

March Holy Hero, ***Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha***
"Lily of the Mohawks"

Patron saint of the environment and ecology

Feast day, July 14



Born in New York in 1656, Tekakwitha was the daughter of a Mohawk warrior and a Catholic Algonquin mother. When she was four years old, an outbreak of smallpox took the life of her brother and both of her parents. Tekakwitha also contracted the disease, which left her with poor eyesight and a weakened and scarred body. She was adopted by her uncle, a Mohawk chief, and his wife. Tekakwitha had a sweet and shy personality and obediently helped her aunts work in the fields tending to the corn, beans, and squash. She collected firewood from the forest and water from the streams. Memories of her good and prayerful mother and stories of her Catholic faith remained in her mind and heart and gave shape to her life's destiny.

When Tekakwitha was eleven, a group of French Jesuit missionaries visited her uncle. Her uncle disliked the "blackrobes" and their strange new religion, but tolerated their presence. Tekakwitha was fascinated by the new stories she heard about Jesus Christ. She wanted to learn more about Him and to become a Christian. Father de Lamberville persuaded her uncle to allow her to attend religious instruction. Tekakwitha was baptized at age 20. Filled with joy, she was given the name Kateri, which is the Mohawk pronunciation of the French name, Catherine. Her family was *not* as joyful, and did not approve of her choice to follow Christ. She became the village outcast. She was insulted, treated like a slave, and even had her life threatened. In July, 1677, Kateri left her village and fled 300 miles through woods, rivers, and swamps to the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier near Montreal, Canada.

Because she never received any formal schooling, Kateri was unable to read or write, and led a life of prayer and penance. She tended the young and cared for the poor, sick, and aged. People gathered near her in church, saying they felt the presence of God when she prayed. Kateri loved the Blessed Mother very much and carried the rosary around her neck always. When the winter hunting season took her and others away from the village, she made her own little chapel in the woods by carving a cross on a tree and prayed there, kneeling in the snow. In 1679, Kateri took a vow of perpetual virginity, meaning she would never marry, and would remain totally devoted to Christ for the rest of her life. Her poor health led to her death at the young age of 24. Her last words were, "*Jesus, I love you.*" Moments after her death, her scarred face miraculously cleared and was made beautiful by God. *Kateri Tekakwitha is the first native North American to be declared Blessed by the Church. The final step in her canonization process is awaiting the second verified miracle from her intercession.*