

Blessed Catherine Tekakwitha

1656 - 1680

PARADISE

Catherine “Kateri” Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in Fort Orange, now in the United States, to a family of the Iroquois tribe. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, 1676. On March 25, 1679, she made a vow of perpetual virginity, subjecting herself to severe penances. In order to flee the wrath of her pagan uncle, she was forced to take refuge in the Mission of St. Francis Xavier in Sault, near Montreal, where she made her First Communion and began to lead a life of prayer. Without neglecting liturgical services and her duties toward the family with whom she was staying, Kateri would often go into the forest by herself to pray. She would recite the Holy Rosary in the morning, while walking around the field of corn she cultivated herself, and would end her prayers in the small chapel of the village. Worn out by smallpox, contracted in 1660, and by spiritual sufferings, she died on April 17, 1680, at only 24 years of age. On June 22, 1980, Pope John Paul II proclaimed her Blessed. She is the first Native American Indian to be raised to the honors of the altar.

Six days after Kateri’s death, on Easter Monday, she appeared to a person of good reputation. While in prayer, this person saw the deceased young woman all aglow in glory, with a majestic appearance, her face shining, lifted up toward Heaven as if in ecstasy.

This vision was accompanied by three elements that made it even more remarkable: first, it lasted for two intense hours, and this person had plenty of

time to contemplate it with great joy, for Catherine, by this favor, wished to recognize the great benefits she had received in this life. Moreover, the apparition was accompanied by many prophecies and symbolic signs. Some of these prophecies have come true; others have not yet come to pass.

Eight days after Kateri’s death, she also appeared to Anastasia (her spiritual mother). One evening, this fervent Christian, after all had retired to their own homes, remained alone in prayer, and fell asleep. As soon as she closed her eyes, she was awakened by a voice that said: “My mother, get up!”

She recognized Kateri’s voice, and immediately, getting up to be seated, turning in the direction of the voice, she saw Kateri bathed in light...carrying in her hand a cross even more brilliant.

“I saw her,” the visionary recounted, “quite clearly in this apparition, and she addressed to me these words which I heard so distinctly:

‘My mother, look upon this cross! How beautiful it is! This was all my happiness during my life, and I counsel you to make it yours as well.’”

After these words, she disappeared, leaving her spiritual mother filled with joy. Kateri also showed herself to her companion one day when she was alone in her cabin. She sat next to her on the mat, resumed the conversation, and after giving her some advice on her conduct, she was gone.

