
The Blessed Kateri Tékakwitha - 1656-1680

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(Conclusion)

Her Vow of Virginity

With her intimate friend Marie Thérèse Tegaiguenta and a Huron named Marie Skarichions, Kateri had thought of founding a monastery for Indian nuns on Heron Island in the St. Lawrence River. Father Fremin objected that she had very little experience in Christian living. If she could not become a nun, perhaps she could dedicate her life to Christ as a lay person. Father Cholenec, her spiritual guide gives us his reaction: "...The thing was so unusual, however, and appeared so incompatible with the life of the Indians, that I thought it best not to precipitate matters, so as to give her plenty of time to weigh a matter of such consequence. I tried her therefore, for some time, and after I had noted the great progress she made in every kind of virtue, and above all, with what profusion God communed with His Servant, It seemed to me that Kateri's design could come from no other source than from Him. Thereupon, I at last gave her permission to carry it out...



"It was the Feast of the Annunciation March 25, 1679, at eight o'clock in the morning when, a moment after Jesus Christ gave Himself to her in Communion, Kateri Tekakwitha wholly gave herself to Him, and renouncing marriage forever, promised Him perpetual virginity. With a heart aglow with love she implored Him to be her only spouse, and to accept her as His bride She prayed Our Lady, for whom she had a tender devotion, to present her to her Divine Son. Then, wishing to make a double consecration in one single act, she offered herself entirely to Mary at the same time that she dedicated herself to Jesus Christ, earnestly begging her to be her mother and to accept her as her daughter".

Her Last Year

The twelve last months of her life were for Kateri filled with suffering. Her headaches, perhaps the result of the smallpox she had contracted as a child, increased. During her last summer she suffered from a serious illness from which she never fully recovered it was followed by a slow fever, painful stomachaches, and frequent vomiting.

In February or March 1680, with the best of intentions, she acted rashly. She had heard about St. Aloysius Gonzaga's penances, and in spite of her bad health,

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asked herself why she could not do as much. Then, St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictines, whose rule recommends moderation, had mortified himself by rolling in thorns. So she strewed her mat with big, pointed thorns, and slept on them for three nights in a row. Her friend Marie Thérèse Tegaiguenta saw that she looked wan and drawn, and after questioning her, told her that if she did this without her confessor's permission she was offending God. When Father Cholenec learned what Kateri had done, he blamed her and obliged her to throw the thorns into the fire. She instantly obeyed, but never recovered her strength.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, the missionary judged that it was time to give her the Holy Viaticum and offered to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction at the same time. She replied that there was no hurry and the priest delayed administering her until the next day.

Most of Kateri's friend had come back from the winter hunt. That night two members of the Holy Family Association, Marie the Penitent and Maguerite Gagouithon, kept watch at her bedside. The latter had practiced penance to obtain a beautiful death for Kateri who told her what she had done in her behalf, and encouraged her always to live as a fervent Christian. On Wednesday morning, the dying woman received Extreme Unction. Her friends and companions wanted to be present at the end. As it was Holy Week, they had to provide enough firewood for the last days of Lent, during which they did not intend to work. Marie Thérèse Tegaiguenta mentioned the problem to the missionary, who in turn spoke about it to Kateri: They were advised to see to their provisions for the last days of Holy week and to have no fear of not returning to the long house in time. At three o'clock in the afternoon, on April 17, 1680, her friends gathered together around Kateri's mat. There was no death struggle. She went to her beloved Lord smiling peacefully. She was not quite twenty-four years old.

A few minutes later, her pock-pitted face was radiant with light. Her people were convinced that a ray of the glory that was hers was reflected on her features.

In 1941, Pope Pius XII officially proclaimed that Kateri Tekakwitha had practiced all Christian virtues to a heroic degree, thereby granting the title of Venerable to the Lily of the Mohawks. On June 22, 1980 Pope John Paul II beatified her.