

## Testimonial

Two years ago, I visited my family doctor and asked him to refer me to an urologist for the routine medical checks for men over the age of 50. He referred me to Doctor A. I took an appointment with him and he suggested that I undergo several tests at the hospital, and asked me to return in a few weeks. I went to the hospital and underwent all the required tests. I then got a call from him requesting my return in order to review for the results. As I sat in his office, he told me that he had good and bad news. The bad news was that cancer was discovered around my left kidney, while the good news was that, *“we caught it on time”*. He believed that there was a 50% chance of cancer but he would like to get a second opinion from his associate, Doctor B. I took an appointment with Dr B, and brought along the DVD containing all the scan results. After 20 minutes of analysis, he confirmed his partner’s diagnosis, but according to him the chance of cancer was 80%! He also described the available procedures to remove this tumor; full kidney removal – with a long recovery period; partial removal, biopsy, or do nothing. It was a dangerous situation and we could not stay idle. He then sent me back to Doctor A who laid out all the options again, strongly recommending the removal of the left kidney completely in order to eliminate any chances of growth or further spreading.

At this time, I decided to inform my immediate family of the situation. I believe that they did everything they could not to appear panicked. Cancer has killed my young sister and has devastated several aunts and cousins. I decided to redo my living will. I shared this news with the members of my prayer group who were shocked to hear about this. While we were talking about it, a friend of ours, another doctor whom I will call Doctor C, whom we rarely see at our weekly prayer meeting, appeared. Before I could say anything, my friends bombarded him with questions about the diagnosis. Calmly I explained to him the situation and the proposed alternatives. Without seeing any of the reports nor the scans, he did not agree with the prognosis. He recommended more sophisticated tests to determine whether there was really any cancer and the exact location of it. I met him later at his house and shared the whole medical file with him. Again, he strongly recommended doing more tests. As he is not my family doctor, he asked me to convince my family doctor to prescribe new tests. I went back to my family doctor and he prescribed the tests. He then explained to me the various options again –one of them being surgical extraction of the tumor.

My youngest sister used to work at a breast cancer clinic. She still had connections there, and so she shared with her ex-colleagues and the lead doctor the various options lying before me. They recommended that I get a 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion at a renowned private clinic. They knew of good surgeons working there and they may be able to book me for a quick appointment. I got an appointment 2 days later! This \$75 visit was the best investment that I made in my entire life!

I brought the whole file along with me, and after filling in a massive questionnaire, I was greeted by a young doctor that I did not recognize. I had checked the profile of the doctor that was recommended to me; I knew what he would look like and I read the various feedback people had given with regards to his work. Anyway, a new doctor, (Doctor E) welcomed me in his office and reviewed the scan with me in detail, laying out all the options. He recommended surgery by robotics (DaVinci) in order to save the kidney. I would have 5 holes punctured in my body through which robotic arms would enter while the surgeon, through a 3-D monitor and a sophisticated computer mouse, would direct the surgery. He was very polite and professional. He was a Muslim from Saudi Arabia and by his accent I assumed that he spoke Arabic so we switched languages and immediately the subject of God –and of His intercession and prayer- entered our conversation. I asked him about the doctor that I was recommended and he replied that he was his assistant student doctor from overseas and that he would be joining us shortly. Doctor F then finally showed up with a big smile on his face. Patiently, he reviewed the whole file and the disk containing the results of the various medical scans with me and made a startling statement, *“I do **not** agree with the diagnostics of Doctors A, B and D; you have a good friend in Doctor C. I recommend a partial surgery through robotics. I want to save your kidney. Your \$75 consultation ends here.”* He sat back, crossed his arms and told me, *“it is up to you to decide.”* I thought a while, then I accepted his proposal.

I then decided to entrust this whole situation and its outcome to two saints: Luke the Evangelist, as he was a surgeon, and to a recent Native Saint, Kateri Tekakwitha, to whom I had already dedicated the past 5 years in promoting devotion to Her by all possible means. I suddenly became very *popular*. Everyone offered prayer support, some even offered moral support. Local and distant friends (from Syria and Egypt), family and clergy all got on the bandwagon of prayer. I did some more research on these procedures and became cognizant of the fact that they can indeed be deadly. I now had only to wait for the magic date, which was about 2 months away.

I decided to go alone on a one week retreat/vacation prior to the surgery. I took along the Gospel of Saint Luke (the physician) and some books on Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. I prepared myself mentally, physically and most importantly, spiritually for this tough medical intervention on my body. Honestly, I was prepared to die and was not afraid of it. I recall going to confession prior to the surgery.

The day before I entered the hospital, I went and prayed at Saint Kateri’s tomb in Kahnawake and at Saint-Catherine’s. Father V and I discussed Heavenly subjects and miracles, and again, I entrusted myself totally to her. I knew that for the past 336 years she had been active responding positively to the various prayer intentions from peoples of all races and creeds, and that if She wanted my continued service, then She would have to work it out with God so that I may return here quickly and continue my work.

