



Kateri's apparition to Father Chauchetière

Kateri Foretells Etienne's Death



THE SIXTH DAY after Kateri's death (April 17, 1680), that is to say, the Monday after Easter, a person of virtue and worthy of belief (Father Claude Chauchetière) was praying at four o'clock in the morning, when Kateri appeared to him surrounded by glory, with majestic bearing and shining face lifted toward heaven as if in ecstasy. This marvelous vision was accompanied by three circumstances that made it seem more remarkable. In the first place, the vision lasted for two whole hours,

during which this person could contemplate her at leisure and did so with a joy and pleasure difficult to express, Kateri wishing by so marked a favor to acknowledge the great service she had received from him during her lifetime. Moreover this same apparition was accompanied by several prophecies, and by as many symbols which might be seen on both sides of Kateri in her ecstasy. Some of these prophecies have already been fulfilled, while others have not yet come to pass. For instance, on her right, a church was seen turned over on its side, while on the left there was an Indian tied to the stake and badly burned. . .

. . . In 1683, the night of the twentieth of August, there was a terrific storm with such lightning and thunder that it . . . hurled the Church of the Sault sixty feet, breaking it into pieces; took it, I say, with such violence at one corner that, though it may seem improbable, it was turned over on the opposite angle and shattered. . .

So much for the destroyed church; as for the Indian burning at the stake, who was seen in the apparition, this came to pass a few years later when an Indian of this mission was burned at Onondaga, as were also two women in the two following years. We do not doubt that Kateri, who had prophesied this a long time before, obtained for these Indians the invincible courage that they displayed during their torture.

The Life of Kateri Tegakouita, First Iroquois Virgin
Pierre Choleneq, S.J., 1696.

An Unknown Letter

Copy of a Letter Written From Quebec to Father Jacques Bigot in Paris, 1691.¹

Reverend Father,

The Peace of Christ.

Since you left for France, we learned that an Iroquois from our Mission of St. Francis Xavier was burned for Jesus Christ in the heart of his country and at the hands of his fellow-countrymen themselves. He was called Etienne Teganonakoa, and we can say about him what St. Augustine says about his patron, that his name was already a happy portent of his triumph.

As he is the first of his nation who signaled his faith in the throes of torture and as we consider him rightly the first martyr of Jesus Christ among all the Indians of North America, it has been deemed appropriate to make known to our Reverend Fathers in France such a glorious death so that they may help us to praise and thank the Divine Author of these wonders and that they may join their prayers to ours in asking for the re-establishment of our missions among the Iroquois.

The Mission of St. Francis Xavier, started among the French of Prairie de la Madeleine, in the year 1669 [sic], was transferred six years later to a league and a half higher at the foot of Sault St. Louis, from which it took the name of St. Francis Xavier of the Sault. Ever since it has been a village composed of Indians only. This immediately attracted many Iroquois families who unreluctantly quit their country to come and share in the peace and tranquillity which their relatives and friends were already enjoying in this holy mission.

The one whom we are speaking about was among them, and the second year after our migration, he came to live there with his wife, a daughter-in-law and six children. He was approximately thirty-five years old, very gentle in character, and brought with him a strong proof of the innocent life that he had led until then in the stability of his marriage, in a country where the dissolute and profligate continually change women. His own wife closely resembled her husband with regard to the excellence

¹This letter describing the martyrdom of Etienne Teganonakoa was written by Father Pierre Choleneq. The original text appears in print for the first time, in the French issue of "Kateri", simultaneously with this translation. The Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha foretold Etienne's death at the stake, in a vision to Father Claude Chauchetière on April 22, 1680, the sixth day after her death.

of her disposition, and their children taking after them both, manifested much docility for their age. As they asked right away for holy baptism and as they manifested much eagerness about receiving it, they and their children were christened after the necessary instructions; and the next day they were all married before the Church according to the custom used on these occasions.

We had reason to believe that they received grace with these sacraments, since from that moment their family was always one of the best disposed of the village by the wonderful union that existed between husband and wife and more so by the zeal that they gave proof of for the good education of their children, by the care that they took in sending them every day, morning and evening, to the prayers and instructions given in particular for those of their age, and by the joy that they showed whenever the missionaries entered their long house to visit with them and to speak about God. They immediately urged their children to listen well, giving orders that all work and even all chatter must cease in order to hear the Fathers speak. I myself have witnessed this very often and I can truthfully say that they equalled the oldest and the most fervent of the mission in their eagerness to bring up their children well and to have God served and honored in their family.

It is through the practice of such a Christian life that our Etienne made ready without knowing, to overcome the enemies of our Faith and of his salvation and that he merited after thirteen years an end as glorious as it was novel for an Indian and for an Iroquois. In the month of August 1690, he departed with his wife and another Indian from the Sault for the autumn hunt along the great river. And in the following month of September they were taken by surprise in the woods by a party of fourteen Indians from Cayuga who fell upon all three, bound them and brought them in captivity to their country.

As soon as Etienne saw that he was a captive, he said to his wife: "I am dead, I know I am, God is the Master of all. As for you, however, your life will be spared and so I am charging you to persevere throughout your life in faith and prayer, and especially in bringing up our children in the fear and service of God. This is all that I want, and if you promise me this, I shall die content."

