



Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

## SOME THOUGHTS THAT KEEP ME CLOSE TO KATERI TEKAKWITHA

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So many thoughts have crossed my mind since first I made the acquaintance of Kateri some thirty-five years ago. I remember reading a letter written by Fr. Claude Chauchetière to France on the 14th October 1682. He spoke of journeys being continually made to Kateri's tomb—of intercession made, and wonders worked through her. In a strange way I have made many a journey also. I have not been fortunate enough to go there physically, but my mind and soul have searched the rivers and the forests; all places Kateri was familiar with. I sought to find some little understanding of the mystery and the meaning of that young Indian's life and death. She has fascinated me—and helped me in a strange but real way.

I am never ashamed to tell folk that in over twenty years of work in parishes I have begged her help so often. I have tried to know more about her in books and articles (*Kateri* has deepened that knowledge).

In New York at Fordham in 1965 I eagerly asked questions of a Jesuit there. Nearly twenty years later I sat in the reading rooms of the British Museum Library.

Ellen Walworth, Margaret Thornton, Justin Steurer, Francis X. Weiser and our own good Henri Béchard are among those who help me on my pilgrimage.

I often wonder just how devotion to Kateri started for me. I certainly remember nine-year-old Tekakwitha—an Arawak Indian chirpily saying, "Well, she—Kateri was brown skin like me and had eyes like me. She was very holy and died very young. And that's good enough for me." So perhaps it was that little Indian girl from the riverside in Guana I met in 1962 that really got me started on a friendship with an Indian girl in heaven.

Reading about a saint can be very helpful but it's only when you start talking to them that a friendship starts. And it's not long then that you want to talk about your friend to others.

Since coming back from my seventeen years on the missions I have talked about Kateri to so many different folk in Lourdes and Edinburg, in Zimbabwe and London, in Italy and Liverpool, and in India and Ireland.

What are some of the things that different folk are attracted to in her? The gentle call of Jesus and her response to it amid forests, rivers and village life. An old lady said "I'm glad she couldn't read or write. There's many of us like that in this world."

It is a strange thing but many are comforted by the very real loneliness that Kateri knew at times. And yet she knew the loveliness of friendship—that beautiful friendship she had with Theresa Tegaiauenta. Folks smile at times at parts of the story of Theresa. And also at the great character, the Oneida Chief Hot Powder.

On learning about Kateri's private vow of chastity one dear soul said. "It's a good thing she never became a nun. We've got too many of them put up as saints already." But almost in the same breath said "Of course my favorite saint is Thérèse of Lisieux. Funny thing, both of 'em died about the same age. Guess they have a bit of a pow-wow together up in heaven."

Although our knowledge of the saints on earth is important, it is in a sense our contact with them in heaven that enables us to enter into the Risen Christ and each play our part in the great Paschal Mystery. Why does God give us friendship with certain saints in heaven? I guess it's the same as on earth—part of the wonderful plan and love of God.

We are able to share many of His gifts and helps through the saints.

Maybe much of the message of Kateri is like that of Thérèse. Her burning love for Jesus in the Eucharist and her closeness to