

KATERI GOES TO THE NORTH POLE BEYOND THE ARCTIC

Many areas of the world have come to know Kateri Tekakwitha, the Blessed Lily of the Mohawks. She is known and reveered in the U.S., Canada, many of the countries of Europe, Africa, and areas of the Far and Near East. She has been introduced to people in Poland and, recently, Yugoslavia. In keeping with these trends, an opportunity arose to bring knowledge of Kateri to the Native Americans of the eastern Arctic regions of the Canadian Northwest Territories.

TRIP IN PLANNING

About two years ago, Anne M. Scheuerman from Rochester, N.Y., one of the many promoters of the Cause for Canonization of Kateri found out that there was a special tour that journeyed to the Arctic Circle and to the geographic North Pole. During the past year, it was apparent to her that the opportune time had come to take this special journey to bring Kateri to the Arctic region. The extensive and necessary planning to the area 3,000 miles northward to the land of perpetual ice and snow where temperatures of -38°F to 50°F, plus wind chill factors were common, began.

One of the first steps was to locate the Catholic Missions in the region to be visited. The second step involved obtaining Kateri statues and pamphlets for these missions. It was Fr. Joseph McBride, S.J.; Vice Postulator for Kateri's Cause in the U.S. and residing at Auriesville, who provided 3 six-inch gold antique Kateri statues. A small Kateri statuette was given by Fr. Henri Bechard, S.J.; V.P. of Canada.

Anne had determined that this statuette would be sealed in a water-proof container and left at the geographic North Pole in honor of the original peoples of the North American continent.

NOVENA OF PRAYERS

A novena of prayers was undertaken to ask the guidance and protection of Blessed Kateri, who, herself, knew and understood difficult travel. In her usual granting of favors, she did, indeed, provide care and protection through-out the entire journey.

Friday, April 17, Kateri's original Feast Day found Anne and Fr. Bechard, Vice Postulator for Kateri's Cause in Canada, at Kahnawake praying at the tomb of Bl. Kateri in the St. Francis Xavier Mission Church. The statues to be left in the North were blessed here.

TRIP BEGINS IN MONTREAL

An evening flight from Montreal guaranteed the party of fourteen a landing at Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island, 1,200 miles northward. From there on, a re-evaluation would be made to determine if landing was possible at Resolute Bay within the Arctic Circle, where a severe blizzard was raging.

The plane was able to land at Resolute in the blizzard. A station wagon took the travelers to a cozy over-night lodge, around which the wind howled through-out the remaining night.

ONTO THE NORTH POLE

In the morning, the group switched from their commercial airline to the chartered ski-equipped DeHavilland turbo-prop Twin Otter. As it happened, the skilled pilot for this chartered plane was an

Onopdaga Native American named Russell Bomberry who lives near Toronto, Canada, . He flew his passengers to the west coast of Ellesmere Island.

Two days later, the adverturers took off for the geographic North Pole trip. Ellesmere Island sits at the edge of the Arctic Ocean, also called the Arctic Ice Cap.

Because of the need of refueling, two twin turbo prop planes were used: Seven of the adventurers with silent prayers in their hearts and six filled gasoline drums in each plane headed for the Top of the World. The drums were held in reserve, for there was refueling from a gasoline storage cache 400 miles north at Lake Hazen. (To add to the passengers' faith, the planes refueled in the air from the gasoline drums mid-way on the return flight.)

The planes flew further northward over the spectacular mountains, crevices, and valleys of Ellesmere Island where in many places no man has ever set foot. Some 30 musk-ox were seen grazing below. Soon the area leveled out and there were ice ridges and no mountains. Everyone knew they were now on the frozen Arctic Ocean--the Polar Ice Cap.

The instruments on the airplane panel showed the nearness of the North Pole. The pilot sent word to the passengers, "Look below and see the lead in the ice that signals the beginning of the spring ice break-up. It is one-half mile wide and, as far as I can see, extends 50 miles north." Later, this lead was found to be 100 miles long. Dog sleds traveling on the ice cannot see the distance nor the width of the leads nor its minor branches. Today, as in the early explorations, these leads are life-threatening to ground travelers.

Soon the instruments on the plane's panel showed 89°.53 and, in a breath, the pilot was over the North Pole, looking for a safe landing place. Through-out the trip the pilot, who could "read" the ground, landed and took off ever so smoothly. Before the group realized it, they had landed at the North Pole!

KATERI STATUETTE IS LEFT

What a sacred moment within the heart! Photos were taken in a spiritual daze. The statuette of Kateri was photographed prior to depositing it atop a stack of three ice slabs providentially placed together. The ice blocks were of a soft blue hue with an outside edging of white frost. Ice blocks are commonly seen. They are a result of the great pressure exerted by the movement of the unfrozen waters below the surface ice.

Russell was watching the weather and ice conditions. Within an hour, he informed the passengers that it was time to return. Anne finished her sacred experience with a final prayer for the needs of Native Americans. She prayed for peace and mercy for all mankind, as she turned in the four directions. Yes, it had been cold here, but how can one feel the cold when the heart is so warm?

