

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656–1680)

Kateri was born in 1656 in the village of Ossernenon (today Auriesville, New York) to a Catholic Algonquian mother and a Mohawk Chief. When she was four years old, her parents and younger brother died of smallpox. Kateri was also affected by the disease, which left her almost blind and badly scarred her face. She was taken in by her aunt and uncle, who was strongly opposed to Christianity.



In 1666, French troops were sent out to subdue the Mohawks, and with the people of her village she spent a winter hiding out in the forest. They stayed on the north bank of the Mohawk River. At the nearby Saint Pierre de Gandaouagué Mission she met Jesuit missionaries and was struck by their friendliness and their piety. She kept active with domestic chores and work but, to the dismay of her aunts and uncle, she refused the normal life path of accepting an offer of marriage. When Father Jacques de Lamberville, S.J., visited her area in 1675, she asked to be baptized. He taught her the faith for six months and baptized her on Easter Sunday, 1676, giving her the name “Kateri”.

Her family made her life difficult and sometimes deprived her of food because she refused to work on Sundays. They threw pebbles at her as she made her way to the chapel to pray. Father Lamberville encouraged her then to go live in a First Nations Christian community, the Saint-François-Xavier Mission, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, across from Montreal, in today’s Kahnawake. Here she received her first communion on Christmas Day in 1677. During the winter hunt, she continued to pray while she helped with the work. She dreamt of founding a First Nations community of consecrated life. She took a vow of chastity on March 25, 1679.

Although still young, Kateri’s health deteriorated in the last years of her life. She died of tuberculosis on April 17, 1680. Kateri was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980 and canonised by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012. She became “the first native North American to be raised to the glory of the altars”.

LINK:

<http://www.katerishrine.com>

QUOTATION:

“I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love...”