All the way, he kept on exhorting his wife to remain steadfast, and in strengthening her against the severe attacks she would have to undergo among her people where they arrived after a few days. Those who were leading them, instead of taking them to their village of Cayuga, conducted them, contrary to all expectation, to that of Onondaga, as if Divine Providence intended having our religion triumph by means of this illustrious confessor in the heart of the enemy country so as to make its victory more remarkable. Besides the war that we were fighting against them, for a long time the Iroquois of these parts, and the Onondaga more than the

others, were exceedingly aroused against the Iroquois of the Mission of the Sault. They had not, either by gifts, prayers or threats, succeeded in detaching them from the French and from the Faith, so as to have them return to the very homeland, where these Christian Indians even made war against their relatives and their brothers on the sole consideration of religion. Therefore, with this Christian in their hands (for the Cayugas had abandoned him to the Onondagas), they resolved to wreak vengeance on him and thus at the same time on the French and the Iroquois of the Sault and on our religion.

It was with these evil dispositions that the Onondagas admitted this noble captive to their village. To be able to understand these dispositions, one must have seen the singular treatment which the Iroquois are accustomed to vent on their captives on such occasions — all of which they did not fail to inflict on him. As he entered the village they fell upon him from all sides. They made cruel incisions in his legs, his thighs and his entire body. It was among these jeers, insults and bad treatment that our good Etienne suffered undauntedly and that with a truly Christian constancy he was led to a long house where he was immediately surrounded by this violent crowd. They began by asking if he were a Christian; not that they had any doubt about it, but to have the occasion to torment him on his confession of the faith that they detested so. Etienne answered unhesitatingly that he was a Christian. "Pray then," they said to him scoffing at him and mocking him. Thereupon, though his arms were bound, he began to make the Sign of the Cross with his hand as well as he could, pronouncing these words in the language understood by all: "In the name of the Father and of the Son." No sooner had he uttered these words than these sworn enemies of religion cut in half the fingers that still remained on this hand. After this first questioning, they began again a second time with the same insults, and he answered with the same steadfastness. Thereupon, these madmen, yelled at him to pray. Not at all surprised, he did so as he had before. And instantly they cut off all his fingers up to the palm of his hand. At last, having questioned him a third time and obliged him after a third confession to make the sacred sign of our redemption once again, these wretches, unable to endure being insulted by him with such constancy and firmness, completely cut off his wrist and, driven by their rage, cut him up in all those parts of his body that he had marked with the Sign of the Cross, that is to say, his forehead, his chest, and his two shoulders, as if to delete those august marks that he had just impressed upon himself to their confusion and to the glory of our holy religion.

Finally after such sanguinary preliminaries which the patient joyfully endured instead of manifesting the least resentment, these Iroquois carried their vengeance to the point of resolving to burn him alive. Immediately, without giving him time to get his bearing, a stake was set up in the middle of the village and he was attached to it. When this brave Christian saw himself in this sorry situation, and, close by, the red hot

irons in the fire with which these angry men intended to burn him, he cried out thus:

"Courage, my brothers, burn me thoroughly and take complete pleasure in roasting me without sparing me. My sins have entitled me to much more than whatever you are able to inflict upon me, and the more you torture me the more I will be rewarded in the next life."

Such courageous words stirred up even more the fury of his executioners who vied with one another in burning his body with flaming fire-brands and red-hot irons without our Etienne's uttering even a sigh. On the contrary, he would cry out to them from time to time:

"Courage, brothers, it's not I whom you are burning; it's someone else, and I do not feel your torments."

After a while, as he felt his strength diminish, he asked for a few moments' respite so as to offer a final prayer to God and to commend his soul to Him. After having done so in a few words, he urged them again to end this cruel butchery, in the midst of which, ever constant, steadfast and as if he were insensible to the slow fire with which he was being burned, he gave up his generous soul into the hands of Him who had created him for His glory. Thus he brought about with more than heroic courage the open triumph of Jesus Christ, of his faith and religion over all Iroquois cruelty, in his own country and before the Iroquois, his compatriots.

I leave you to think, dear Father, with what pleasure all paradise witnessed the triumph of this brave Etienne, as it did in the past that of his holy patron. We do not know precisely the day of such a precious death; but it is sufficient for us to know that it was inscribed in the book of life and that the Angels doubtless celebrate this feast in heaven to make up for the honor merited from mankind here on earth by a Christian who suffered so for Jesus Christ.

His wife, named Suzanne, had her life spared as he himself had predicted, and she is a slave in her country, but always constant and steadfast in her religion. The other Indian who was taken with them had only a few fingers cut off at Onondaga and was taken from there to Cayuga where his life also was spared. However, no matter what efforts were made to oblige him to have him take a wife, he never wanted to give his consent saying that his religion forbade it and that he was already married. Sometime later, after having come with a large war-party to the vicinity of Montreal, he found the means to slip away from his companions and to come by canoe to his beloved Mission of the Sault and to his wife and children. And there it was that he related all that we have just said and of which he had been the eyewitness.