CHANGE IN WAY OF LIFE FOR INUITS

The next day, the chartered plane took off eastward across whipped cream, snowy covered landscape to Grise Fiord, an Inuit (as the Eskimos prefer) village of 100 people.

Grise Fiord was the first hamlet visited after the North Pole adventure. It was from here that Anne mailed 260 post cards to friends of Kateri that are on her mailing list. These cards were

created especially for the journey to the top of the world. Besides showing the travel route, a photo of the actual statuette left at the North Pole was displayed above an igloo.

In Grise Fiord, the native people live, learn, and survive in a close community. The Canadian government assists by providing essential support services, while the people work, fish, and hunt to help themselves as best they can. The same pattern prevails throughout the Arctic region. The Inuit adults and children appear happy and joyful, inspite of the pain they suffer in their cultural shock. They have become a settled peoples after centuries of leading a nomad life of living off the land. Though sturdy and courageous and lovers of the cold and outdoor life, they are a fragile people\$. There are only 20,000 Inuits in the vast Northwest Territories. The Northwest Territories cover a broad spectrum running east to west above Canada's provinces.

ONE CATHOLIC INUIT FAMILY AT POND INLET

Baffin Island is 800 miles long, settling west of Greenland. Pond Inlet, a village on its northernmost border, is made up of 750 people, mostly Inuits. Fr. Guy Mary-Rousselier has served Catholic Missions in this area for 50 years. He is also a respected historian of the Eastern Arctic Inuit and archeologist of the island. The Anglican church arrived in 1927 and evangelized the peoples. As a result, in this small village, only one Inuit family is Catholic. There are Inuit Catholic families in surrounding communities served by the Oblate Missionary.

The Inuit Catholic family is the Mucktar family. The father of the large family graciously gave an interview at his home. Allan is a gentle, warm man with a gentle heart. His wife Teresa is a slim woman who has raised ten children. The couple also welcomes and raises other children in need of a home.

Allan was baptized a Catholic through his mother, who was a Catholic in Arctic Bay. Allan is 56 years old. Teresa was a Catholic in Igloolik. The family has always kept the Catholic faith, in spite of the lack of fellow Catholic Inuits in this town. Confirmation of the deep feeling of faith is expressed by one of the married sons, who has been married to an Anglican Inuit named Myna for 11 years. Leo said, "It is difficult here to be a Catholic. There are no other Catholic Inuits. But the Catholic Church is the oldest church in the world and the true church. I was baptized a Catholic and I am a Catholic."

CATHOLICISM AT IQALUIT

On the southern end of Baffin Island is Iqaluit (formerly called Frobisher Bay). The Catholic Mission Church was built in 1960. Our Lady of Assumption Church is a fairly large wooden structure which includes community meeting rooms. Fr. Patrick Lorand is much loved by his parishioners and the community of 2,500 at large. A tall, muscular priest, he displays an air of confidence, faith, and joy. Born in France and ordained a priest in 1978 in Canada, Fr. Lorand asked to work in the Northlands. This Mission is a central mission. Surrounding areas served include Polaris Mines

on Little Cornwallis Island, Resolute Bay, along with other settlements on Baffin Island. Peoples served are English speaking, French speaking, and Inuktitut speaking by the native Inuits. Masses are often said using the three languages and hymns are sung in the three languages.

NEWS OF KATERI

News of the Blessed Kateri was brought to each of these Catholic Missions. Both of the Baffin Island Missions were given the traditional Kateri statues from the National Kateri Center at Auriesville, N.Y. Also, Marlene McCauley, artist and devoted friend of Kateri, donated 3 of her new delicate and inspirational Kateri statues for the occasion. Two of these were left with these Missions, while the third was carried to the Igloolik Catholic Mission. Igloolik is located on Melville Peninsula, about 700 miles northwest of Iqaluit. The person delivering the Kateri statue was a member of the tour. He was traveling there to make a 3-day dogsled trip over Fox Basin. (A comment is appropriate. It was no minor miracle that these statues, which had been carried on the entire trip, were absolutely intact!) Of course, pamphlets, prayer cards, and medals also accompanied the statues.

KATERI, A FRIEND

Thus ended a 13-day Arctic and North Pole adventure in the name of Kateri. Surely, she protected and helped Anne to survive the bitter frost and cold, two heavy blizzards, rugged terrain, open icy waters, and other events that could threaten an earthly existence.

For these blessings, she is grateful. But what is important is that Kateri will now be a friend to the people of the Arctic, as they come to know her. She was of an original peoples who loved her own. She will be an inspiration for she, too, knew the cold and harsh climate. She also knew the agony of cultural life changes. Kateri's heroic virtues and way of life will inspire the people of the Northlands to imitate her goodness and faith.

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After this news story was written, but before it was published, a letter was received by Anne. It was from Igloolik, where a Kateri statue and some support material was sent via a tour member traveling there, as related earlier. In confirmation of the above paragraph, Fr. Louis Legaré, O.M.I., pastor, said, "Thank you very much for the statue of Kateri. I received it exactly two years after my visit to her sanctuary in Kahnawake (Canada). For me it was a sign that she cares also for the Inuit people..."