

in a

Word™

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**First
Native American
Saint to be
canonized
October 21, 2012**



**“I am no longer my own. I have given myself entirely to Jesus Christ.”
~ Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha**

Photo by: Father James Pawlicki, SVD

LILY OF THE MOHAWKS

THE STORY OF BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA

On October 21, 2012, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680) will be canonized a saint. Known as the “*Lily of the Mohawks*” she is the first Native American to be declared a saint by the Church.

The Vatican has been receiving requests to canonize Kateri for more than 100 years. The first recorded instance came in the 1884, when Jesuit missionaries delivered a petition on behalf of the Mohawks.

Blessed Kateri 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.*”

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



This painting is one of the oldest portraits of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, by Father Claude Chauchetière, S.J. (circa 1696)

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 glare 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.

It is said that 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, kneeling in the cold chapel for hours. When the 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's health, never good, was deteriorating rapidly due in part to the penances she inflicted on herself. She was encouraged 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 "Lily of the Mohawks" or "Beautiful Flower Among True Men." The Catholic Church declared Kateri venerable in 1943. She was beatified in 1980 by Pope John Paul II.

Kateri is the first Native American to be declared Blessed. Her feast is celebrated on July 14th in the United States.

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



"Kateri was a child of nature. Her sainthood will raise the minds and hearts of those who love nature and work in ecology."
***—Bishop Stanislaus Brzana,
Bishop of Ogdensburg, N.Y.***

Kateri's story as we described here is found in more detail at the home page of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Conservation Center at <http://conservation.catholic.org/kateri.htm>

in a word or two

Second African National Eucharistic Congress

August 3-5, 2012

Marriott Hotel and Conference Center,
5701 Marinelli Road
Bethesda North, Maryland 20852

The Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church/USCCB invites all to join African Catholics for a time of prayer, enrichment, and fellowship in the Second African National Eucharistic Congress.

Theme of the Congress is: *The Eucharist as Our Nourishment: A Catalyst for Unity, Justice, and Peace for African Catholics as New Migrants in the U.S.*

The Congress will include an opening Eucharistic celebration, Eucharistic adoration and all-night vigil, enlightening and inspiring workshops on the Eucharistic, breakout/dialogue sessions, youth workshop and essay competition award.

Most Rev. Dr. William Avenya, Auxiliary Bishop of Makurdi Diocese, Nigeria, will be one of the presenters. His Eminence, Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, will be the Celebrant and Homilist at a special closing Eucharistic Celebration on Sunday, August 5, 2012 at 10:30am.

To register for the Congress or for further information, please contact:

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The National Association of African Catholics in the United States (NAACUS) as an umbrella Association of African Catholics, affiliated with the Bishops Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church/Pastoral Care of Migrants Refugees and Travelers of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and dedicated to primarily serve African Catholics in the United States, seeks to engage, support, nurture, build communities of African Catholics, give direction and promote their spiritual wellbeing while

liaising, coordinating and involving all African Catholics to maximize their charisms as a faith and worship Community in the United States.

Some of the objectives of NAACUS are:

To be a voice of African Catholics residing in the United States

To promote awareness of the presence of African Catholics and their respective heritage and cultures in the United States, and their contribution to the Church

To encourage the celebration of the Catholic Liturgy in the ethnic languages

To promote and support the US Bishops' "Call to Solidarity with Africa"

To raise awareness of the pastoral needs of African families, youth and young adults

Empower and enable Catholics of African origin residing in the United States to help evangelize themselves and their local parishes

To support the strengthening of African marriages and family life, and nurture vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and lay ministry

To advocate for social justice within African communities and the U.S.

The Logo of the National Association of African Catholics in the United States captures very dramatically the Monstrance containing the body of Christ dwelling in Africa. Africa in its full color: green for the rich and fertile soils in which the grains and fruits grow, that supply bread and wine respectively, which become transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. The green also symbolizes the variety of vegetation and crops that sustain the African people.

The waters surrounding Africa symbolizes life. In African culture, water has great religious significance, it is used for cleaning, healing, blessing and in other ceremonies. In the Eucharist, the mingling of water and wine helps us to share in the divinity of Christ Who "humbled Himself to share in our humanity". Another very important feature on the African Continent is to bring light to Africa and bring to an end all kinds of afflictions plaguing Africa for instance, wars, disease, poverty, economic and psychological marginalization plus injustice by both internal and external forces.

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; Father Brendan Murphy, SVD consultant.

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Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>