On the magic day, at 7:00am, I was taken to the surgery room. I was nervous and so I prayed. I demanded to see the surgeon face-to-face before he touched me. Needles were being plugged into my body, breathing equipment placed over my face, several doctors introducing themselves to me etc... There were a lot of people around me and I quickly noticed the famous robot that I was not supposed to see -and just as quickly, the attendants covered it up. I wanted to keep my gold chain with the cross attached to it, but they refused. I was laid down on a table in the shape of a cross, tied to it, and then my doctor appeared with his usual smile. I grabbed his hands and asked him the following question, “*Are you a religious person?*” to which he replied, “*sort of, this is kind of my Church*” to which I said, “*Because I will pray to God so that you do a good job on me.*” and then I passed out. Eight hours later, I opened my eyes to the sight of my son, sister, brother and niece. This lengthy absence from the world puzzled me. What happened? Where was I? I did not dream. I did not see anything. I felt nothing. Time did not exist. I still have no explanation for this “absence” to this very day. A couple of days later, several members of my prayer group came to visit me at the hospital and we prayed a decade of the Rosary in thanksgiving.

I was told by the doctors that the operation was successful but I had to wait for the final prognostic in two months’ time at the surgeon’s office. The 5 little holes in my body bothered me for a few days and then all pain disappeared. At the prescribed appointment date, I returned to the hospital for my follow-up meeting. There I met a smiling Doctor E asking me, “*What do you think it is?*” to which I replied “*I don’t know, you are the doctor, you tell me!*” He then reviewed the file and pulled out the results of the various tests that they did on the tumor they extracted and said, “***There was no cancer, there is no cancer, all the tests are negative! Are you happy?***” How could I not be happy!

I went back several times to visit the Hospital and to pray at the Chapel and to express my gratitude to the various nurses and orderlies that took care of me during my stay. As of today, I do not have any disorders related to the surgery; I and many others cannot even tell that I underwent this dangerous intervention. I am grateful to God for sparing me; I guess I still have more time to serve Him down here on earth before the grand finale of our encounter.

I lost about a week’s work at the Kateri Center, which is not too bad all things considered.

Why did I choose to ask Saint Luke for his blessing? As a physician, I hoped for him to guide my doctor’s hands and inspire his intelligence during the surgery. He is also the only Gospel writer that details Jesus’ childhood. He describes the Incarnation event in the Blessed Mother beautifully. The Virgin Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit and what was in Her womb was a sacred human being,

not a fetus. Our birth is also a sacred event since its author is God and we have no right whatsoever to dispose of in any way. Our life is sacred from conception till natural death.

Why did I turn to Saint Kateri for her blessing? I have seen many videos that were produced about her; I have listened to numerous audio documentaries also, I have read a multitude of books, I was involved in the making of a DVD for her canonization. To this day, I also read, edit and translate the hundreds of favours obtained (temporal and spiritual) through her intercession that we receive regularly at the Kateri Centre by mail and/or e-mail and that we publish in the Kateri periodical. What stands out in her life is her **absolute desire for purity**, her desire to do what is most pleasing to God by her love of her neighbor. She was an apostle of non-violence. She was an orphan at the young age of four, and then she was adopted. Her eyesight was diminished due to the smallpox illness that took her family; she was a refugee when the French destroyed all the Mohawk villages in 1666; she was severely persecuted and mocked for her faith to the point of almost losing her life; she experienced exile by abandoning her village and heading to another Mission in Canada where she could live her faith with other Christian converts. She had nerves of steel when she was falsely accused of adultery and yet forgave her accusers. She dedicated Her life to God and decided to remain a virgin, just like the Virgin Mary. She embraced Christianity with all her being. The more she absorbed the teachings of the Church by the Jesuit missionaries –to whom she was totally obedient- the more she fell in love with God. During Easter, she would associate herself truly with Our Lord's Passion. She constantly prayed for the conversion of her relatives and her kin. She endured extreme bodily penances in order to expiate for whatever "sins" she thought she had committed, even though her life was exemplary, and for the sins of her kin. She knew only two paths: Work and Church. Everyone knew where to find Kateri! As I was reading her biographer's texts in the Jesuit Relations concerning her bodily mortifications, I had tremendous difficulty turning some of the pages and at times I wept. I could not believe nor understand how a simple and illiterate native girl could go through all this in almost absolute discretion for a totally different and new God to her. Finally, her death: the pock marks that were on her face disappeared completely within 15 minutes, she was transfigured into a radiant beauty – a sign of our own transfiguration. Immediately after her death, miracles began to happen, as Her life was luminous. A sign of approval from God concerning her brief life on earth: only 24 years!

Thank you Saint Luke, thank you Saint Kateri, for putting the right people in my path at the right time and for your powerful intercession. Thank God for the privileged access I had to so many doctors.

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