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Mohawk woman to be canonized

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The Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, depicted in this statue at the rectory of the St. Regis Mission in St. Regis, Quebec, will be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church during ceremonies in Rome in 2012.

Staff Photo / Denise A. Raymo
Press-Republican



Sainthood is expected to be bestowed in 2012 upon the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha by the Roman Catholic Church.

It is a day St. Regis Mohawks and thousands of others have prayed for steadily for more than 100 years.

"When we heard, we said, 'We're going to Rome'," laughed Vicky Phillips, religious-education coordinator at the Kateri Tekakwitha Hall at the Roman Catholic Community Center on Route 37 in Akwesasne.

"We didn't think it would happen, and we were about to give up hope."

She was the first Native American beatified, in a dedication made in 1980 by Pope John Paul II.

This Monday, Pope Benedict XVI made the announcement of her canonization.

'SO HAPPY'

The Rev. Jerome Pastores of St. Regis Mission Church received word through an email that the community's hope had become reality, she said.

"He was so happy to hear it. It's what we've prayed for, and he was even happier because the second (proposed saint) the Vatican announced was from the Philippines because he's from the Philippines," Phillips said.

Representatives from many Indian tribes will be invited to the Vatican for the ceremony, but no date has yet been set, she said.

"We rejoice with our Native American friends as the day of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's canonization nears," the Most Rev. Terry LaValley, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ogdensburg said in a news release.

"We eagerly await that day when the church declares that she is numbered among the saints in heaven."

TRAVELING STATUE

Debbie Thomas, the mission church liaison, said the pope's announcement was a long time coming and joyous news.

"We're all so excited we can't even work," she said, laughing. "We're just waiting to hear what's happening next."

She said they have a traveling statue of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that has been on loan and has been shared in many Akwesasne homes since July.

And at each site, "something has happened to the families," Thomas said.

One woman who had no feeling in her legs for 25 years developed sensation after being in the statue's presence for three days, Thomas said.

A man had asked for two medals with Tekakwith's image on it but gave no reason for his request. Then, several months later, he told friends of the person who gave him the medals that, after receiving them, his cancer had gone into remission.

"Every time I go to pick up the statue, I get so excited to hear the stories the families have to tell," Thomas said. "I feel honored to be a part of this."

LILY OF MOHAWKS

Tekakwitha, known as the Lily of the Mohawks, was born in 1656 to a Mohawk chief and an Algonquin woman and has had two miracles attributed to her.

The first was at her funeral on April 17, 1680, when witnesses at her bedside saw the smallpox scars she bore disappear from her face and sick people were suddenly healed, including a person previously disfigured by ringworm.

Pope Pius XII declared her "venerable" in 1943.

The second miracle was in 2006, when the family of a 5-year-old boy prayed for healing from the flesh-eating disease on his face.

He had undergone 29 surgeries with no relief. But after three weeks of intense prayer to Tekakwitha, the boy was healed and remains disease free nearly six years later.

LIFE OF SERVICE

She was born with the name Catherine and orphaned by age 4, when her parents and brother died in a smallpox epidemic that left her scarred and with poor eyesight, according to material from the center.

She was baptized there in 1676, taking the name Kateri Tekakwitha, which means "one who puts things in order."

She received communion for the first time on Christmas Day 1677 and took a vow of perpetual virginity two years later, dedicating herself to teaching prayers to children and ministering to the sick and old.

Tekakwitha became ill and died on April 17, 1680, at age 24. Her last words were: "Jesus, I love you."

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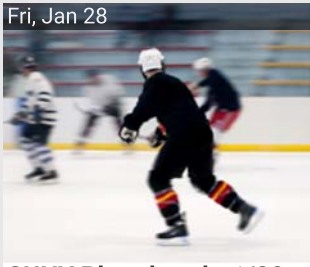
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