

**Compendium**  
of the life, virtues and miracles  
and of the official records  
on the cause of canonization  
of Blessed  
Kateri Tekakwitha  
Faithful Laywoman  
(1656-1680)

from the archives  
of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha  
Laywoman

The Father Cardinals, the Patriarchs, the Archbishops, the Bishops and so many taking part in the coming Consistory will find in this *Compendium* the biographic profile of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, laywoman, as well as the principal phases of the Cause of beatification and of canonization and the Apostolic Letter of her beatification.

I

Life and Virtue

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Indian virgin of the tribe of the Agniers or Mohawks, of the Iroquois Indians, spent the first part of her life in the territory now found in the State of New York, United States of America, and the rest in Canada where she died after a life of heroic virtue.

Born in 1656 of a pagan Iroquois Indian man and of a devout Christian Algonquin woman, both of the Agniers Indian tribe, residing in Ossernenon (Auriesville) in the state of New York.

The Indians of the tribe of the Blessed were the same ones who in the year 1642 had tortured and in 1646 sent to death St. Isaac Jogues.

Her mother had received a good Christian education in the French colonies of Trois-Rivières in Canada, where, during the war between the Algonquins and the Agniers, she was captured by the latter and married to one of these. She preserved her faith to death and desired baptism for her children; however, before she could obtain for them sanctifying grace, there being no missionaries among the Agniers, she died in an influenza epidemic with her husband and son, leaving her little girl orphaned at age four.

In addition to this she suffered from the same disease as her parents, but she recovered and was looked after by her aunts and by her uncle, one of the chiefs of the tribes of the Agniers

or Mohawks, which changed settlements three times during her infancy and adolescence and finally settled near the site where at present is the town of Fonda.

From infancy the Blessed had a sweet character. She was kind and meek, industrious and displayed virtue and good humor. She attended to household chores and showed great ability in the handiwork of Indian girls.

In the beginning, given the facial scars and eye ailments caused by influenza, Kateri sought seclusion in her own hut that she learned to love bit by bit because it offered her the means of avoiding the idle gatherings and the gossip of her peers, as well as the tribal feasts that under more than one aspect could offend her innate modesty.

When her relatives sought marriage with subterfuge and with threats of force, she refused and resisted. She bore with patience the bad treatment to which she was subjected by her family because of her opposition and finally she won them over with her meekness and sweetness.

The Blessed, who at the age of ten had had some fleeting contact with the Catholic missionaries, desired baptism. As soon as the missionary of her village, Father Jacques de Lamberville, had seen her, he was edified by her life and by her excellent witness to those who detested her virtue. Therefore he prepared her for baptism, which he solemnly conferred upon her on Easter day 1676, with the name of Kateri.

Especially after baptism the young Indian girl became a model of piety, charity, humility, sweetness and other Christian virtues. Because of her faith she suffered the mistreatment of her relatives, who attributed her observance of the Sunday rest to laziness; but she endured with sweetness their jests, insults, threats, and false accusations.

In order to preserve the young neophyte from the corruption of the Indians and to facilitate her progress in virtue, Fr. Jacques de Lamberville sent her to a devout colony of Christian Indians, known as the Mission of St. Francis Xavier, in Prairie-de-la-Madeleine, facing the city of Montreal in Canada.

The young girl managed to escape from the fury of her uncle and was able safely to complete the long and dangerous journey to the Mission. The Missionaries of St. Francis Xavier considered the arrival of the Blessed as an envoy from God to edify all with her angelic life.

In the new residence she had the fortune of living under the protection of a pious lady, who helped to cultivate her Christian life. From her arrival at the Mission to her death she always sought that which was most perfect and most pleasing to God, and endeavored to do all for Him, without selfishness and with the greatest gratitude.

Except for a single winter, when Kateri went hunting with the others of the village to find nourishment, she spent all her time working in her own hut, praying and taking part in pious conversations in an oratory of the Cross near the village and in the church. Her devotion was so clear that her director allowed her to take Communion the first Christmas after her arrival at Sault (1677), a truly exceptional permission because normally one used to test the Indian neophytes a long time before admitting them to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Also during the Indian hunting season the Blessed continued her pious exercises.

At this time, falsely accused by another woman of having sinned with her husband, she bore such an accusation with so much patience that her accusers and those who at first believed her guilty repented of their wrong and admitted that they had slandered her. Her virtue became known by all and she was accepted, although very young, into the Association of the Sacred Family into which were admitted only the most fervent and most elderly among the Indians.

Regarding virginity, Kateri would not yield to the insistence of her adoptive sister and of a certain Anastasia, who had acted as a mother to her, and endeavored to make her embrace the

married state. With the permission of her director (Father Cholenec, S.J.), and although recommended by the same to consider for three days the question of marriage, she declared after a few minutes that she had renounced this in order to have Jesus Christ as her only spouse.

In making this decision she knew the risk of a life of poverty, because an Indian girl depended on her husband for a home and for subsistence; but she was content to live poor for love of virginity and of Our Lord.

Her spiritual director, knowing the background, was so much convinced of her purity, of her love of virginity and of her steadfastness that on March 25, 1679, he allowed her, after having given her Holy Communion, to bind herself with a vow of perpetual virginity, the first act of such a kind known among the Indians of North America.

Having been given in this way to the Lord, the Blessed refused the occasion of going with companions for the hunt during the following winter, in order to remain close to the church and to receive the sacraments, although her spiritual director deemed it necessary to impose restraint in her aspiration to lead a life ever more austere and mortified.

In her last and most painful illness, she gave a sublime proof of the heroism of her virtue and of the manner of her faith, hope, charity, humility, sweetness, patience, resignation and joy in suffering.

She was held in such regard of holiness that the Missionaries believed it appropriate to bring the holy Viaticum to her hut rather than to transport her, as is customary, to the church for her last communion. Kateri received the last sacraments with great devotion.

The words that closed her life were, "Jesus, I love You." She was conscious and mentally lucid until her death, showing understanding of the pious aspirations suggested to her. She sweetly fell asleep in the Lord at three o'clock in the afternoon on April 17, 1680, Wednesday of Holy Week, at just 24 years of age.

## II

### Journey of the Cause

The renown of the sanctity of Kateri Tekakwitha was already a reality from the moment of her death and afterwards it spread rapidly not only among the members of the Indian tribes of North America, but also among the Christians of Canada and of the United States, as well as those of Europe where the knowledge of this young Indian virgin became widespread. It was kept alive over the centuries and, with the passage of time, grew everywhere.

#### *a) Towards beatification*

In the years 1931-1932 the Informative Ordinary Process was drawn up on the renown of sanctity, on virtue in general and on the miracles of the Servant of God, as well as the Process on the "non culto."

The Session of the Historical Consultors took place in the month June, 1938.

May 15, 1939, the Decree on the Introduction of the Cause was signed.

July 19, 1939 the Decree of the Distribution of the Apostolic Process on the Renown of Sanctity was issued.

The Position on virtue was prepared in 1940 and on November 26, 1940, the Pre-Preparatory Congregation took place, followed by the Preparatory Congregation on November 10, 1941, and the General Congregation on virtue on June 9, 1942.

The Decree on Virtue was issued on January 3, 1943.

In the years 1942 and 1945 two Processes on alleged miracles took place, respectively in the Diocese of Hamilton (Canada), and Marquette (USA). Afterwards all the necessary steps were taken leading up to the Decree of Validity and of the Medical-Legal Judges: after that there were other acts.

On May 25, 1973, the Postulator gave the Prefect of the Congregation a report which put forward the proposal to proceed to the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha on the basis of the old miracles.

On August 23, 1973, Pope Paul VI directed that the matter be submitted to the judgment of the Cardinals and, receiving a favorable opinion, on December 19, 1977, made known his intention of proceeding to the beatification with the dispensation from the two miracles, on the basis of a solid and proven existence of “renown of miracles,” since she is an important figure in the beginnings of the Church in North America.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, on March 15, 1980, then granted a dispensation of the specific proof of miracles and, showing the wide and documented “renown of miracles,” celebrated the rite of beatification at St. Peter’s on June 22, 1980.

#### b) *Towards canonization*

In the spring of 2007 some documents were transmitted to the Postulator of the Cause regarding an extraordinary case of the cure of the child Jacob Finkbonner from “facial necrotizing fasciitis” that occurred in Seattle (USA) and attributed to the intercession of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. The decision was made to ask the Archbishop of Seattle to conduct a Diocesan Investigation into the supposed miracle.

Meanwhile the Archbishop, at his initiative, had commendably taken steps to obtain the medical documents relating to the case, made contact with four medical specialists, members of the Craniofacial Surgical Team of the Children’s Hospital of Seattle and asked them to provide all the necessary information on the case. From September 2007 to May 2008 the Diocesan Investigation was instructed on the supposed miracle in the Seattle Curia.

There followed a Supplementary Investigation that took place from August 28, 2008, to June 26, 2009.

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints recognized their juridical validity with the decree of February 12, 2010.

The Medical Council, meeting on September 15, 2011, pronounced unanimously (seven out of seven) on the “scientifically inexplicable” cure of the child Jacob Finkbonner.

The Congress of Theologians, meeting on November 8, 2011, acknowledged that the inexplicable cure was due to divine intervention through the intercession of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha as a result of the invocations on the part of the faithful.

The Cardinals and Bishops, in the Ordinary Session of December 13, 2011, judged the case in question a true miracle, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed.

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the relative *decretum super miraculo*.

[translated from the original Italian]

### III

## Apostolic Letter on the completion of beatification

Pope John Paul II  
*for a perpetual remembrance*

Christ's command: "Go out to the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15), clearly shows that the preaching of the Gospel is not only one of the principal gifts of the Church, but pertains to her essence; such that we could not even conceive of a Church which from the beginning refrained from the spread of religion. Of course, the Word of God offered to the people works to build up the faith in their hearts, roused to nourishing health.

That word nevertheless is so rich in its gifts, that mankind's earthly condition might become ever more honorable. For the most esteemed view of human dignity, by which is believed that the Son of God became man and the brother of all men, and from which flows the following notion, as it is applied to the human person, to his right to freedom and to daily work which the Church always bears in mind. She commands that this be safeguarded, as a tribute to her great gift to mankind's good.

Additionally, the life, preaching, and works of those whom we honor today with the title of Blessed, entirely demonstrate this: the Church, who approaches man through the preaching of the Gospel, affects the whole man, whose entire salvation is worked out, that is, his present and his future life. But to follow the causes of these Venerable Servants of God, though briefly, will bring sure joy. For not only does meditation on their life stir one to even greater virtue, but also binds us as mankind together in love, in order that we may easily follow their course of life, namely, as creatures of God, and brethren in faith, and one with us in our journey towards eternity.

The first athlete among this glorious company is the Venerable Servant of God Joseph of Anchieta, born March 19, 1534, in the city of St. Christopher of Laguna, on the Canary Islands. As a young man, he dedicated his virginity to God by a vow, and with tender devotion handed over his entire self to the Virgin Mary, whom he also extolled in a Latin poem he wrote. In 1551 he entered the Society of Jesus, and two years later asked to be sent to the holy missions in Brazil. There he was ordained to the priesthood in 1566, and presided over several religious houses, until he was made Provincial Superior of the entire Brazilian mission. Full of merit he died in Reritiba, in Brazil, in 1597, which city today is named "Anchieta" in his honor. But if we consider his work in full, it becomes clear that his greatest zeal was the preaching of Christ as the living Word, the model of virtue. Of course, in addition to being a man concerned with eternal salvation, he promoted the greatest care for the human dignity of the Native peoples, to which he devoted his chief labor. He was most interested in their lives, languages, and institutions of learning, in order that he might sow the true Gospel among the local people. He also wrote a grammar in their language, and likewise used the Catechism among the Christians. Indeed, his renown was so great that, as he was called the "Apostle of Brazil," his memory would be a blessing through the centuries.

The second in this flock of Venerables is Peter of St. Joseph Betancur, who first saw the light of day on March 20, 1626, in the city of Vilaflor de Tenerife, also on the Canary Islands. His parents, shepherds and farmers, but rich in faith, reared him in holy devotion. With his patrimony, he went to Guatemala at the age of 30 to proclaim Christ: where he became seriously ill, and recovered almost as if a portent. Meanwhile, he learned of the plight of the poor, and labored to find a cure for their condition. Moved by divine inspiration, he wished to imitate the poverty of blessed Francis of Assisi, and to serve nearby. For that reason, he became a Tertiary (as they say) Franciscan, entering the monastery of St. Francis, which was on the site of Antigua Guatemala; and there that blessed man chose to be tested: for he lived also destitute of all things, and this shone forth in his every labor: he taught the boys he gathered, and visited the poor and the sick, and built a school, oratory, and infirmary, and opened a home for receiving pilgrim priests, and a lodging for the helping the young people who attended the University. He proceeded in this regard, and opened an infirmary for convalescents, such as was unheard of at that time. He took care that the teaching of Christ would imbue their souls, and as the basis of this, which surpassed our own methods. Moreover, he established two Societies of Religious, one for men, the other for women, which were called the Bethlehemites, under the protection of the most sweet Infant Jesus, in true wisdom, with the result that his successors, following in his footsteps, perpetuate his work. He departed this life at the age of 41, on April 25, 1667; for whom was introduced the renowned name, "Mother of Guatemala."

The third of our Venerables of God recalled in this sermon is the maiden Marie de l'Incarnation. Her course was unique, for throughout her entire life she partook in contemplation. This admirable woman was born into the light in Tours, France, on October 28, 1599, to industrious parents; and was reared in the precepts of God. According to custom, she married young, and at age 18 she became a mother. But alas! by the age of 20, she was widowed by the death of her husband. And from this she had a heart for one thing, to govern her house well and rear her little boy in piety. But God urged his handmaid enter religious life, such that when her son was barely grown up, he was handed over to her close friends, and she was received into the Ursuline order in Tours, as the maiden had chosen. She took her vows in 1633, and set out for the land of Canada in 1639, among French women, however many went along for the purpose above all of evangelizing the land. She settled in the city of Quebec, and founded an Ursuline monastery, which has ever since been occupied. The house was rather singular: inside she prayed continuously, and devoutly meditated on divine truths, and cultivated virtues in the custom of the Saints; in which they absorbed the saving plans of the Missionaries, instruction to the Natives, honest discipline, and sometimes needed nourishment! Also, in order that there might be religion, she wrote a lexicon to catechize the people in their own language; and composed much with the inspiration of the Most Holy Trinity, of which the chief works are these: *Letters*, *Spiritual Relations*, *Brief Exposition on the Song of Songs*, and *The Holy School*. So many of these writings contain lofty doctrine and the fire of devotion, that she was considered another Teresa of Avila. At last, on April 30, 1672, her light closed in death in the Lord, and she obtained the name of "Mother of the Catholic Church in Canada."

There is in this company of Blesseds also Venerable François de Montmorency-Laval, born in that French city, which today is called Montigny-sur-Avre, on April 30, 1623. He learned Greek and Roman history with the Society of Jesus in the city of La Flèche, and sacred theology

in Paris. He was made a priest in 1647 and in 1658 became the first Apostolic Vicar of Canada, in which territory he suffered misfortune. When the episcopal see of Quebec was established in 1674, Francis was made its first Bishop, a diocese which actually at that time extended even to the Gulf of Mexico. In this office, indeed, he labored greatly. He went forth with patience and endurance and held up strongly. Looking ahead, he founded the Séminaire de Québec, which is now called Université Laval. The work went very well, and became a house for all priests; out of which came Missionaries, like soldiers of Christ, and also served as a common house, where many came together in devotion, learning, and virtue. But its heart beat with the history of France. They also attended to preaching to Christ, so that the life, culture, institutions, and characteristics of the Natives could be safeguarded, mostly from the threats of the Europeans. He was to Canada what St. Augustine was to Britain, St. Boniface to Germany, Cyril and Methodius among the Slavic peoples. Finally, he stepped down from the diocese in later years and spent time in the Seminary which he had founded, a useful example and advisor to all. The end of his life came in 1708, as he was still rich in his mind.

There is still one Kateri Tekakwitha numbered among those Blessed whom we proclaim today. She was born to Indian parents, her father a pagan, her mother imbued with the Catholic faith. She entered into life in 1656, in the State, as it is now called, of New York, in the town of Auriesville. Kateri lost her father, mother, and older brother, and with a terribly deformed blister, she was welcomed under the roof of her uncle, who was the chief of the Mohawk tribe. Thus was she instructed in the Christian religion, and in 1676 she was baptized by Jacques de Lamberville, of the Society of Jesus, a model of all virtues and above all of chastity. But because of this, a crime to many, great hardship came to her. She followed the advice of the Society of Jesus, sent to the Indian missions by St. Francis Xavier, and resided in Prairie-de-la-Madeleine (today called Montreal) where she was at peace. Alas! after such a brief time she passed to eternal light, on April 17, 1780, age 24, first flower of the Indians; her sanctity was attested to by all.

The renown of these Servants of God, however, which broadly flows, is also held in perpetual memory. And, although later, the Church seeks this public verdict. For which reason the Cause of each one of them, although varied in time and place, proceeded to their Beatification, and this happy conclusion, whether ordinary or apostolic; after which, their virtues are approved in solemn judgment as Venerable: Joseph of Anchieta, 1734; Peter of St. Joseph Betancur, 1771; Marie de l'Incarnation, 1911; Kateri Tekakwitha, 1943; François de Montmorency-Laval, 1960. Next, Canon Law (2117) requires miracles for Beatification. But with the distance of time, places, and persons it was difficult to commend the purported miracles to the strictness of medical arts, as the holy canons require, although the renown of their wonders was firm, the signs of holiness, of great pastoral importance, which, as the Blessed are called, flow through the nations, in which the Venerables either were born, or labored, as it approaches the Holy Year 1975, the thought came whether, in an unusual way, the miracles in their causes might be dispensed. But here we humbly look to the Letters of the Canadian episcopal conference, which delayed Kateri Tekakwitha (1973), then the episcopal conferences of Brazil, Guatemala, Canada and Federation of North American States, which pertains to others (1977). This was the affair from Paul VI and John Paul I, Our Predecessors, to which We proceeded, with the approval of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, on January 20 of this year, with everything carefully considered, as petitioned in this writing. We granted our opinion on March 15 of this year, united to the good of the Christian people, that in a most exceptional

manner the law of miracles in this case would be suspended. Thus we established this day of solemn Beatification, June 22, 1980. In which case, with the great Cardinal Fathers, Bishops, clergy and multitude of people gathered from these nations, we commemorate, above all, in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, we took the words of the status of Beatification, which are: "We, devoted of our brethren Avelar Brandão, Archbishop of São Salvador in Brazil, Mario Casariego, Archbishop of Guatemala, Maurice Roy, Archbishop of Quebec, Paul Grégoire, Archbishop of Montreal, Howard J. Hubbard, Bishop of Albany in America, not to mention several other brothers in the Episcopate and many of the faithful, with the recommendation of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, by Our Apostolic Authority we decree that the Venerable Servants of God Joseph of Anchieta, Peter of St. Joseph Betancur, Marie de l'Incarnation, François de Montmorency-Laval, Kateri Tekakwitha, are hereafter called by the name of Blessed, with their feast day on their *dies natalis*: Blessed Joseph of Anchieta on June 9, Blessed Peter of St. Joseph Betancur on April 25, Blessed Marie de l'Incarnacion on April 30, Blessed François de Montmorency-Laval on May 6, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha on April 17; these dates may be lawfully celebrated yearly. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Moreover, we pronounce the decrees the virtuous life of each of these, by which we first venerated them, and we invoke their protection.

This decree is issued in perpetuity, no impediments to the contrary.

*Given at Rome, before the ring of the Fisherman, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of June, 1980, the second of Our Pontificate.*

[*translated from the original Latin*]