

HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II AND BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA



John Steele pinxit

AT ROME

ON JUNE 22, 1980, the Pope beatified five Venerables among whom was the young Iroquois Maiden Kateri Tekakwitha. The four others had devoted themselves to the Native Americans throughout the Americas.

In the Holy Father's homily during the Mass, he praised Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha and the other Blesseds stressing that they would henceforth be offered "to the imitation of the faithful and to the admiration of the world at large:"

"O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever" (Ps 135 [136], 1).

This exalting invitation of the Psalmist to unite, all of us, in glorification of God, for his infinite goodness and mercy, is taken up today by the whole Church, overflowing with joy because she can bow to venerate five of her members raised to the honors of the altars by means of Beatification and, at the same time, can present them to the imitation of the faithful and the admiration of the world. They are, a Jesuit, the "Apostle of Brazil", Joseph

De Anchieta; a missionary mystic, Mary of the Incarnation (Guyart); a Franciscan tertiary, the founder of the Bethlehemite Congregation, Peter De Betancur; a bishop, Francis De Montmorency-Laval; and a young Redskin maiden, *Kateri Tekakwitha*.

Further on, he thus summarized the life of the Mohawk Maiden:

This wonderful crown of new Blesseds, God's bountiful gift to his Church, is completed by the sweet, frail yet strong figure of a young woman who died when she was only twenty-four years old: *Kateri Tekakwitha*, the "*Lily of the Mohawks*", the Iroquois maiden, who in seventeenth-century North America was the first to renew the marvels of sanctity of Saint Scholastica, Saint Gertrude, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Angela Merici and Saint Rose of Lima, preceding, along the path of Love, her great spiritual sister, Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

She spent her short life partly in what is now the State of New York and partly in Canada. She is a kind, gentle and hard-working person, spending her time working, praying and meditating. At the age of twenty she receives Baptism. Even when following her tribe in the hunting seasons, she continues her devotions, before a rough cross carved by herself in the forest. When her family urges her to marry, she replies very serenely and calmly that she has Jesus as her only spouse. This decision, in view of the social conditions of women in the Indian tribes at that time, exposes *Kateri* to the risk of living as an outcast and in poverty. It is a bold, unusual and prophetic gesture: on 25 March 1679, at the age of twenty-three, with the consent of her spiritual director, *Kateri* takes a vow of perpetual virginity, as far as we know the first time that this was done among the North American Indians.

The last months of her life are an ever clearer manifestation of her solid faith, straightforward humility, calm resignation and radiant joy, even in the midst of terrible sufferings. Her last words, simple and sublime, whispered at the moment of death, sum up, like a noble hymn, a life of purest charity: "Jesus, I love you..."