

"THE GREATEST YEAR"



FROM 1682 TO 1695, Fr. James Bruyas, who had been appointed successor to Fr. James Frémin as Superior of the Mission, took in hand the fortunes of the Praying Indians. He was able on many occasions to see for himself how powerful Kateri Tekakwitha was before the throne of God. Then Fr. Peter Cholenec followed him as Superior. During the years he had spent among the Hurons, at Quebec and at Lorette, he had heard about the extraordinary favors obtained through the intercession of the Iroquois girl whose spiritual guide he had formerly been. The favor granted to Fr. Bruyas in 1693 must have impressed him.

On a Thursday during the winter, this Jesuit suddenly became aware that his right arm was completely paralyzed. It was immediately decided to take him to Montreal for treatment according to the precarious methods of the period. Before leaving, he asked the little band of Kateri's intimates to begin a novena for him. His trust in the merits of the Lily of the Mohawks was so great that on arriving in Montreal he refused to take any of the remedies that were offered to him. He repeated to anyone who would listen that he would be cured. On the following Thursday, the eighth day of the novena, he was no better. On Friday, the last day, he arose at the customary hour, four o'clock in the morning, and found his arm in so good a condition that he was able to offer the Holy Sacrifice—something he hadn't been able to do for eight days—in thanksgiving to Our Lord and to Kateri.

During the winter of 1694, Kateri blessed the Mission with a signal favor, this time for an Onondaga, Marguerite Gagoüithon's sister, who had done penance for her friend on the eve of her death. This woman left with her husband for the annual hunt. She was pregnant before starting out and her time came at the beginning of spring. She suffered excruciating pain. For three days and three nights she was in labor without being able to bring forth her child.

She became desperate. Then the thought came to her that she should pray to Kateri. In a few words, she cried out from the bottom of her heart, "O Kateri, have pity on me, help me to deliver my child as soon as possible, and if it's a girl, I promise that she shall have your name." At that moment she quietly fell asleep and was wakened by the cries of her infant, a little girl whom she carried to Fr. Cholenec as soon as she returned to the village. She joyfully told him how Kateri had helped her. On baptizing the little one, the priest was happy to give her the name of her heavenly benefactress.

All these favors stimulated Kateri's friends. During the winter of 1692-1693, no doubt thanks to the many prayers that were being offered, the most hardened of the village practised *Ho tonongan-nandi*,¹ a public penance done in atonement for all. Even though Fr. Chauchetière, in a letter dated August 7, 1694, addressed to his brother, says that "this cure should be written out," he forgot to give him the details. More's the pity for his 20th-century readers!

All these manifestations of Kateri Tekakwitha's glory filled with admiration and rejoiced the Mission of St. Francis Xavier and the neighboring villages, 1695, according to the Jesuit missionaries, was the greatest year for Kateri. Her reputation spread to the two biggest towns of the country, Quebec and Montreal. Her patronage extended to the most important people of the colony. The first one was no other than John Bochart de Champigny, Lord of Noroy and Verneuil, Knight and Intendant of New France from 1686 to 1702. For two years, the Intendant had been plagued with a bad cold, which worsened so much that he could barely speak. His wife, born Marie Madeleine de Chaspou, Lady of Verneuil and of Du Plessis-Savari, wrote to the Jesuits of the Mission and asked them to make a novena to Kateri for her. The Fathers, who held the couple in high esteem found nothing better to do than to turn to Kateri's band, who fortunately were then at the village. During the novena of prayers offered by Marie Therese Tegaiguenta, Marie Sarichions, Marie of Onondaga, Marie Gagoüithon, and the "virago," in Quebec the Intendant was perfectly cured of his cold.

Here are Fr. Cholenec's comments on this cure: "I do not doubt that on this occasion Kateri wished to reward the great obligations that all missions in general, and that of the Sault in particular, had to Mr. and Mme. de Champigny for the marked favors we had received daily from them."

The happy pair's gratitude soon made itself felt. Mme. de Champigny quickly had pictures of Kateri printed, which she distributed in Canada and even in France, where she sent them to persons of the highest rank at Court. As a result, that same year in Paris, a person in danger of death was healed. As for the Intendant, to manifest his gratitude, he too had small likenesses of the saintly

1. Ronatonhakanonni: Men-who-are-doing-penance.