

uncommon practice for the 17th century, and as she approached death she received viaticum to help speed her toward her Lord and insure her safe arrival in eternity. Never one to be concerned about her appearance, Kateri now wished to be clothed in a beautiful outfit so she could greet her heavenly Bridegroom arrayed in her finest dress.

On April 17, 1680, the Wednesday of Holy Week, Kateri died. Her last words on earth were “*Iesos konoronkwa*” — “Jesus, I love you.”

Those who were by her side reported that her body took on a lustrous radiance and the scars from her face disappeared. Two French trappers arrived at the mission just as Kateri died, and seeing the large crowds gathered outside her cabin went to find out themselves what was happening. Upon entering the cabin, they saw a beautiful maiden.

Native Americans began their devotion to Kateri almost at once; novenas were prayed and Masses offered for the repose of her soul. Within months, favors were reported as a result of her intercession.

A Model for the New Evangelization

As devotion to Kateri grew, she attracted many as a model of purity and chastity. Her example continues to teach us to live our sexuality as a gift from God that is not to be squandered outside of the loving committed relationship of marriage between a man and woman.

She has also come to be honored as a patroness of the environment. She teaches us how to love and care for the world because it too is a gift from God almighty.



St. Kateri embodies both the Gospel and the Native culture from which she comes.

—Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap
Member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribe

Kateri was an evangelist. She taught children how to pray. She demonstrated through her example what rich rewards await those who are devoted to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and also to his Blessed Mother. She evangelized the French Jesuit priests who had been sent to bring the Gospel to her and to the Native peoples. She demonstrated to them that the beauty of the Christian life and message can find a home wherever they are spread. She truly lived and continues to embody the spirit of her name: *She who advances or opens the way before her.*

For all these reasons, Kateri Tekakwitha is a model for the New Evangelization.

“We are all very proud of her because she embodies in herself what Pope John Paul II called inculturation — the saints are the truly inculturated members of a particular ethnic group because they personally embody both the Gospel and the culture from which they come,” said Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap of Philadelphia, a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribe and the only Native American Catholic archbishop in the United States.



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**St. KATERI
TEKAKWITHA**

*Mohawk, Mystic and Model
for the New Evangelization*

Pope Benedict XVI has described Kateri Tekakwitha as a “striking example of sanctity and heroic charity.” Her life reminds us, he said, of the “historic role played by women in the building up of the Church in America.” Her

example and intercession, he added, should inspire all of us in our “pursuit of holiness” and in our “efforts to contribute to the growth of God’s Kingdom in the hearts of people today.”



What can this young Mohawk woman — this 17th-century convert to Catholicism, this prayerful and hardworking Bride of Christ who experienced both physical suffering and persecution for choosing to follow the Lord as his true disciple — teach us today?

Kateri Tekakwitha — Lily of the Mohawks

Kateri was born in 1656 in a village on the Mohawk River called Ossernenon, now Auriesville, N.Y. Her father was a Mohawk chief and her mother a Christian Algonquin raised among the French. The name *Tekakwitha* — she was also called *Tegarouita* or *Tegakhouita* — means “she who puts things in order” or “she who advances or opens the way before her.”

Kateri was born into a period of political and religious turmoil, 10 years after three of the Jesuit martyrs were tortured and killed: Rene Goupil, Isaac Jogues and Jean Lalande. Indians blamed the “Blackrobes” for the sudden appearance of deadly white man’s diseases, including small pox.

When Kateri was only 4, a small pox epidemic claimed her parents and baby brother. Kateri survived, but her face was disfigured and her eyesight impaired. According to legend, she was raised by relatives who began to plan her marriage. But after meeting with Catholic priests, Kateri decided to be baptized and pursue religious life. When she was baptized on Easter in 1676 at age 20, her relatives were not pleased.

She fled the next year to Canada, taking refuge at St. Francis Xavier Mission in the Mohawk Nation at Caughnawaga on the St. Lawrence River, about 10 miles from Montreal. She reportedly made her first Communion on Christmas in 1677.

A Devout Indian Catholic

Kateri attended Mass each morning at the mission settlement. The Blessed Sacrament was available throughout the day for meditation, and Vespers was prayed every afternoon. The Indians at St. Francis Xavier Mission who had converted to Catholicism often practiced harsh personal penances, including physical punishments that injured their health. Kateri joined them in such practices, injuring her own health.

All who lived or served in the mission soon realized that Kateri’s holiness was something rare. She existed only to love and praise God, to give thanks to him, and to express her devotion to the Blessed Trinity and the Virgin Mary.

Kateri once visited the growing city of Montreal



‘Blessed Kateri stands before us as a symbol of the best of the heritage that is yours as North American Indians’

—Blessed John Paul II, June 24, 1980

and there she discovered women religious, devout nuns who lived only for Christ and cared for others in hospitals. When she returned to the mission, she asked the priest if she could enter such a convent. The times, however, were not right for an order of Native women religious. She next asked the mission priest if she could take a vow of perpetual virginity; he welcomed her intention. On March 25, 1679 — the feast of the Annunciation — Kateri Tekakwitha vowed to live as a Bride of Christ, as a virgin forever. People remember seeing Kateri kneeling motionless and unresponsive to the world around her as she made the solemn vow.

Her Final Days on Earth

In early 1680, Kateri’s health began to fail. She was forced to remain inside her cabin in the mission but she received a regular stream of visitors. Priests brought her Communion regularly, which was an

A SOUL WITH MANY GIFTS AND GRACES

Within weeks of her conversion, the missionary priest Father de Lamberville realized that Kateri was a soul with many gifts and graces. It was a wonderment to the priest that a Native American woman would be so clearly chosen by God for such prayerful intimacy with Him. She astounded the missionary priests with her deep spirituality and her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. She took a private vow of virginity and devoted herself to prayer and to teaching

prayers to the children and helping the sick and elderly of Caughnawaga. She was said to perform “extraordinary penances.” Kateri did not abandon her Mohawk routines and traditions when she became Catholic. She performed her daily tasks with great care, sanctifying each moment of her day, thus bringing herself even closer to God through her normal, average obligations. Everything she did was dedicated solely to Jesus Christ.