

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha



Date of birth: 1656
Birthplace: Ossernenon (Modern day New York)
Date of death: April 17, 1680
Canonization: Oct. 21, 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI
Feast Day: July 14

Patron Saint of: ecology, Indigenous Peoples, and people in exile

About Kateri:

Born in a Mohawk village in what is now New York, our future saint, then called Tekakwitha. At the age of 4, a smallpox outbreak took her mother, father, and baby brother, leaving her orphaned and her face disfigured. She was then taken in by her aunt and uncle, chief of the Turtle Clan. He was very anti-Catholic after his daughter converted to Catholicism.

When Tekakwitha encountered Jesuit missionaries for the first time at age 11, she began to live a devout life with direction from the missionaries. Around the age of 13, her aunt began looking for suitors for Tekakwitha, though Tekakwitha vehemently opposed the idea of marriage, eventually saying to her confessor, "I have no spouse but Jesus." Instead, she busied herself with clothes making, mat weaving, cooking, and caring for the wounded and burying the dead during the attack of the Mohicans on her village. Around the age of 17, her aunt tried to arrange a marriage, but Tekakwitha fled and hid until her aunts gave up the idea of her marrying. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676 at the age of 19. Her baptismal name was Kateri, or Catherine.

Because of violence toward her as a result of her conversion, Kateri fled her village to a Christian Indian mission 200 miles away. Here, she made friends with other Native American converts and was inspired to start the first Native religious order, but this idea was rejected by the Jesuits.

Kateri's already poor health took a steep decline around the Holy Week of 1680. She died at age 23 or 24 around 3pm on Holy Wednesday, April 17, 1680 in the arms of her friend, Marie-Therese, and surrounded by the other villagers. After her death, her once scarred face was said to miraculously transform into radiant beauty. She is said to have appeared to 3 different people after her death. She is the first Native American woman of North America to be canonized.

A word from Kateri:

"I have abandoned this miserable body to hunger and any other misery so my soul could be content and have its usual nourishment."

Find out more:

Books: *Kateri Tekakwitha, the Iroquois Saint* by Pierre Cholonec

Formed.org: St. Kateri Tekakwitha audio podcast