

SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA



Known as the “Lily of the Mohawks”, Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in Ossernenon (today Auriesville, New York) to a Catholic Algonquin mother and a Mohawk Chief. When she was four years old, her parents and 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 aunts and uncle, who was strongly opposed to Christianity.

When she was 10 years old, her village moved to Caughnawaga (today Fonda, New York). In 1667, her village was visited by the Jesuit missionaries Fathers Fremin, Bruyas and Pierron. From them, she received her first knowledge of Christianity. When Kateri turned 18, Father Jacques de Lamberville arrived to take charge of the mission in her village. Despite his misgivings, her uncle allowed her to be baptized as long as she remained in the village. Following her Baptism, Kateri 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, 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.

Kateri’s health deteriorated in the last years of her life. She died of tuberculosis on April 17, 1680, shortly before her 24th birthday, and was buried at St. Francis Xavier Mission. Her final words were: “Jesos Konoronkwa” (“Jesus, I love you”). Witnesses report that within minutes of her death, the smallpox scars vanished from her face, which then radiated with beauty.