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The Legacy of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

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THE LEGACY OF SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA, PART 1 OF 2

1. Throughout this past century, and especially since her 1980 beatification, thousands of Native North Americans have overcome their personal challenges and followed the path of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. Yes – you and me, we can do this! With Kateri’s help, we can overcome our personal struggles and love Jesus with the many gifts the Creator gives us. Image: Painting by Rev. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., 1681. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA; all others, BCIM, MUA.

2. By baptism, we’re all called to Heaven, and someday, a few of us will be canonized or recognized formally. Canonized saints are those selected by the Church as models for us all. Like Saint Kateri, they are holy people who lived virtuous and well-documented lives confirmed by martyrdom or God’s miracles while helping us through prayer. Shown here are ten Native Catholics in good standing when they passed. Images: Left to right, top row: 1. St. Kateri Tekakwitha painting, Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA, 2. Joseph Chihoatenhwa, web, 3. Apalache martyrs, web, 4. Geronimo, BCIM, MUA, 5. Mo. M. Catherine Sacred White Buffalo, BCIM, MUA; bottom row: 6. Nicholas Black Elk, 1937, W. Ben Hunt, photographer. W. Ben Hunt Collection, MUA, 7. Rev. Francis M. Craft, BCIM, MUA, 8. Sr. M. Olivia Taylor, BCIM, MUA, 9. Louis Sam, BCIM, MUA, 10. Rose Prince, web.

4. From the 19th century is Geronimo, an Apache leader from Arizona; and American Sister Mother Mary Catherine Sacred White Buffalo, a Hunkpapa religious holy woman from North Dakota. Images: Left to right: 4. Geronimo, BCIM, MUA, 5. Mo. M. Catherine Sacred White Buffalo, BCIM, MUA.
5. From the mid-19th through mid-20th centuries is Nicholas Black Elk, an Oglala holy man and catechist from South Dakota; Father Francis M. Craft, a Mohawk pastor and chaplain from Pennsylvania and North and South Dakota; and Sister of St. Francis Mary Olivia Taylor, a Choctaw-Chickasaw educator and religious from Oklahoma. Images: Left to right: 6. Nicholas Black Elk, 1937, W. Ben Hunt, photographer. W. Ben Hunt Collection, MUA, 7. Rev. Francis M. Craft, BCIM, MUA, 8. Sr. M. Olivia Taylor, BCIM, MUA.

6. From the mid to late 20th century is Louis Sam, a Coeur d’Alene a lay church leader from Idaho; and Rose Prince, a Carrier holy woman from British Columbia. Images: Left to right: 9. Louis Sam, BCIM, MUA, 10. Rose Prince, web.
7. Saint Kateri grew up facing many challenges and hardships. She was born in present-day upstate New York within a Mohawk community to a traditional Mohawk father and a Christian Algonquin mother. At age four, a small pox bacterial infection raged through and devastated her and the community. It killed many people, including her parents and her brother, and it left her face scarred and eyesight damaged.

Image: Painting by Rev. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., 1681. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

8. Relatives in her Mohawk Turtle Clan then raised Kateri, in the Mohawk Valley near present-day Albany. In so doing, she learned about the Creator and the turtle’s foundational role in supporting all of what the Creator has made. Images: Mohawk Valley at the National Kateri Shrine, Fonda, New York, July, 2012. Mark G. Thiel, photographer; artwork – Oneida Nation, Oneida, Wisconsin, Mark G. Thiel, photographer, 2003.
9. Kateri learned about the Creator’s Great Law of Peace, which bound her Mohawk people in a covenant with their nearby relatives – the Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca. Together they became known as the Iroquois, and their traditional dwelling, the Long House, symbolized their way of life. Because the Mohawk people lived farthest to the East, they became known as the Keepers of the Eastern Door in a metaphorical Long House aligned with the pathway of the sun stretching over all of the Iroquois peoples from east to west. Images:


