

Kateri and Juan Diego

by

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Saints are to be met with who resemble one another by their virtues and it is even more interesting to meet those of a similar race.

True Christian sentiment calls "saints" those who are known to have practised to a high degree all Christian virtues — even when the Church has made no official declaration concerning these virtues. Following this popular sentiment which submits itself beforehand to the decisions of the Church, we may call "saints", Kateri Tekakwitha and Juan Diego the two Indians of the American Continent whose causes of canonization are actively engaged.

Juan Diego was a humble Mexican Indian who, because of his virtues, was chosen to be the ambassador of Mary at the

occasion of Her apparition at Tepeyac. Our Lady, to make known her request for a shrine in Mexico, did not wish to choose a wise doctor of the University, a learned prelate, or a brave captain. For this She chose an Indian who precisely did not belong to the Aztec Indian nobility. Juan Diego was one of the first Christian Indians who fervently began to live his Catholicism! His simplicity and candor were such that when Our Lady appeared to him at Tepeyac, he did not lose even for an instance his presence of mind. With that sublime simplicity of the humble, he addressed himself to the heavenly Lady who was speaking to him with the most tender expressions that could be found in his language and which for him expressed the greatest fondness:

"Lady and little girl of mine, ... how did you get there at break of day? Oh, the littlest of my daughters, I am going to do what you are asking me; now I am leaving, I your humble servant."

Juan Diego found himself before the supernatural and the wondrous and immediately he found his place within it. His faith was so intense that he did

not find it strange that God or Mary should talk to human beings. He did not falter while talking to Our Lady. He showed the greatest possible respect but there was no hesitation in his words. This experience which could have made anyone else vain, was for him an order of the Queen of Heaven, a request which he must accomplish quite promptly.

His special tenderness for the Mother of God merited his being chosen as the messenger of the apparitions of Gaudalupe. Once his mission was accomplished and after the devotion to Mary of Gaudalupe reached its highest point, not only in Mexico but in all neighboring regions, Juan Diego retired to a hermitage where he lived for seventeen more years consecrated to fasting, to penance, to contemplation and to the frequent reception of Holy Eucharist.

The Indians who knew him used to say to their sons to encourage them to practise virtue, "May God make you become like Juan Diego!" Many had recourse to him as an intercessor in their petitions to Our Lady. And he, humbly, was willing to pray for all. And praying with simplicity, as he always used to do, he always obtained what he requested.

Is it not natural that we should find between Juan Diego and Kateri striking resem-

blances? Kateri Tekakwitha too was a fervent servant of Mary. We all know the tenderness with which she recited "*Wari tekoronkwaniens* — Hail Mary!" and how she never dispensed herself from the recitation of the rosary. Like Kateri, Juan consecrated his virginity to the Queen of Heaven and like her he kept it faithfully despite the shameful habits of his people. Like her, he also loved solitude, recollection and frequent communion.

Kateri was not favored with visible apparitions, but she also had a mission here on earth: she was to be the messenger and witness of a truth: that God and Mary had found within her — within the soul of a humble Iroquois — a Garden of delight! The hand of God descended upon the barbarism of the Indians and transformed them into fervent Christians, always faithful to the inspirations of grace. The resemblance between Juan Diego's holiness and Kateri's is remarkable.

That is why we claim that they are two symbols for America. They represent the native races of the continent prostrate at the feet of Mary, *la Conquistadora* of America. These two Indians, we hope officially to call saints and signal protectors of the native races of the New World. — *The End.*