



# SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA (1656-1680)

Known as the “Lily of the Mohawks”, Tekakwitha was born in 1656 to a Catholic Algonquin mother and a Mohawk Chief. She was orphaned by smallpox, which left her almost blind and badly scarred.

In 1667, her village was visited by the Jesuit missionaries. From them, she received her first knowledge of Christianity. Despite his misgivings, her uncle allowed her to be baptized and she received the Christian name Kateri. She lived a pious and faith-filled life, spending hours in prayer and fashioning crosses out of twigs. She also refused to marry, believing that she was married to God and that no man could take God’s place in her heart. Her beliefs were met with ridicule, hostility and threats. Thus, two years after her Baptism, she fled to St. Francis Xavier Mission, a Christian Mohawk village in Kahnawake, in present-day Quebec.

There, she received her first Communion on Christmas Day 1677. She also made a vow of perpetual virginity on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1679. In Kahnawake, Kateri was known for her faith and holiness. She taught prayers to children, cared for the elderly and the sick, and would often attend Mass at sunrise and sunset.

She died of tuberculosis on April 17, 1680, shortly before her 24th birthday, and was buried at St. Francis Xavier Mission. Witnesses report that within minutes of her death, the smallpox scars vanished from her face, which then radiated with beauty. Since Kateri’s death many miracles have been performed through her intercession, with the sick being cured and many prayers being answered.

Kateri was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII on January 3, 1943, and beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980. Saint Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012, in Rome. She became “the first native North American to be raised to the glory of the altars”. Today, there are a number of shrines dedicated to Kateri in both the United States and Canada, including the Kateri Centre at her burial site at the St. Francis Xavier Mission in Kahnawake.



**Portrait of Saint Kateri  
Tekakwitha painted by Fr.  
Claude Chauchetière, SJ, around  
1696**