10. Kateri learned about the “three sisters” of corn, beans, and squash. Throughout upstate New York, all of the Iroquois Nations cultivated Mother Earth with care and grew these crops for food, which continues today. Images:

11. At age 18, visiting Jesuits instructed Kateri in her mother’s Christian faith, and they baptized her the next year in 1676. They gave her the name Catherine, after Saint Catherine of Siena, because like her namesake, she too was a mystical and prayerful person. The following year, like other Mohawk Christians at that time, Kateri moved north into Québec Canada, near Montreal, where their Jesuit teachers lived. There she became known for her sanctity and love of Jesus. Her health failed, and she died at age 24 in 1680, and upon her death, she miraculously lost her facial scars. Image: Painting by Rev. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., 1681.

Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

12. Fellow Mohawk Christians honored Kateri’s memory and cared for her remains, and in so doing, they founded the St. Francis Xavier Church and Kahnawake by Montreal on the St. Lawrence River in 1719. The town’s original bark houses gave way to brick ones, and because of the river’s many rapids, the men became expert voyageur canoeists who ventured west with the fur trade before Lewis & Clark. For generations without clergy, some men intermarried among tribes in present-day Montana, Alberta, and elsewhere. As lay missionaries, they spread their Christian faith, which their Western descendants handed down without Kateri’s story. Apparently Kateri had not yet been accepted as a prayer mediator, which then may have inhibited
the spread of her story. Image s: Map and late 19th century view of Kahnawake, Wikipedia; voyageur painting by Carl Heilman II, Minnesota Historical Society. Ref: Daren Bonaparte conversation, July 21, 2012, re: Mohawk devotional prayers to Kateri with deceased human as mediator is foreign to Mohawk culture. Bob Bigart, bob_bigart@skc.edu, Nov. 28, 2012, re: knows of no Kateri “memories” among Salish of Montana. [Thiel: It is likely that Kateri as mediator among the Mohawk developed ca. 1880s-1900.]

13. Meanwhile, Jesuit-educated Native women religious began to honor and pray to Kateri in Mexico. But by 1773, trouble stalled her cause in Europe and North America. Under pressure from the colonizing powers, Rome dismantled or “suppressed” the Jesuits worldwide, and two wars followed between British-controlled Canada and the emerging United States. Thousands of Mohawk and Iroquois people died supporting both sides, and the Great Law of Peace was shaken. In 1814, Rome permitted the Jesuits to reorganize, and beginning in 1839, the pioneering Jesuit Father Pierre-Jean de Smet, led the founding of Jesuit communities and schools in the Midwest and Western United States (including Milwaukee’s Jesuit community).

Image: DeSmet, BCIM, MUA.
14. During the 1880s, Jesuits promoted petitions from Native Catholics and Bishops’ councils to introduce Kateri’s canonization cause. One such Native petition is this translated excerpt from the Flathead people, a tribe in Montana with considerable Mohawk intermarriage and a long history of seeking Jesuit missionaries. It reads in part, This virgin, we believe, was given to us from God as a great favour, for she is our little sister. But now we hope that thou, our Father, who art the Vicar of JESUS CHIRST, wilt grant us a favour likewise; we beg thee with the whole of our hearts to speak and say: "You Indians, my children, take CATHERINE as an object of your veneration in the church, because she is holy and is in heaven." Ref: 1885 Flathead Indian canonization petition, reprinted by Ellen H. Walworth in The Life and Times of Kateri Tekakwitha, The Lily of the Mohawks, 1656-1680, Buffalo, 1891, and “Our Little Sister Kateri Tekakwitha, The Lily of the Mohawks", The Indian Sentinel, 1908, 5.
15. Meanwhile in the future North and South Dakota, Father Craft, a wounded survivor of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, collaborated with several Lakota Catholic women to organize the American Sisters as a community of women religious. They followed Kateri’s vision to form a Native women’s religious community in conjunction with their Lakota tradition of the Sacred White Buffalo Woman who gifted them the sacred pipe as a mediating instrument for praying to God. This was reflected in the professed name of Josephine Crowfeather, the community’s first superior, who became Mother Mary Catherine Sacred White Buffalo. Images: Left: Rev. Francis M. Craft, Thomas W. Foley Collection, MUA, and right: Mother M. Catherine Sacred White Buffalo, BCIM, MUA.

