

Relic of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha goes to Saint Theresa Point for yearly Marian Retreat

Fr. Messia and his pastoral Committee of Saint Theresa Point invited Deacon Ron Boyer and myself to be part of their week-long Marian Retreat at Saint Theresa Point, Manitoba. After weeks of preparation, I was ready for the journey. Deacon Ron Boyer was advised against the mission by his doctors. However, he gave me a letter to take to Fr. Messia and the Ojibwe-Cree people of Saint Theresa Point.

Upon my arrival at the airport, I was happy to see Michael, a Teacher at saint Theresa Point, whom I had previously met. From the airport, he took me to visit the church of the Indigenous Peoples in Winnipeg where there is a beautiful statue of Saint Kateri. Soon thereafter, it was time to travel to the smaller airport to take the plane to our final destination.

After one hour of flying, my friend Douglas woke me and asked me to look out the window...Lo and behold, it was breathtaking. There in front of me were

small islands and small lakes, all joined together like a maze. This was exciting.



After landing, we walked for about five minutes to the lake. There we jumped on an outboard motor boat to take us to Saint Theresa Point. So far



everything was familiar to me. I grew up on a small village on the Atlantic coast, and spent summers on the beach and swimming in the rivers. I could see Saint Theresa point in the distance covered by the mist. It was about 4:00pm when we arrived on the island. We hopped into Michael's van

and made our way to the camping area for the Marian Retreat. They were eagerly awaiting us.

When we arrived, a group gathered around our van in prayer. Kateri had arrived! At last their Saint had arrived. We proceeded to the shrine of Saint Theresa, where a special place was made for the Relic. A procession was made, led by the relic - Saint Kateri herself - and we all made our way to the Shrine. A beautiful Tabernacle in the form of a teepee was made to welcome and host the relic. I led the congregation in praying one octave of the Saint Kateri Rosary for the environment. We prayed the silver beads for the protection and preservation of the waters of the world.

There were distinguished guests at the retreat. Michael Russell O'Bryan, a well-known Catholic singer from Florida animated the pilgrims with his singing of the Catholic Hymns every evening. I was introduced to the members of the Marian

Organizing Committee. I met Fr. Messia, the parish Priest of Saint Theresa Point. He is truly a priest called to serve God's holy people. Humility abides in him. He welcomed me to the island of Saint Theresa Point.

The first evening ended with the celebration of the Holy Mass, after the entrance procession with the Holy Relic of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. Friday night ended with a religious concert made up of indigenous artists from other Reservations.



Every family builds a tent and camps out in the forest. A multi-purpose stage is built. This is used for presentations during the retreat and as a sanctuary for the altar during the celebration of the Eucharist. Saturday morning, I was invited to have breakfast with one of the families in their tent. The breakfast was delicious, but what was more striking was the warmth of this family in the tent. Soon the breakfast was over and it was time to return to the morning session. Fr. Messia led the

Rosary. It rained. The ground was wet. There was mud on my shoes and on the



lower parts of my trousers. This was not new to me. I grew up in a village on the East of Dominica; on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. In the early 70's the roads were not paved in the village.

I did not expect small steps in a procession to be so tiring. There came a time when I was exhausted from going around the camp in small steps in the forest while praying the Rosary. We prayed four complete decades of the Blessed Rosary. The procession was lead by a group of men who carried a statue of the Blessed Mother. They were accompanied by a group of children, who held colored ribbons in their hands, attached to the stand of the statue of the Blessed Mother. Even if I was extremely exhausted, I knew She was present. I could not stop because I saw the elderly of the community were still going. Some were supported by their grandchildren. I called earnestly and humbly on the Blessed Mother to give me the strength to continue this pilgrimage. I wanted to stop, the fatigue was getting more and more intense. I slowly and meditatively began to offer my pain to those who suffer and are in pain in the world. Kateri heard and answered my prayers. I could feel her presence among the Ojibwe-Cree people as we prayed the Rosary in the forest. Suddenly, I began feeling much relieved and the fatigue disappeared. There was a breath of fresh healing air all around me; I was now at peace. The day ended with the celebration of the Holy Mass.

The Church was filled to capacity. The altar servers and ministers who support Fr. Messia were present to partake in the divine meal with Jesus. During



the homily, I read the letter Deacon Ron Boyer sent me with. The Deacon had met some members of the community in Rome in 1980 during the Beatification of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. He mentioned them in his letter. All the people that I called out from the Deacon's letters were seated at Mass!

They were happy that he remembered them.

Immediately after Mass, Fr. Messia and I began anointing everyone with the Blessed Oil of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to the tune of soft spiritual music by the church choir. After the anointing, everyone went to venerate the relic, which was placed in the beautifully ornamented tabernacle. It was hand-built and decorated by the mother of a young woman from the community. This is an interesting story of faith in Jesus Christ. Her daughter was healed of cancer by Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. As a sign of her gratitude to the saint, she built and ornamented this beautiful tabernacle herself. It was only fitting that her daughter, as a means of thanking Jesus, spent the entire Saturday night in the church all by herself, in song and drumming, giving thanks to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

Sunday was another testimony of faith. During the day, everyone was given



a bottle of Holy Water and a scapular.

The evening was the climax. In a profound and emotional ceremony lanterns were lit and were set free in the sky. What a lovely and meaningful experience. The lanterns were in honor of the deceased of the community of Saint Theresa Point, as they returned to their ancestors. The night sky was solemnly and beautifully lit, and a live Catholic Indigenous band filled our

hearts with a melody that lent itself to the moment. This was very moving; I thought of my loved ones who were already passed.

On Monday morning, it was time to leave Saint Theresa Point. Fr. Messia was ready to take me to the airport. I am not good at handling goodbyes, so I gently encouraged Fr. Messia to drive directly to the boat. We went on our way. Far in the distance I could see some of the women running down the hill waving goodbye. We waved back. It was an emotional moment.

Thank you, Saint Theresa! Thank you, Saint, Kateri Tekakwitha and Saint Thérèse! Thank you, Fr. Messia and the lovely people of Saint Theresa Point! Thank you to the people of Kahnawake, and the Diocese of Saint Jean-Longueuil for praying for me during this pilgrimage. Thank you, Jesus Christ, it begins and ends in you.

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