

Que. Mohawks proud of Kateri

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Catholic News Service
Montreal

LOCAL PRIDE in Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is evident in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, a few miles southwest of Montreal.

The influence of Blessed Kateri, the first North American Indian who has been beatified, is seen throughout the reserve. The medical centre, the school, and a youth centre have been named after her.

Jesuit Father Louis Cyr recalled the words of one native person at the time of her beatification 20 years ago: "It is not our custom to put anybody on a pedestal. But deep down we're very proud of her."

Blessed Kateri's tomb attracts pilgrims from all over North America who come to venerate the "Lily of the Mohawks."

Most come with two goals: to receive a blessing and to further the cause for Blessed Kateri's canonization.

Blessed Kateri was born to a Christian Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father in 1656 at Auriesville, N.Y.

She was born into a period of political and religious turmoil, 10 years after a band of her father's Iroquois people tortured and massacred three of the Jesuit



Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha was beatified in 1980 and is awaiting approval of a miracle before she is canonized.

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martyrs: Rene Goupil, Isaac Jogues and Jean de la Lande.

Indians blamed the "Blackrobes" for the sudden appearance of deadly white man's diseases, including smallpox. Blessed Kateri's parents were victims of this plague.

Under pressure from her relatives to marry, in 1677 the contemplative young girl fled to present-day Quebec, taking refuge at St. Francis Xavier mission, about 14 km downstream from present day Kahnawake on the St. Lawrence River.

She was baptized by the Jesuits and astounded them with her deep spirituality and her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. She shunned marriage and took a private vow of virginity.

Of frail health, she died in 1680, at age 24. Soon after Blessed Kateri's death, Catholics started to claim favours and miracles had been obtained through her intercession.

In 1943, Pope Pius XII declared her venerable; Pope John Paul beatified her in 1980. To-

day, many see her as a model for Christian native people.

"I believe that Kateri has been chosen by God, our Creator, to be a model to native people," said Ron Boyer, an Ojibway native who is a permanent deacon.

"She inspires native people in their struggle for recognition. She is a presence and inspiration in the healing of our cultures. She gives affirmation of native Christian identity."

Today, some aboriginal people reject Blessed Kateri, saying she was a "white man's saint." Some Mohawks in Kahnawake see her as a symbol of the colonial imposition of European values on the Indians.

The Jesuit movement to have Blessed Kateri canonized continues to collect and document favours and miracles attributed to the young Mohawk. Some alleged medical miracles attributed to her intercession have been documented, but none have been approved by the Vatican's verification process.