

## "RISING TO NEW LIFE"

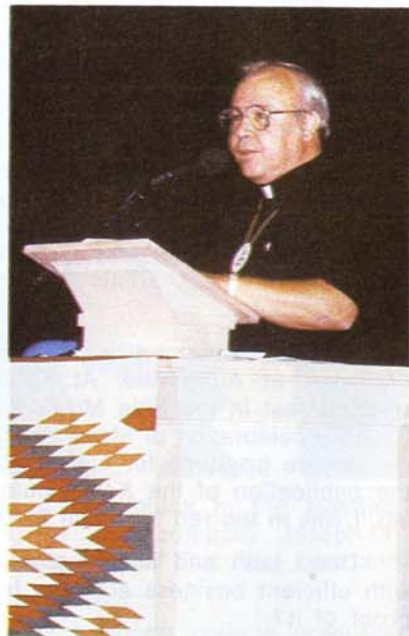
THE 49th ANNUAL TEKAKWITHA CONFERENCE

Bozeman, Montana

August 10-14, 1988



Bishop Donald Pelotte of Gallup, New Mexico and Bishop Charles J. Chaput of Rapid City, S.D.



Fr. Gilbert Hemauer, OFM Cap., Executive Director of the Tekakwitha Conference resumes the history of the Association.



Archbishop William Borders of Baltimore, MD, at his right Bishop Fliss

With Him in glory

# Reverend Michael K. Jacobs, S.J.

1902 - 1988

"If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Jn XI, 25

The first time I laid my eyes on Father Michael Karhaienton Jacobs was during the autumn of 1934. I was completing my novitiate at Sault-au-Récollet on the northern shore of the Island of Montreal. In later years I would tease Father Michael about this meeting: "You looked so holy then." He took it quite good-naturedly and would go on with his work.

Michael was born at the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at the town of Caughnawaga on May 11, 1902. His parents, Joseph and Ann Jacobs both lived on the Reservation all their lives. He grew up in a happy family of three other boys and three girls: Cecilia, Lottie and Mary, and Angus, Frank and Tom. They could trace their ancestry in direct line to 1715—as far back as the church records of the Mission go.

Until the age of 16, Michael attended the Indian school at Caughnawaga where he perfected his knowledge of Iroquois and English. During September 1918, the Superior of the Mission, Father Gras, S.J., sent him with the future Dr. Williams to Sacred Heart College, Sudbury, Ontario, some 555 miles from his home town. Knowing how Indian children are apt to be lonesome, the Jesuit made sure the two students would not play truant and return home on foot. A note to this effect was later found by Father Michael in Father Gras' notes.

During Father Samuel Granger's postorate, the annual procession for the Feast of the Assumption in which a statue of Our Lady was carried through the village was maintained. On one of these Feasts, a thunderstorm forced the altar boys with the statue to seek refuge in the nearest house. One of the youngsters was Michael Jacobs, and the place they entered was his home. His



Harold Godey pinxit.

**FR. MICHAEL JACOBS, S.J.**

Mother, who was ill, venerated the statue and Father Granger blessed her with it. On that day, Our Lady told Mrs. Jacobs that her son would some day become a priest, a secret she kept from him until after his ordination.

Before returning home for the summer vacation of 1922, young Michael made a retreat of decision and chose to join the Society of Jesus.

On August 14, 1922, Michael Karhainton Jacobs entered the Jesuit novitiate at Sault-au-Récollet on the Island of Montreal, and his mother, who was ill, found herself completely cured by Our Lady.

After two years of novitiate, Michael pronounced his first vows and began the long years of study through which every Jesuit "Mister" must go. First of all, two years of the classics followed by two years of philosophy, and then two years at Gaspé of what is known as regency, which consisted for him in teaching the youngsters of the Minor Seminary on the Atlantic coast. On August 1, 1931, the young religious took up theology at the Scholasticate of the Immaculate Conception in Montreal.

Finally the great day of Michael's Ordination dawned on July 1, 1934. The Most Rev. William Forbes, Archbishop of Ottawa, who had baptized him and celebrated the marriage of his parents officiated. The Archbishop, who had not had the opportunity of speaking much Iroquois over the years, preached a beautiful sermon in the language of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. The newly ordained priest's heart was filled with gratitude: his Great Companion, Christ the Lord, had called him to be the first Mohawk Jesuit priest.

Before taking up his active ministry, he still had another year of theology before him in Montreal with a special year of ascetical and mystical studies at Chicoutimi, P.Q., under the direction of Father Samuel Bellavance, who was later my own Instructor of tertianship.

The time has come, I believe, to look back on Father Jacobs' life. Think of him as a teenager going off to Sudbury, far from his home, from his beloved ones, plunging into a different cultural milieu than his own, and adapting to it, certainly with good will and much effort on his part. Think of him as a young man going through the long formative years of Jesuit training, ever faithful to the Lord and Our Blessed Mother. Some fell out along the way, but not Michael! And whether he "looked holy or not," I have always admired him. All the more so because he cooperated very faithfully with every Vice-Postulator since Father John Wynne's time in fostering the cause of beatification and canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

His first assignment was to his native parish, at St. Francis Xavier's in Caughnawaga, where he devoted himself for two years (1936-1938), ever on the alert to communicate his love for Kateri Tekakwitha to all who came into contact with him, a responsibility he considered his to the end of his life.

