

## KATERI IN GUATEMALA

As I am here in Guatemala for the fourth time to help out the parish of Champerico, a small fishing port in the Pacific, on September 12, 1989, I had the occasion, with two fellow members to go and visit the "Missionaries of the Eucharist," a community of Maya indigenous Sisters. They live in a fertile valley, on a high mountainous plateau which surrounds Atitlan Lake, exactly at San Andres of Semetabaj. A bumpy, tortuous, climbing and difficult road leads us there.

On that day, while visiting their humble house, strongly built, very functional, well adapted to the mildness of the climate, – the work of a Benedictine brother of Maya origin – in the classroom of the novices, we discovered a large image-poster of Kateri, distributed in 1980, at the time of her beatification.

Sr. Tonia-Maria, their foundress, of American origin, tells us that they venerate her a lot, like the first American Indian publicly glorified by the Church, but that unfortunately, they know nothing about her. Fr. Louis Gagnon, immediately, tells them: "Well, Sister, Fr. François will come to tell you about Kateri during a two or three day retreat." I gave them the little information I remembered and promised to come back to instruct them better.



*The picture of Kateri in the novices' classroom*

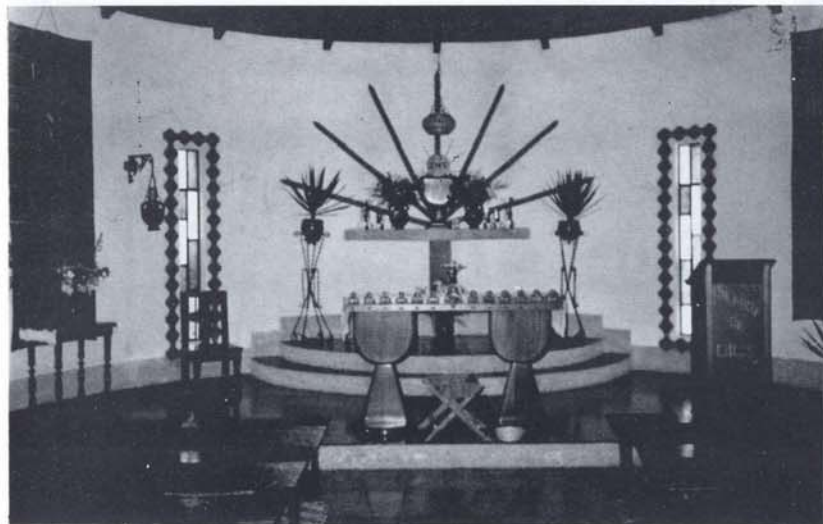
Through friends, I quickly contacted Fr. Henri Béchard, S.J., in charge of the sanctuary and Kateri's Cause, who sent me some literature, both in Spanish and in French, as well as other addresses in Spain or Latin American – who could supply us with other information. Among others, I received from Miss Mireille Moreu in Barcelona, a well produced story of Kateri for the youth.

With all these treasures and after having prayed the Holy Spirit a lot in order to receive the gift of the Spanish tongue, I left to give three days of instruction on Kateri and a last one on the Trinity, at the request of Sr. Tonia-Maria.

One can well imagine the attention of my listeners and the thousand and one questions they asked me. They were 35: 5 professed Sisters, 9 novices and 21 postulants, all in their lovely native costumes, with innumerable colors and designs, each village having its own original symbols.

There are three different idioms in the community: qitché, qatchiqel and tsutujil; Spanish though is the principal language used among them. They gave me an audio-cassette of religious chants in these three dialects. All were very melodious.

Unluckily, Sr. Tonia-Maria could not attend either of the lectures. Since a month, she was recovering from a bite to a foot inflicted on her by a German Shepherd.



*The chapel of the Missionary of the Eucharist*

Wednesday, January 31, 1990, with seven visiting travellers from Quebec, I returned to the Missionaries of the Eucharist. It was a great feast for all... Sr. Tonia-Maria was up on her feet. They were able to take photos under the setting sun.

Back to our road, bumpy, tortuous, difficult and climbing... the seven travellers were amazed by what they had seen. Our minibus driver, a Guatemalian, told us: "I saw in Sr. Tonia-Maria what was kindness and for me this kindness is the characteristic of a virgin." All the voyagers said that this visit was the highlight of their trip.

The missionaries, in January, just founded their first house of apostolate, in Santa Clara, in the same diocese of Solà. One professed nun with four postulants were part of the foundation. They have long praying hours. Tuesday is a day of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed on the altar.

More than ever they pray Kateri for whom she is a model of self-gift to God and to the others. May the Holy Trinity, through the intercession of Kateri, grant that one day these Mayas Sisters come to establish themselves close to their Indian brothers and sisters of Canada. Long live Kateri and those who follow her!

Champerico, Guatemala, February 13, 1990.

François-Paul Deraspe, Trinitarian



Fr. F.-P. Deraspe, O.S.S.T., Sr. Tonia Maria and the novices

## DREAMING TOGETHER

### Second Ontario Native Kateri Conference

The flames from the bonfire leaped as high as the surrounding tree tops on Avila's grounds, making a slash of red against the late night sky. It was ten o'clock, on the second night of the Native Kateri Conference in Thunder Bay. Inside a lodge, constructed of willow bones and canvas skins, people in light, loose clothing were seated together on cedar branches around a center where red hot rocks steamed with the water poured over them. In this purifying atmosphere, people were praying, were experiencing healing from personal grief, and were sharing with one another the story of their path to God. It was a native religious experience known traditionally as the "sweat lodge", and by the testimony of those who experienced it, Jesus Christ was present with them.

When native people from Northern Ontario, as well as from other provinces and the U.S., gathered for a three-day "search" conference at Lakehead University in mid-August, it was this very harmony between their Catholic faith and their native heritage that they were hungering for. Some had already found it thanks to the enlightened teaching on cultural expressions of religion that has followed the Second Vatican Council. Others, drawn to be authentically native in their search for God, had sought religious experience outside of the Catholic faith in which they had been baptized. Many of these persons have returned to the Catholic native community as teachers of the native way of finding God. For others, the teaching they remember from their childhood that the native ways are pagan and evil, has proven a stumbling block to a harmony between the native way and their Catholic faith. But these are slowly finding for themselves, through experience, that being native and being Catholic are twin gifts, to be cherished in unity within the personal faith experience.

Welcoming participants to this second Ontario Native Kateri Conference, Bishop John O'Mara said "this conference will give us a special occasion to listen to the Spirit and to share the Spirit's insights... to know what is authentic and what is not. We will be able to share the Spirit's reconciliation and love among ourselves and with the larger community."