

winter hunting season took Kateri and many of the villagers away from the village, she made her own little chapel in the woods by carving a Cross on a tree and spent time in prayer there, kneeling in the snow. Kateri loved the Rosary and carried it around her neck always.

Often people would ask, "Kateri, tell us a story." Kateri remembered everything she was told about the life of Jesus and his followers. People would listen for a long time. They enjoyed being with her because they felt the presence of God. One time a priest asked the people why they gathered around Kateri in church. They told him that they felt close to God when Kateri prayed. They said that her face changed when she was praying. It became full of beauty and peace, as if she were looking at God's face.

On March 25, 1679, Kateri made a vow of perpetual virginity, meaning that she would remain unmarried and totally devoted to Christ for the rest of her life. Kateri hoped to start a convent for Native American sisters in Sault St. Louis but her spiritual director, Father Pierre Cholonec discouraged her. Kateri's health, never good, was deteriorating rapidly due in part to the penances she inflicted on herself. Father Cholonec encouraged Kateri to take better care of herself but she laughed and continued with her "acts of love."

The poor health which plagued her throughout her life led to her death in 1680 at the age of 24. Her last words were, "Jesus, I love You." Like the flower she was named for, the lily, her life was short and beautiful. Moments after dying, her scarred and disfigured face miraculously cleared and was made beautiful by God. This miracle was witnessed by two Jesuits and all the others able to fit into the room.

Kateri is known as the "Lily of the Mohawks." The Catholic Church declared Kateri venerable in 1943. She was beatified in 1980 by Pope John Paul II. Kateri was the first Native American to be declared Blessed. Her feast is celebrated on July 14th in the United States. Pope John Paul II designated Blessed Kateri as a patroness for World Youth Day 2002. Pope Benedict XVI canonized Kateri a Saint on October 21, 2012.

Saint Kateri's tomb is found at *St. Francis Xavier Mission* in the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake, near Montreal, Quebec. Saint Kateri is honored at the *National Shrine of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha* in Fonda, New York and the *Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs* in Auriesville, New York.

#### PRAYER TO SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA

SAINTE KATERI, STAR OF NATIVE PEOPLE AND BRIGHT LIGHT FOR ALL! WE THANK GOD FOR YOUR HEROIC COURAGE, CONSTANT PERSEVERANCE AND DEEP LOVE OF THE CROSS. PRAY FOR US THAT OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST MAY DEEPEN. AND MAY WE IMITATE YOU IN FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL EVEN WHEN DIFFICULTIES ARISE. IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

\*(excerpted from: [conservation.catholic.org](http://conservation.catholic.org))

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## *Saint Kateri Tekakwitha*

*Virgin (1656-1680)*

*Obligatory Memorial USA: July 14*

*Canonized to Sainthood—October 21, 2012*



*Lily of the Mohawks*

## ***Saint Kateri Tekakwitha***

(1656-1680)

\*Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), also known as Saint Catherine Tekakwitha, is honored by the Catholic Church as the patroness of ecology, nature, and the environment.

Tekakwitha's baptismal name is Catherine, which in the Iroquois languages is Kateri. Tekakwitha's Iroquois name can be translated as, "One who places things in order." or "To put all into place." Other translations include, "she pushes with her hands" and "who walks groping for her way" (because of her faulty eyesight).

Tekakwitha was born at Ossernenon, which today is near Auriesville, New York, USA. Tekakwitha's father was a Mohawk chief and her mother was a Catholic Algonquin.

At the age of four, smallpox attacked Tekakwitha's village, taking the lives of her parents and baby brother, and leaving Tekakwitha an orphan. Although forever weakened, scarred, and partially blind, Tekakwitha survived. The brightness of the sun blinded her and she would feel her way around as she walked.

Tekakwitha was adopted by her two aunts and her uncle, also a Mohawk chief. After the smallpox outbreak subsided, Tekakwitha and her people abandoned their village and built a new settlement, called Caughnawaga, some five miles away on the north bank of the Mohawk River, which today is in Fonda, New York.

In many ways, Tekakwitha's life was the same as all young Native American girls. It entailed days filled with chores, spending happy times with other girls, communing with nature, and planning for her future.

Tekakwitha grew into a young woman with a sweet, shy personality. She helped her aunts work in the fields where they tended to the corn, beans, and squash, and took care of the traditional longhouse in which they lived. She went to the neighboring forest to pick the roots needed to prepare medicines and dye. She collected firewood in the forest and water from a stream. Despite her poor vision, she also became very skilled at beadwork.

Although Tekakwitha was not baptized as an infant, she had fond memories of her good and prayerful mother and of the stories of Catholic faith that her mother shared with her in childhood. These remained indelibly

impressed upon her mind and heart and were to give shape and direction to her life's destiny. She often went to the woods alone to speak to God and listen to Him in her heart and in the voice of nature.

When Tekakwitha was eighteen, Father de Lamberville, a Jesuit missionary, came to Caughnawaga and established a chapel. Her uncle disliked the "Blackrobe" and his strange new religion, but tolerated the missionary's presence. Kateri vaguely remembered her mother's whispered prayers, and was fascinated by the new stories she heard about Jesus Christ. She wanted to learn more about Him and to become a Christian.

Father de Lamberville persuaded her uncle to allow Tekakwitha to attend religious instructions. The following Easter, twenty-year old Tekakwitha was baptized. Radiant with joy, she was given the name of Kateri, which is Mohawk for Catherine.

Kateri's family did not accept her choice to embrace Christ. After her baptism, Kateri became the village outcast. Her family refused her food on Sundays because she wouldn't work. Children would taunt her and throw stones. She was threatened with torture or death if she did not renounce her religion.

Because of increasing hostility from her people and because she wanted to devote her life to working for God, in July of 1677, Kateri left her village and fled more than 200 miles through woods, rivers, and swamps to the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier at Sault Saint-Louis, near Montreal. Kateri's journey through the wilderness took more than two months. Because of her determination in proving herself worthy of God and her undying faith she was allowed to receive her First Holy Communion on Christmas Day, 1677.

Although not formally educated and unable to read and write, Kateri led a life of prayer and penitential practices. She taught the young and helped those in the village who were poor or sick. Kateri spoke words of kindness to everyone she encountered. Her favorite devotion was to fashion crosses out of sticks and place them throughout the woods. These crosses served as stations that reminded her to spend a moment in prayer.

Kateri's motto became, "Who can tell me what is most pleasing to God that I may do it?" She spent much of her time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, a kneeling in the cold chapel for hours. When the