

KATERI'S LAST CHRISTMAS

(Continued.)



IT IS NOT SURPRISING that Kateri Tekakwitha communicated her joy, poured out as a pure lustral water, first of all, on her friends Marie Therese Tegaiguenta and Marie Skarichions, then on Marie of Onondaga and Marguerite Gagoüithon, who was also a native Onondaga, and, perhaps, on a few others.

Marie of Onondaga, good-looking and intelligent, was related to one of the first families of her Iroquois Canton. She was only a few months older than her friend Kateri Tekakwitha. She was the mother of a family and belonged to the Confraternity of the Holy Family whose members, as we know, were very carefully selected. Unfortunately, little by little she neglected her responsibilities and ended by committing "a rather serious fault." It is not known in what she erred. Besides, it matters little. What counts was her profound and immediate repentance after she weighed the gravity of her failing.

Father Cholenec spoke to her of the four last ends—death, judgement, hell, and heaven—with the help of engravings, illustrating Satan's hold on sinners, like those that could be seen at Quebec Seminary. Quickly persuaded of his penitent's good will, he gave her a copper crucifix, which a friendly priest had sent him from France.

It became the symbol of the new life Marie of Onondaga was undertaking with the assistance of her friend Kateri Tekakwitha.

On examining herself, Marie discovered that she had gone astray, because she had forsaken the sacrament of penance and because she was too much attached to the trinkets

dear to the heart of Iroquois women. She thereupon made a general confession of her entire life and resolved to go to confession each week. She gave up once and for all her trinkets, which she distributed among her acquaintances. As time went by, it was said of her as it was of Kateri, "She can be found either at work in her longhouse or in the woods, or again praying before the tabernacle."

Following Kateri's style of life, she spent much time adoring Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament as early as four o'clock in the morning. Now and then, to atone for her faults, she scourged herself in an abandoned shack either going to or coming back from church. She attended the first Mass at dawn and the following one also. Then it was time for housework or sewing or laboring in the fields or in the forest. This she did in close union with God, a union that brought tears to her eyes, tears of joy.

In the evening after prayers at church, during the winter of 1678-1679, while the rest of her family were away on the hunt, she found herself alone with her youngest children. She had them say their prayers and put them to bed for the night. Before an engraving of Our Lady and of Our Lord, suffering upon the Cross, attached to one of the beams of the longhouse, she meditated for several hours. As a result of her dialog with the Lord, she began to practise penance, too often immoderately. In the coldest weather she flogged herself to the point of blood, often feeling her child stir in her womb. As soon as Father Cholenec heard about it, he ordered Marie to stop these penances, far too dangerous for a pregnant woman. After the birth of her son Ignatius, she took them up again.

The profound love of Marie for Christ astonished the missionary. It was the principle of her penitential life, the principle that urged her on to consecrate herself to Our Lord on the same day as her friend Kateri. During the first months of 1680, Marie, more enamoured than ever before of the Savior, was still weeping over her sins. This bitter regret added to her macerations had so emaciated her that Father Chauchetière took her for someone else. Many years later, Father Cholenec noted that she had always walked faithfully in the footsteps of Christ. He did not hesitate to call her "a truly marvellous woman."

Marguerite Gagoüithon was a year of two younger than Kateri. She was extremely beautiful and belonged to one of the most prominent families of the village. Her first cousin, considered by the Iroquois as "her brother," held the rank of