

# *Profile Sheet: Saint Kateri Tekakwitha*

Feast Day: July 14



Kateri was born in 1656 in what is now New York state as is the first Native American to be canonized. Kateri's mother was an Algonquin who was a baptized Catholic; her father was a Mohawk chief. Smallpox left Kateri an orphan at age four, her face scarred, and her sight almost gone. Her uncle, the new chief, took care of her and gave her the name "Tekakwitha" which means "one who places things in order," referring to her need to find her way using her hands because of her limited eyesight.

Jesuit priests came as missionaries to Kateri's tribe. They were called "Blackrobes" and were hated by many of the Mohawks. Kateri was inspired by the teaching of the

Blackrobes and remembered her mother's love for her Catholic faith. By age 19, she found the courage to become Catholic. She was baptized on Easter Sunday and took the name of Kateri (for Catherine) on Easter Sunday.

Her baptism changed her life. Because she would not work on Sundays, she was refused food that day. She was treated like a slave but meditated on the great dignity of being baptized. She was always in danger because her people did not approve of her faith. She finally fled to a Christian village where she lived a humble, ordinary life, practicing fasting and praying for others. The cross had a special meaning for her as a sign of Christ's sacrifice and love. She would make crosses out of branches and leave them in the woods to remind herself and others to pray. She died the afternoon before Holy Thursday at age 24; her final words were the simple prayer, "Jesus, I love you." At death, her scarred face changed color and became like that of a healthy child, without any lines or pockmarks.