

The Blessed Kateri Tékakwitha - 1656-1680

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(...following)

The Praying Village

It is difficult to portray Kateri's joy on entering the village of the praying Indians. The deep fervor of these converts delighted the heart of the young woman. Her sister's welcome and that of Anastasia Tegonhatsiongo, mistress of her long house and former friend of her mother, made her feel that she was not a stranger, but that she was truly at home. For their part, the missionaries did not forget that they had a "treasure" to care for. She already knew two of the three Jesuits, Fathers Jacques Fremin and Pierre Cholenec, whom she had taken care of during their brief stay at Gandaouague in 1666. Father Claude Chauchetiere, her first biographer, was the third priest stationed at the mission. The superior charged Father Cholenec with the spiritual direction of Kateri. After baptizing an adult, it was the custom of the missionaries to have wait several years before giving him Holy Communion. Her director, as soon as he became better acquainted with the newcomer, decided that she should receive her First Communion on Christmas Day, 1677.



An American writer, Daniel Sargent, gave us the profound signification of this communion:

"Yet even then it must be acknowledged that the Iroquois had been longing very particularly for Holy Communion. The very mirages they had followed showed them famished for it. They had always tried to raise themselves higher than they were by joining themselves somehow to sufferings. And here were the sufferings of Christ with which they could unite themselves. Also the Iroquois had been tormented with the desire of girding themselves into a single body, which was greater than the sum of them all as individuals. In all their wars they had, like most imperialists, fought for an ultimate peace to be enjoyed in the unity of a longhouse which was the Long-House."

"The union with God, with the splendor of the saints, and with the heroism and weaknesses of the Church Militant, made possible by the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, was the very thing for which all their wars had been fought, and all their dreams had been dreamed."

Now Kateri, without clearly grasping all these implications, felt them sufficiently to prepare herself as well as possible for this encounter with Christ. According to Father Chauchetiere, her motto was, "Who will teach me what is most agreeable to God so that I may do it?" She lived up to this motto not only for a few months after her First Communion, but until the moment of her death.

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Jansenist Arnauld spoke of the Real Absence of Christians before the real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Such was not the case at the Mission of St. Francis Xavier. The humble bark church nearly became her home. She came to pray at four o'clock in the morning, attended the first Mass at the break of dawn, and another at sunrise. Several times during the day she could be found in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. She never missed evening prayer with the other faithful, and remained in church long after everyone had left. The weight of her love carried her to the tabernacle.

Her prayer was far more interior than vocal — an unceasing flow of love. Even so, the missionaries asserted that she did not use her praying as an excuse not to work. She was not one of those sanctimonious persons, more common in her day than in ours, who were at church when they should have been doing their housework.

At the end of the week, she examined her conscience with great care, did penance for her failings and went to confession.

When the moment came for her to receive our Lord for the first time, on Christmas Day 1677, Kateri was not simply a young Iroquois of exquisite purity; that day she realized the destiny of her race. Good though she was until then, from that morning on, she advanced with giant steps on the road to holiness, thinking herself all the while a very ordinary Christian.

(to be continued)

Kateri speaks to us...

Birth: 1656. Smallpox: 1660. First communion: 1676.
Flight to La Prairie: 1687. Death: April 1st, 1680

"Who will teach me what is most agreeable to God such as I could do it."

"My Jesus, I must suffer with you."

"I am extremely touched by the three nails that attached our Lord to the cross. However they; are a symbol of my sins."

"Jesus, I love you, Jesus, I love you, Jesus, I love you."

"I have no other spouse, but Jesus Christ. I have considered myself content to live in poverty and misery for His love."

"If an innocent girl such conducts herself, what should not a sinner like myself do!"

"How much I want that everyone of our lodge should love and rely upon the cross as I did!"

"It is in us that God wants to take up His dwelling place. our souls are the temples that are most agreeable to God."

"The poverty when that threatens me does not scare me."

"Go and tell the Father that I am going to Heaven."

"Look, look, how beautiful the Cross is."

"I'm in heaven and I realize that the Cross is more beautiful than ever."

"On her death bed, her last words: Jesus, Mary, I..."



Kateri Tekakwitha