

# KATERI TEKAKWITHA



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IN A TRIBE of Iroquois Indians established in what is today the State of New York, south of Canada, took root a marvelous flower of goodness and grace, Catherine, or Kateri in the Indian language, who was elevated to the honor of the altars in June 1980.

She was born in 1656. Her father was an Iroquois warrior, who during an incursion among neighboring tribes had made a slave of an Algonquin Christian, his future wife. From this union an adorable little girl was born. She was four years old when an epidemic of small pox left her an orphan. She endured her illness, which left her with her face pock-marked. Entrusted to an elderly woman, she grew into an intelligent and lovable girl. She had received some religious instruction from her mother. Her occupation was that of the Iroquois women: needlework, barkwork, chores in the longhouse.

At that time, a few Jesuit missionaries had come to the Iroquois village in order to bring peace to them. The first one to see the young Indian maiden, immediately felt that he had before him an extraordinary person. He baptized her on Easter Sunday 1676. Her life of intense union with God, her life of prayer and penance openly contrasted with the customs of her tribe; even so, this young girl of 20 years knew how to keep alive her ideal of holiness, as a flower among thorns, or better still as an angel.

Her tribe was not ready to receive Christianity nor to retain in its ranks a young Christian girl willing to live only for the Lord. She was constantly harassed and ridiculed in every possible way; she was even accused of immorality and infamy. So the missionaries decided she must be sent to some other place. Nor far from Montreal, there was a flourishing mission. She prepared her escape and in the autumn of 1677, travelling by canoe on rivers and lakes and on foot through the woods, she reached Sault St. Louis. There she met a few women who had known her mother and was entrusted to the care of one of her Christian relatives, who adroitly tried her in all sorts of way. However, Kateri soon realized that she had come



Relic of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha (foresection of sternum) venerated at the cathedral of Chicoutimi, P.Q., Canada. See story of its discovery in *Kateri*, No. 130, Winter 1981. The reliquary was obtained in Rome during May 1981 by the Very Rev. Canan François Plourde.