

## Painting of Fr. Claude Chauchetière



The earliest known painting of Bl. Kateri attributed to Fr. Claude Chauchetière, s.j. (1690?)

## Portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha (1696) by Father Claude Chauchetière

Father Chauchetière painted a large portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha, one year after her death to accomplish what he had been inspired for his consolation and of the others. This was in April 1681. To facilitate the explanation of this great painting, he wrote a small book where all the actions of Kateri Tekakwitha are painted. Undoubtedly, this portrait was painted with sepia ink<sup>1</sup>. In 1685, or later, he again painted images from his narrative of the Sault using sepia ink.

He had written that the 1681 portrait was still in the chapel in 1695. Fr. Claude had done a copy of the 1681 portrait with oil paints for a more lasting portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha, which is presently at the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier in Kahnawake.

The earliest copy he painted would have been in 1696 before he left the Mission to reside in Québec. In 1695, he wrote the life of Kateri Tekakwitha and in August of the same year, he wrote a letter to his brother Jean Chauchetière explaining that he had written Kater's life in three parts<sup>2</sup>. Father Pierre Cholenec completed the second and third part when he completed his recount of her life in 1696. Father Pierre Rémy sent Father Cholenec a signed list of testimonials

dated March 24, 1696. These were testimonials of cures attributed to Kateri Tekakwitha in his parish. Father Chauchetière would soon be leaving the Mission to reside in Québec. There is no written account when he arrived in Québec. At the earliest, Father Chauchetière left the Mission in 1696. He died at the age of sixty-four on Holy Wednesday, April 7, 1709.

Father Claude Chauchetière had painted Kateri's portrait using many symbols to depict her life.

The location of the chapel was depicted in the portrait. The shoreline of the river and the painted church accentuated the location of the Mission at the Sault until 1689<sup>3</sup>. The Chapel was pronounced by the painting of a larger church.

Fr. Claude painted many red lilies on Kateri Tekakwitha's white vest and they represent her virginity and purity. Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century lilies were drawn on Our Lady's robe to symbolize Her virginity and purity.

The canoe represents Kateri with those accompanying her on their voyage and arrival at the Mission. There were four people in the canoe there are four persons, one Native from the Huron Mission of Lorette, Québec along with the brother-in-law of Kateri Tekakwitha,

<sup>1</sup> Sepia ink, a reddish brown pigment prepared from the inky secretions of cuttlefish.

<sup>2</sup> Father Claude Chauchetière had written to his brother in a letter the life that he had written of Kateri Tekakwitha was in three parts. The first part had three books. The first book had twelve chapters and was her life before baptism, the second book was her life she led at the Mission and the third book the particularities of her death. The second part had several revelations and other marvels. The third part was the bodily cures attributed to her by year 1681 to 1696.

<sup>3</sup> The river was the Great River or presently known as the Saint Lawrence River.



both are in front facing Kateri Tekakwitha.

Kateri Tekakwitha is painted in red, representing the red blanket she had at the time she arrived from the land of the Mohawks. There was only place for three persons in the canoe as written by Father Chauchetière, but he also painted the Divine Providence behind Kateri Tekakwitha because God had guided her to the Mission as was repeatedly said by Father Chauchetière.

Kateri Tekakwitha's vest is white representing her purity, possibly the same vest given her by her companion before her death. She also had a belt around her waist slightly seen and noticed from the contour of her vest.

Father Chauchetière wrote of her appearance that her hair was straight and parted. Her eyes, eyelids, her prominent right high cheek and broad face expresses her Native features.

Her round face seems to have a slight characteristic of an Algonquin, perhaps taken after her mother's Algonquin features. Her face is of a rosy colour. This was the appearance of her face when her face was transfigured shortly after her death. The left side of her face is shaded, perhaps to depict her covering of the face during her holy life. Her face inspires devotion.

Her moccasins are dark red to brown colour, which is mentioned in her life where she used glue from sturgeons to colour the hides red. Her left moccasin is painted different from her right, which is wider or loose, indicating that she had walked with a limp on her left foot. Also, her left foot is not painted straight as her right foot. Father Cholenec had written that she was

small and walked with a limp. This injury happened before she met Father Jacques de Lamberville, and this infirmity remained with her throughout her life. She appears to be of small stature in the portrait, and from her femur relic, she was slightly more than four feet and five inches in height.

Her blanket that she wore is a dark blue. This was the same blanket she wore on the days when she would receive Holy Communion. A double chain necklace attaches the color of her vest. Chauchetière painted the Cross in her right hand and as in the other paintings of her. Father Cholenec said this was how Kateri Tekakwitha appeared to her close friend Anastasia.

The shrub on her right side, would it depict the shrub that she took the thorn branches from and placed on her mat to sleep on<sup>4</sup>?

Father Chauchetière without any doubt painted the oil painting, because the drawings he did previously in 1685 or sometime later, the hands of those painted when enlarged on paper are of the same style as those in the portrait.<sup>5</sup>

After her death, Kateri appeared in a vision to Father Claude Chauchetière. He painted her in the way she had appeared to him. When portraits of Kateri were placed on the heads of the sick, marvellous cures occurred.

God did not deprive us from having a portrait of Kateri. Portraits were of great importance after her holy death for cures and instruction.

<sup>4</sup> Northern Prickly Ash shrub.

<sup>5</sup> The canvas of the oil painting is slightly more than 35 inches in height and 29 inches in width. The image of Kateri Tekakwitha was painted after the background was painted on the canvas.

## Psalm 51

1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions
2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin
3. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me
4. Against You, and You alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified in Your sentence and blameless when You pass judgment
5. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me
6. You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart
7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow
8. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that You have crushed rejoice
9. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot all my iniquities
10. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me
11. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take away Your Holy Spirit from me
12. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit
13. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You
14. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your deliverance
15. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise
16. For You have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be pleased
17. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise
18. Do good to Zion in Your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
19. Then You will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on Your altar.