16. The community grew to at least 12 members based on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. There they ministered to the Three Affiliated Tribes of Gros Ventre, Hidatsa, and Mandan by providing home health care and Christian religious instructions. However, skeptical government and church officials doubted their abilities and opposed their ministry, which led to their community’s decline. Image: Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, North Dakota, 1890, BCIM, MUA.
17. Mother Catherine died in 1893 and the Spanish American War ensued five years later. Only four sisters remained, who with their chaplain Father Craft, enlisted in the United States Armed Forces. The sisters became the first American Indian women to serve officially, and in so doing, they successfully administered a hospital in Havana. After the war, all returned to the United States except Mother Mary Anthony Cloud Robe, on the far left; she died in Cuba and remains buried there today. *(Mother Anthony, whose birth name was Susie Bordeaux, came from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. An effort to repatriate her remains is under discussion.)*

Images: Left: Mother Catherine’s death, 1893, public domain, and Spanish American War, Cuba, 1898, BCIM, MUA.

18. After 1900, new picture technologies became available for promoting ideas, and Catholic authors, missionaries, and other friends of Kateri added them to the promotion of her cause. Printed illustrations, shows with illuminated slides, and posters became common, as shown by these Choctaw girls at Holy Rosary Mission in Tucker, Mississippi.

Image: BCIM, MUA.
19. In 1931, the Bishop of Albany formally opened Kateri’s canonization cause. More documentation was compiled, authenticated, and studied; and more petitions were gathered, which would total over 600 with nearly 100,000 signatures; all of which generated more awareness of her cause. As the momentum grew, students at Catholic schools began to present plays about her life. Among them were plays at St. Anthony’s Mission in Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, and at Holy Rosary Mission on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Images: Both BCIM, MUA. Ref: Amleto Giovanni Cicogani, Sanctity in America, Paterson, N.J., St. Anthony guild press, 1941, 128-129.

20. Native women promoted Kateri’s cause through church clubs or sodalities. These Coeur d’Alene women gathered for prayer at Sacred Heart Mission on the Coeur d’Alene Indian Reservation, De Smet, Idaho, in 1940. Image: Sr. Providencia Tolan, S.P., photographer. BCIM, MUA.

22. After the fur trade’s decline in the late 19th century, the men of Kahnawake discovered new jobs in ironwork. They began by working in local structural steel bridge projects and then moved on to high-rise building projects in New York City and elsewhere. In 1954, Mohawk workers returned to Kahnawake to remember and honor Kateri with the gift of a miniature bridge at the dedication of her statue at St. Francis Xavier Church. Image: Rev. John Paret, S.J., photographer. Kateri Centre, Kahnawake, Québec. BCIM, MUA.
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23. Among the Mohawk people, much of the momentum for Kateri’s cause comes from the ladies as shown in this 1990 pilgrimage to her birthplace at the Martyrs’ Shrine, near Auriesville, New York. Image: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

24. Similarly, Mohawk ladies have contributed to the momentum for her cause within the Tekakwitha Conference. Sister Kateri Mitchell, also a Turtle Clan member like her namesake, sings praises to Kateri in 1985 at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York. Image: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

