

## The Blessed Kateri Tékakwitha - 1656-1680

by P. Henri Béchard s.j.

(...continued)

### New Trials

The Cross has always been the prerogative of those who truly want to follow Christ. So was it Kateri's. And it was all the heavier because it resulted from her efforts to be charitable to her neighbor. After Christmas, the village was practically deserted. It was the time of the great annual hunting. In small groups, the Indians of St. Francis Xavier's scattered through the neighboring forest. On their snowshoes they went in search of caribou, elk, deer, and racoon. To be agreeable to her adoptive sister and to her "brother-in-law", Kateri accompanied them. During the long weeks she spent far from the village and its little church, she was faithful to her customary devotions. She even made herself a small shrine, which consisted only in a cross that she had cut out in the bark of a tree growing on the bank of a frozen brook. In union with Christ the Worker, she did not spare herself at work. She used to go to the forest for firewood; she followed the trails to cut up the wild animals the men had killed, often enough quite far from her wigwam, and with the other women made belts of wampum when the weather kept them inside. As discreetly as possible, she fasted in the heart of abundance.

During this hunting season something happened that was to make Kateri suffer as never before. One evening, one of the men, who had been hunting elk all day long, entered the hut very late. He was tired out and without eating or drinking threw himself on the nearest mat and quickly went to sleep. The next morning, his wife, was surprised not to find him next to her, but asleep next to Kateri. She thought that he had sinned with the young woman, and not aware that the latter generally went to pray at her little shrine, imagined that they were meeting secretly. As if to confirm her suspicions, that same day her husband spoke about a canoe that he had constructed for the return trip to the mission and added that he needed the assistance of one of the women of the band to help him pull it out of the woods. "Kateri will come," he said, for he knew how charitable she was. The Indian's wife, who was prudent and virtuous did not mention her doubts to anyone, but resolved to speak about them to Father Fremin at the mission.

On Palm Sunday, the hunters were back in the village and Kateri was with them. She was allowed to receive Holy Communion a second time on Easter Sunday and, not much later, was admitted into the Confraternity of the Holy Family, made up only of the most fervent and the most missionary-minded of the faithful. Some time after, Father Fremin had her come to his home. He informed



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her about the suspicions of the hunter's wife and asked her what the truth of the matter was. Very calmly, Kateri simply denied the accusation, for she felt in no way guilty. The Father was satisfied with her answer. However, the Indian woman who had complained and a few others who had learned about the accusation, no one knows how, persisted in the conviction of her guilt. Never had Kateri suffered as much as on this occasion, not even in the midst of her penances and macerations, which she practised to obtain the conversion of her people and her own identification with Christ

A trial of another sort awaited her. Her adopted sister, who was very fond of her, worried about her. Why did she not marry a good hunter, who would take care of her, providing her with food and clothes? The one time Kateri had gone to Montreal, she visited the Hotel-Dieu, conducted by the Daughters of St. Joseph, a community founded by Jerome Le Royer de la Dauversiere for the care of the ill and wounded. For the first time, she had seen women like herself, who had consecrated themselves to God by the vow of chastity. She felt strongly drawn to a similar calling. Her "sister", who did not succeed in changing her mind, was more successful with regard to old Anastasia Tégonhatsiohgo in convincing her that Kateri was taking the wrong direction. In turn the mistress of the long house tried to impose her point of view on the young woman, who was generally very submissive. Rather sharply, she answered Anastasia, who was a widow, "If you wish to remarry, do so! For me, all I want is peace!" The old woman was annoyed and she decided to speak to Father Cholenec. Kateri forestalled her and convinced the priest that she must not marry.

*(to be continued)*

### *To Someone I Love...*

I am writing to say how much I care for you. I want you to know me better.

When you awoke this morning, I exploded a brilliant sunrise through your window, hoping to get your attention. But you didn't even notice.

Later, you were walking with friends, I bathed you in warm sunshine and perfumed the air with flowers. Still you didn't notice me. So I shouted to you in a thunderstorm and painted a beautiful rainbow. You didn't even look!

Tonight, I spilled moonlight on your face and sent a cool breeze to refresh you. As you slept, I watched over you and shared your thoughts, but you were unaware of my presence.

I hope you will talk to me soon. When you're ready, I will be near. I love you very much.

Your friend,  
JESUS