

Be assured that you are pleasing in the sight of God and that I shall help you when I am with Him." -Saint Kateri Tekawitha.

Kateri Tekakwitha (pronounced [ˈgaderi dega ˈgwita] in Mohawk), baptized as Catherine and informally known as Lily of the Mohawks (1656 – April 17, 1680), is a Catholic saint who was an Algonquin–Mohawk laywoman. Born in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, on the south side of the Mohawk River in present-day New York State. When Kateri was a young girl, a smallpox epidemic took her parents, along with her baby brother, leaving her with pocked skin and diminished eyesight. We can sense how much of her vision she lost from the name Tekakwitha,” literally, “One who walks groping for her way.” She converted to Catholicism at age nineteen, when she was renamed Kateri, and baptized in honor of Catherine of Siena. Refusing to marry, she left her village and moved for the remaining five years of her life to the Jesuit mission village of Kahnawake, south of Montreal on the St. Lawrence River in New France, now Canada.

Despite the lack of a formal education, and Christian scriptural materials being rare, Kateri became a living Bible and living catechism. “Kateri, tell us a story,” her Mohawk companions would ask her, and she would share stories from scripture, and joyfully tell them of God’s plan for humankind, of his love and mercy, of the great dignity of each human person. She is the fourth Native American to be venerated in the Catholic Church and the first to be canonized.

Under the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, she was beatified in 1980 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI at Saint Peter's Basilica on 21 October 2012. Various miracles and supernatural events are attributed to her intercession. The Church finds God’s grace in the cultures of all believers. And in Kateri, we have found the grace of her Native American peoples, who have long modeled the call to be stewards of Creation, seeking to live in harmony with nature. The Iroquois tribes had (and retain) a deep connection with the land, managing resources carefully, and following closely the rhythms and patterns of nature. Kateri embodied this, often going into the woods alone to seek God’s voice in nature, leaving behind crosses formed with twigs as “stations” for those who followed her. Stanislaus Brzana, bishop of Ogdensburg, anticipated her canonization when he declared, “Kateri was a child of nature. Her sainthood will raise the minds and hearts of those who love nature and work in ecology.” Saint Kateri Tekakwitha’s Shrine and Saint Francis Xavier Church are located in Kahnawake, on the south shore of Montreal.

Upon her death at the age of 24, witnesses said that minutes later her scars vanished and her face appeared radiant and beautiful. Her final words were "Jesus, I love You."

Saint Francis Xavier Church, today, has two parts. The first, namely the boutique and the museum, is in fact what remains of the XVIIIth century church. The present church is an extension begun in 1820 by two Jesuits, Fathers Joseph Marcoux and Félix Martin. Over the years, they added the new sacristy, the new tower and the steeple.