26. How did the Tekakwitha Conference begin? In 1939, Benedictine Father Sylvester Eisenman, a long-time missionary among the Yankton Dakota at Marty, South Dakota, had a meeting in Fargo, North Dakota, with its Bishop Aloysius Muench, a former seminary educator from Milwaukee, who later was awarded a Marquette University honorary degree for his international leadership. They discussed how best to provide mutual support and problem solving tools for priests and men religious ministering to Native Catholics, and that summer in Fargo, they launched a gathering for these men that soon was named the Tekakwitha Conference. It became a rotating annual event hosted by various Catholic missions and schools, first in North and South Dakota, and later in Montana, Minnesota, and Manitoba as well. Women never attended, but a few Native men did attend as guest speakers or observers, if laity, or as members, if clergy or religious. In 1964, the attendees posed for this picture at St. Joseph’s Indian School in Chamberlain, South Dakota. Jesuit Father John Brown of the Blackfeet Nation is standing at the far left in the third row. In the spirit of Vatican II,
the Conference reorganized in 1977 under the leadership of Native Catholic men and women who soon opened membership to all persons dedicated to Native Catholic ministry everywhere. Images: Left: Bishop Muench, Wikipedia; right: BCIM, MUA.

27. Meanwhile, Native Catholic women began to promote Kateri’s cause elsewhere. Here elders Juana and Joe Pecos lead a 1989 procession to enshrine Blessed Kateri in San Diego Mission in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, which was the first such enshrinement in a church among the Southwest Pueblo tribes. Image: KTP, MUA.

28. By the 1990s, Kateri’s Native devotees were everywhere across North America – from Eskimo in Alaska; Pima in Mexico; Akwesasne Mohawk in New York-Quebec; to Cherokee in North Carolina. Images: Upper left: Herman D. Ray, photographer. Herman D. Ray Collection, MUA. Upper and lower right: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA. Lower left: Fr. David Bauman, O.F.M., KTP, MUA.
29. During the late 1970s, Native Catholic clergy, religious, and laity had thoughtful discussions about inculturation, which led to various forms of inculturated Mass and Catholic ceremonies in meetings at the national, regional, and local levels. As more Native Catholics joined, they brought their Native cultures with them, and from the heart, they shared their languages, symbols and practices. A Nez Perce woman from Idaho signs the Lord’s Prayer in Plains Indian Sign Language in 1984 in Phoenix, Arizona, and Pima ladies honored Kateri with their basket dance in Mass in 1990 in Tucson, Arizona. Images: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

30. A Kateri Circle powwow princess wears a beaded crown with the cross in 2000 in Lincoln, Nebraska, and a Crow Nation pipe carrier prays with his pipe in Mass in 1991 in Norman, Oklahoma... Images: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.
31. And Laguna Pueblo eagle dancers from New Mexico honor Kateri in Mass in 1992 in Orono, Maine, and a shrine honors her before a Lakota Sioux star quilt in 2003 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Images: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

32. The Conference also runs under Native leadership, which includes bishops as well as religious, clergy, and laity... Images: Bishop Donald E. Pelotte (Abenaki), S.S.S., Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1997, and Association of Native Religious and Clergy, Norman, Oklahoma, 1991, Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

34. After further review, Pope John Paul II declared Kateri blessed in 1980, the second of three steps towards canonization, which was followed by his visit to Tucson in 1987. Images: Above left/center: Peter’s Basilica/plaza, Vatican City, 1980, and above right: Papal visit, Tucson, Arizona, 1987. Left and center: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA. Right: Photographer unknown. Tekakwitha Conference Records, MUA.

