

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Feast Day: July 14 (1656-1680)



The name Tekakwitha means “moving all things before her” or “she who puts things in order.” This young woman transferred her life’s obstacles to her Christian faith and put her life in order in a short time.

Tekakwitha belonged to the Turtle Clan of the Mohawks, and Iroquois nation. She was born in the village of Ossernenon, near what is now Auriesville, New York, 10 years after Isaac Jogues and his companions were martyred there. Her mother was a Christian Alognquin, and her father was a non-Christian Mohawk chief. When Tekakwitha was four, smallpox devastated the village, causing her parents and baby brother to die, and leaving her eyes weak and her face scarred.

Anastasia, a Christian friend of Tekakwitha’s mother, took care of Tekakwitha and told her about God. When Anastasia went to Canada to be with Christians, Tekakwitha’s uncle, a Mohawk chief, took her as his daughter.

Tekakwitha obeyed and worked hard. She was indoors a lot because light hurt her eyes. She excelled at cooking, beadwork, and repairing canoes. But when her relatives wanted to

arrange her marriage, she refused. She felt that the Great Spirit was the only one she could love. This angered her uncle.

Tekewitha learned more about God from a missionary. She was baptized on Easter Sunday when she was 20 and received the Christian name Katherine or Kateri. The following Christmas, she received her First Communion.

It was hard for Kateri to live as a Christian. Her people expected her to work in the fields on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. Sometimes they didn’t feed her. Children made fun of her and threw stones at her. Kateri endured this for two years.

Father de Lamberville, a Jesuit missionary, advised Kateri to go to an Iroquois village in Canada, where other Christians lived. One day when her uncle was away, Kateri escaped with a Christian named Hot Ashes. When Kateri’s uncle discovered she was missing, he followed but did not catch her. After an exhausting journey, Kateri arrived at Kahnawake, near modern-day Montreal. She gave the priest there a note from Father de Lamberville. It said, “I send you a treasure, Katherine Tekakwitha. Guard her well.” Kateri was an outstanding Christian. She went to Mass daily, made frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and prayed the Rosary often. She cared for the sick and the old, and she taught children. She was known for her gentleness, kindness and joyful spirit.

But Kateri endured severe headaches. She was not strong and could only eat very little, but she offered her suffering to God. When she was 24, Kateri contracted a disease and died. Her last words were “Jesus, I love you.” The scars on her face suddenly disappeared. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized on October 21, 2012 and was the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. She is called the “Lily of the Mohawks,” and is the patroness of ecology and the environment, people in exile and Native Americans.