In 1938, after pronouncing his final vows on February 2, Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord at the Temple, he was appointed pastor of the Mission of St. Francis Regis at Akwesasne, Quebec, where he served in this role until 1965. Most of the Iroquois who founded St. Regis came from old Caughnawaga in 1755 before any boundaries divided the Mission. Today, as its parishioners are well aware, it is made up of American territory on the south side of the St. Lawrence, of Cornwall Island and other areas in Ontario, Canada, and of St. Regis in Quebec. It consequently comes under the jurisdiction of three Bishops, who all constantly encouraged and helped Father Michael in his ministry.

He devoted himself wholeheartedly to his flock, serving them in their own language but never hesitating to preach in other parishes, spreading the good news of the young lover of Christ, Kateri Tekakwitha, whose virtues were declared heroic in 1943. He was responsible for the coming of his former teachers, the Sisters of St. Ann, to St. Regis in September of the same year. Every month he visited his home town of Caughnawaga preaching in Mohawk, English, and French at all the Masses. Every year as long as his health permitted, he would go down to Auriesville, the Venerable Kateri's birthplace, on Indian Day, the eve of Labor Day, when the Kahnawake choir would sing at the Eucharistic Celebration and the Akwesasne dancers prepared by Sister Kateri Mitchell would perform before the crowd of pilgrims. In 1965, after erecting the parish hall at Hogansburg, N.Y., he was overjoyed to be able to bless the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha's statue, a fitting memorial to the Lily of the Mohawks.

The long hoped for day of the Ven. Kateri Tekakwitha's beatification finally dawned on June 22, 1980, 300 hundred years after her saintly death. Many parishioners from St. Regis and St. Francis Xavier were in Rome for the great occasion. Father Michael's declining health did not allow him to be present at St. Peter's although Father Gérard Lavigne, S.J. had intended sending him to Rome for the beatification ceremonies. He himself decided he was not well enough to travel, but his happiness was complete because the first North American Indian to be elevated to the honor of the altars was of his people and her story was closely linked with that of St. Regis and of St. Francis Xavier.

In 1982, because of his bad health, Father Jacobs retired to St. Jerome, where he was admired by all for his patience, his

faith and his spirit of prayer. He will always be remembered as a genuine apostle of the Lord, totally given to his flock and beloved by them.

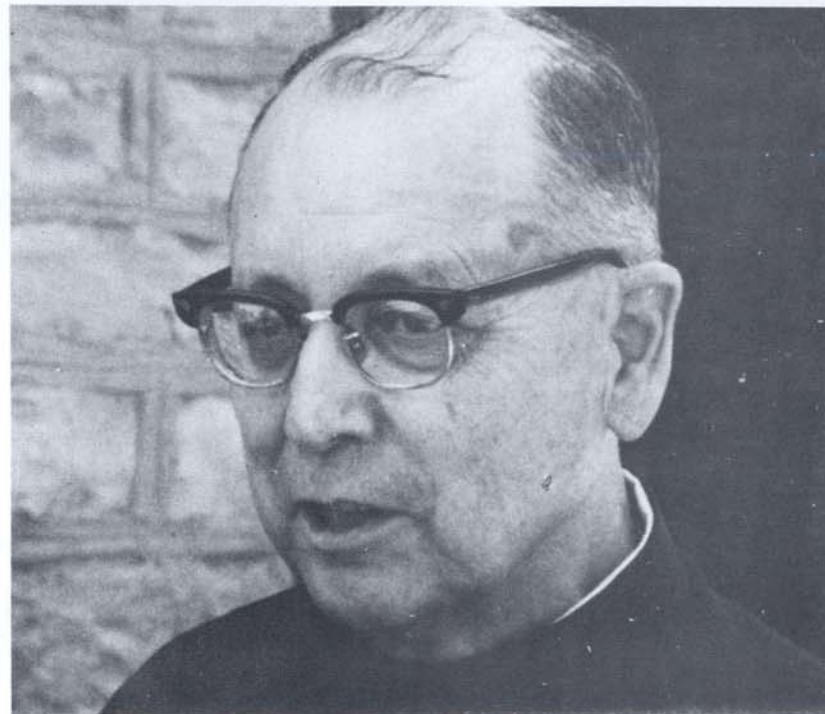
I was not at all surprised that he was called to give an account of his stewardship on the feast of the Nativity of Our Blessed Mother whom he loved so much. Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha certainly welcomed Father Michael to heaven and led him before the throne of God. Jesus lovingly smiled at his faithful servant and said:

"I am the resurrection and the life.  
If anyone believes in me, even though he dies  
he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me  
will never die."

These words must be our comfort and consolation.

*Photos: Anne M. Scheurman*

*Homily: Henri Béchar, S.J.*



*Father Wisshe Jacobs, S.J.*



*Artist Harold Godey, Fr. Michael Jacobs, S.J.,  
portrait, and Donor Thomas Constantino.*



*Portrait, Mr. Thomas Constantino, Fr. Robert Fleig, S.J.,  
Fr. Michael Jacobs, S.J., and Fr. Thomas Egan, S.J.*



*Unveiling of the statue of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha at Hogansbury, N.Y.  
in front of the St. Regis Parish Hall on Easter Monday, April 18, 1965.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Diebow*



Fr. Michael K. Jacobs, S.J. and Vice-Postulator Henri Béchard, S.J. on the same occasion



On October 22, 1972, at the Cornwall Island Recreation Center, Bishop Adolphe Proulx, presented jubilarian Father Jacobs with the Medal of Merit of the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall.



Bishop Adolphe Proulx and Fr. Jacobs rejoice.