35. Since Kateri’s beatification, the Canadian vice-postulator has given first-class relics from Kateri to Native Catholic leaders, who in turn, began to involve them in processions and Mass at the Conference by 1990. The center close ups show the reliquary and the tiny relic in the small case with the red backing. Images: Tucson, Arizona, 1990: Left: Leading a procession preceded by smudging; right: Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., celebrating Mass; center above: A close-up of a reliquary and center below: A tiny first-class Kateri relic in a flat case. Relic, Sr. Kateri Mitchell, S.S.A., photographer. Tekakwitha Conference Records, MUA. All others: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.
In following the pathway of the sun across North America from the Mohawks – the People of the Eastern Door – to where the sun sets in the far west, stands this sculpture next to St. Joachim’s Mission in the Lummi Nation on Puget Sound’s western shore within Washington State. It depicts the origins of their Christian faith as paddlers in a dugout canoe bring the first missionary to tell the people about Jesus. Before 2006, Lummi Catholics and Sister Kateri Mitchell began planning the conference for that summer, which was to be based in Seattle. Meanwhile, in February and March that year, six year old Jake Finbonner, a Lummi Nation boy, was fighting an aggressive strep A bacterial infection on his face. Family and friends prayed to Saint Kateri to save his life. During the conference planning, Sister Kateri visited him at Seattle Children’s Hospital and she and his parents prayed briefly with Kateri’s first class relic. Immediately after Sister Kateri left, hospital staff removed Jake’s bandages during surgery and discovered that his disease was gone. But like Saint Kateri after her disease, Jake’s scars remained. Image: Sculpture at St. Joachim’s Church, Lummi Reservation, Washington. Mark G. Thiel, photographer. BCIM, MUA.
37. That summer the Tekakwitha Conference visited the Lummi Nation, and at that time, Seattle Archbishop Alexander Brunett announced the Vatican’s investigation of Jake’s instantaneous cure with Jake, his family and pastor at his side. Image: Anne M. Scheuerman, photographer. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

38. Before 2012, the Mohawk Nation had already planned to host the Conference for that next summer. Then in December 2011, the Vatican announced that it authenticated Jake’s cure as a miracle due to Kateri’s intercession with God, and that Pope Benedict XVI would declare Kateri a saint in heaven next October. Consequently, that year’s conference had the atmosphere of a religious pep rally. It concluded with Jake transferring St. Kateri’s reliquary to a representative of the next year’s host committee while Sister Kateri looks on. Image: Herman D. Ray, photographer. Herman D. Ray Collection, MUA.
39. Kateri’s canonization ceremony was held in St. Peter’s Plaza, Vatican City, on Sunday, October 21, 2012. It was a joint ceremony and Mass involving a total of seven canonizations amid 80,000 pilgrims from Asia, Europe, and North America. At least 2,000 pilgrims were Native North Americans, many of whom displayed distinctive native symbols such as beadwork, buckskin, and feathers… Images: Left above and below: Herman D. Ray, photographer. Herman D. Ray Collection, MUA. Above right: Mark G. Thiel, photographer.

40. …as well as a purple and white Iroquois flag depicting the historic unity between the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Seneca Nations. Images: Above left and right: Mark G. Thiel, photographer. Center above: Herman D. Ray, photographer. Herman D. Ray Collection, MUA.
41. One pilgrim was George Looks Twice from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and a grandson of Black Elk. Mr. Looks Twice hopes that someday the Church will canonize his grandfather as well. Black Elk taught traditional and Christian ways and values and baptized over 400 Indians from several Northern Plains tribes. On the left after 1910, Black Elk is teaching his mother Lucy to pray the rosary, and on the right in 1937, he is dressed in his regalia at a tourist pageant.

Images: Left, center, and right: BCIM, MUA; Mark G. Thiel, photographer, Oct. 21, 2012; and W. Ben Hunt, photographer. W. Ben Hunt Collection, MUA.

42. For more information, read, *Native Footsteps along the Path of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha*, edited by Mark G. Thiel and Christopher Vecsey, and published late last year by Marquette University Press with the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, and later this year, watch for the St. Kateri’s Legacy Digital Image Collection on the website of the Marquette Raynor Memorial Libraries, a collection of selected images from St. Kateri’s beautification and canonization, the Tekakwitha Conference, and other events. Image: Painting by Rev. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., 1681. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.

44. The Marquette Archives doesn’t have all of the answers. But if we can’t help, we’ll tell you who can. For a web search, use “Marquette Archives” or email me at Mark dot Thiel at Marquette dot edu, which is preferred. You may also call me at 414-288-5904, but I’m not always available.  Image: Painting by Rev. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., 1681. Anne M. Scheuerman Collection, MUA.