

BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA,
"THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS"

Tekakwitha was born of an Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father.

Kahenta: I, Kahenta has been brought up and baptized at an Indian village near the French colony of Three Rivers in Canada. But in one of the Mohawk raids I was taken through woods and across the lakes to the shore of the Mohawk River, a mile from the town of Auresville, New York.

Kahenta was saved from the torture and fire by a fierce pagan Mohawk chief warrior, Kenneronkwa (meaning Beloved). Later on, she became his wife. The young couple was soon blessed with a son. A daughter was born in 1656 and they named her Tekakwitha.

When Tekakwitha was only four years old, her father, mother and small brother all died of small pox. The little girl herself became ill of the terrible disease but she escaped death. She was then adopted by her two aunts and uncle.

The small pox had made marks on Tekakwitha's face and harmed her eyesight. She never wandered far from home without a stick in her hand. But she was cheerful and busy, always the first one at work.

When she was ten years old, war broke out between the French and the Mohawks. She fled from the village together with the other Mohawks to save themselves from the horrors of war. After the war, the French missionaries began to bring the Catholic Faith to the Mohawks.

Tekakwitha first learned about Jesus from the Jesuit missionaries. It was her duty to serve them during their visit in her uncle's cabin.

Shortly after her thirteenth birthday, her aunts talked to the Indian teen-ager,

A: You are now old enough to get married. We have arranged it for you.

T: But aunt, I do not want to get married. I'd rather stay here with you and serve you.

A: You stupid girl! So, you do not want to obey us? From now on, you will be treated like a slave. Since you do not want a husband, do all the hard work here in the house!!

Kateri suffered all these insults with patience and served everybody with gentleness. She secretly desired to receive the sacrament of Baptism but she never told anybody. Maybe she was too shy or she was too afraid of her uncle who hated the white man. He thought only a fool would believe the talk about the Great White Spirit who had died on a cross and wanted all men to live as brothers.

It was only when she was nineteen years old, when she opened her heart to a missionary, Father de Lamberville, who came to visit her.

T: Father, for eight years now, I have been secretly hoping to be baptized. I do want to become a child of God and a follower of the Great White Spirit, Jesus Christ.

So, on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1676, with the Indians present to watch the celebration in the chapel of St. Peter, Tekakwitha, the niece of the Mohawk chief, received the sacrament of Baptism and was given the Christian name Kateri (Catherine).

Kateri continued to attend the morning and night prayers at the chapel with her people. On Sundays, she was present for the mass. She also joined other Christian Indians who were praying the Rosary.

Kateri also suffered insults for her faith in Jesus Christ. Some children would pull her hair, others would point a finger at her and call her Christian as though they meant "dog". She also had to bear the cruelty of the drunkards, the witchdoctors and enemies of Christianity, even her own uncle. They threw stones at her and called her a witch. But she was fearless.

Only the priest and some Christians of her village were her friends. One day, the priest told Kateri:

P: Leave this place as soon as possible. Go to the Praying Castle in Canada, some three hundred miles away from here.

The new Christian colony, a new Caughnawaga lay on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, several miles west of Montreal. Kateri arrived in Canada in the autumn of 1677. Father de Lamberville, the priest who baptized Kateri sent a letter to the missionaries. He wrote:

P: I send you Kateri Tekakwitha. Will you kindly try to guide her? You will soon know what a treasure we have sent you. Guard it well, May it profit in your hands for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that is very dear to Him.

The people of the village were very good Christians. Kateri enjoyed meeting the new converts.. All were trying hard to know, love and serve God. Each morning they heard Mass, listened to the missionary's teaching and recited the Rosary.

An Indian convert by the name of Mary Teresa who soon became a close friend of Kateri. One day, while they were watching a chapel being built, Kateri told her friend:

K: God does not want a chapel made of wood. Rather, he wants to make of our souls his temple.

Teresa and Kateri prayed together, did penance and shared the most secret thoughts. Kateri spent much time in prayer. She obeyed the priest who was her guide, but most of all, she was obedient to the Holy Spirit, who made her holy. If she prayed hard, she also worked hard. She kept herself busy around her home helped the sick, cared for the little children, and did other works of kindness.

Kateri made her first Holy Communion on Christmas 1677 after she reached the mission. She developed a special love for the Holy Eucharist and to Jesus crucified.

She even carved the sign of the cross on a tree in the woods where she did her praying.

K: I offer my soul to Christ the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and my body to Christ the Lord, hanging on the Cross.

The Indian Christians also practiced strict penance for their former sins – especially the worship of false gods, drunkenness and the torture of captives.

Mary Teresa: I've been wicked in the past, I ought to do some special penance.

Kateri: I must do some special penance too, Mary Teresa – for my sins and the sins of my people. Shall we offer a Rosary barefoot in the snow?

Mary Teresa and Kateri had the chance also to meet Sister Marguerite Bourgeoys, the kindly French woman who had come to Canada, to teach the children and to nurse the sick. On their way to the convent school started by Sister Marguerite, Mary Teresa told Kateri:

MT: You'll love her, Kateri, I just know you will!

K: Maybe Mary Teresa and I could be sisters too. Maybe we could build a little convent over there on the island.

But the priest who has been guiding them did not approve of this plan. Instead, he allowed Kateri to make a secret vow of virginity – a promise to God that since she loved Him above all creatures, she would remain unmarried.

K: I have dedicated myself to Jesus, Son of Mary. I have taken Him for my Spouse, and only He shall have me as a spouse.

But as months passed Mary Teresa began to worry about Kateri's health. Because she always fasted the girl had become little more than skin and bones.

MT: Kateri, you musn't do penance any more, it's not right.

K: Don't worry, Mary Teresa. Nothing's wrong with me. I'm just a little tired, that's all.

MT: Tired! And why not, when you've been lying on sharp thorns every night.

K: Please! That's to make up for my sins... and the sins of my people.

Kateri's poor health continued to grow worse. She was always in pain. She suffered from a slow fever, from stomach and chest pains and severe headaches. She kept herself in the same position day and night. She wanted to suffer with Jesus on the cross.

Her greatest joy was the Holy Communion brought to her by the priest. She lived only for the love of Jesus and now she was ready to die for Him.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, Kateri began to be very sick. She received the Holy Anointing and the Eucharist. Her friend Mary Teresa, who was at her side, heard Kateri whisper:

K: I am leaving you, Teresa, I am going to die. Keep up your courage. Listen to the Fathers. Never give up your penances. I will love you in heaven. I will pray for you. I will help you.

On April 17, 1680, Kateri died. Her last words were:

K: Jesus, Mary, I love you.

She was only twenty-four years old. The Indians came to kiss her hands as she lay in death. They all said:

All: We have lost our Saint.

Kateri was buried at three o'clock on Holy Thursday afternoon. One of the priests said:

P: She loved the Holy Eucharist and the Cross, and now she can spend Holy Week in heaven.

Kateri granted many favors to those who prayed to her. The sick were cured, sinners converted, and miracles began to happen. Many Indians also tried to follow Kateri's beautiful example of Christian life. They lovingly call her the "Lily of the Mohawks".

On June 22, 1980, Pope John Paul II declared her Blessed. This is the last step before a person is declared a Saint. She will be the first native North American saint.

Prayer:

Blessed Kateri, loving child of God and Lily of the Mohawks, we thank God for the many graces He gave you. Help us to be more like you in our love for God and for people.

Give us a great love for the Holy Eucharist and the Mother of Jesus. Make us ready to make sacrifices for Jesus that we may save sinners and be happy with you in heaven.

Kateri, we love you. Always be our friend. Amen.