



Saint Kateri (Tekakwitha)

Feast Day: July 14

Born: 1656 Died: April 17, 1680

Declared Venerable: January 3, 1943 by Pope Pius XII

Beatified: June 22, 1980 by Pope John Paul II

Canonized: October 21, 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI

Patron: loss of parents, persecuted Christians, those who have been exiled, Native Americans and ecologists.

Tekawitha was born in 1656 in a Mohawk village (now in New York). Her mother was from a different Native American clan, kidnapped and forced into the Mohawk tribe. Her mother was impressed by Jesuit missionaries and was secretly baptized Catholic. Kateri's father was a Mohawk chief.

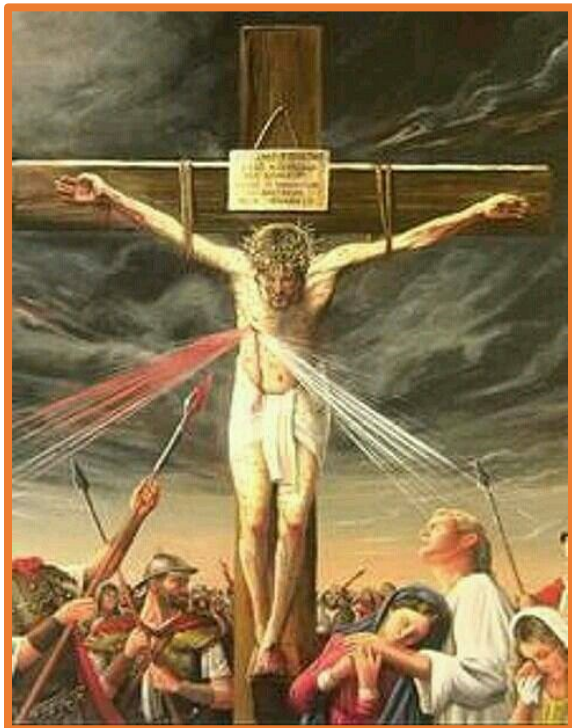
At 4 years old, smallpox claimed the lives of her parents and baby brother. It left her partially blind and her face scarred. She was then raised by an aunt and uncle who were anti-Christian. They were not very attentive to Kateri who was then known as Tekawitha which, in the native language, meant "She who bumps into things."

Tekawitha had been pressured into marriage since she was 13 years old. She refused, desiring instead to learn from the Jesuit missionary priests. She sought them out when they preached at a nearby village. The Mohawks were at war with the Mohicans. Tekawitha helped the Jesuit priest Jean Pierron tend to the wounded, bury the dead and bring food and water to the warriors. Tekawitha's own people, the Mohawks brutally tortured their Mohican captives. Tekawitha listened as Fr. Pierron pleaded with the Mohawks to stop. They refused but allowed him to baptize victims before they died.

At age 19, Tekawitha was baptized and took the name Kateri, Native American for Catherine after Catherine of Sienna. Because of her conversion, Kateri was ostracized from the Mohawk village. Kateri left her village and began a dangerous journey of over 200 miles to a Christian village. There she lived a simple and prayerful life. She practiced penance and offered her suffering to Christ. For penance she would eat bitter food, lie on a mat of thorns, and endure burns that she had witnessed her tribe inflicting on the captured Mohicans. During a harsh winter in 1679, she would circle a cornfield praying the Rosary. Fr. Claude Chauchetière guided her on how to offer more moderate penances. Her piety and sanctity inspired even the Jesuit priests. It is said that she radiated sanctity. She was known as the Lily of the Mohawks.

At age 24, Kateri became ill and died during Holy Week. A priest who witnessed her death proclaimed that her face, which had been marred and disfigured, became instantly beautiful just before her death. He called others to witness the miracle as well. They believed it to be a sign that she was received into Heaven at the moment of her death. Kateri appeared to Fr. Chauchetière. He saw a vision of her face lifted to Heaven in ecstasy. He built a chapel near her grave. Many miracles have been attributed to the intercession of St. Kateri; the latest in 2006 when a boy from Washington state was instantly cured of a flesh-eating bacteria when a relic of St. Kateri was placed on his body.

"Who will teach me what is most pleasing to God that I may do it." ~ St. Kateri Tekawitha



In this week's Gospel, Jesus is "firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem." He knows exactly what awaits Him there: abuse, humiliation, suffering and death; yet, forward He goes, carried only by courage and love. Along the way, He wanted to stop in a Samaritan town, but He was not welcomed. How did He respond to this rejection? The disciples, James and John, wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy those Samaritans; they were soundly reprimanded by our Lord. How did Jesus respond? He put His hands to the plow and continued toward Jerusalem, carried by courage and love, to give His life as a sacrificial offering for all peoples—yes, even for those

Samaritans who rejected Him. In a word, Jesus responded with silence and love: love not in word, but in deed and truth.

Unfortunately, on occasion we have all responded to Jesus' invitation to visit us as did the Samaritans. We have all, at times, refused to allow Jesus His rightful place in our lives; we have turned Him away—in a word, we have sinned. Fortunately, Jesus does not call down fire from heaven to destroy us, rather, He makes a way of forgiveness—He wants us to turn from our sin, go to Confession, and be restored to a faithful loving relationship with Him.

How do we respond to rejection? How should we? Should we not follow the example of our Lord? St. Ambrose teaches us: "Perfect virtue retains no desire for vengeance, and that where there is true charity there is no room for anger--in other words, that **WEAKNESS SHOULD NOT BE TREATED WITH HARSHNESS** but should be very far from holy souls, and desire for vengeance very far from great souls." Like James and John, we are tempted to call down fire from heaven and seek vengeance against those who do not welcome us, but as Christians, we must learn to imitate Christ in these situations: to put our hands to the plow and not look back, to continue forward, carried by the courage and love of Jesus, and make our lives a sacrificial offering for all people. Only this will bring us His peace; only this will make us fit for the reign of God.

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples