

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: April 17

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IN BRIEF

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Young Mohawk convert of the 17th century, the first Native American from North America to be canonized.

Feast day	April 17
Born	1656, Ossernenon (present-day New York State)
Died	April 17, 1680, Saint Francis Xavier mission at the Sault, near Montreal (New France)
Canonized	October 21, 2012, by Pope Benedict XVI
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	ecology, the environment, people in exile, Indigenous peoples of the Americas

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Novena to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Sanctuary of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha at Kahnawake

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LIFE

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha was a young Mohawk woman of the 17th century, born on the banks of the Mohawk River in what is now New York State, who died in 1680 at the age of twenty-four at the Saint Francis Xavier mission near Montreal. Baptized at twenty despite the hostility of those around her, she lived a life of prayer and penance that deeply impressed the Jesuit missionaries. Known as the "Lily of the Mohawks," she became in 2012 the first Native American from North America to be canonized. Her feast is April 17, the day of her death; in the United States her memorial is celebrated on July 14.

Who was Saint Kateri Tekakwitha?

Tekakwitha was born in 1656 at Ossernenon, a Mohawk village in the Mohawk River valley. Her mother, a baptized Algonquin, had been captured and taken into the people of her husband, a Mohawk. The two peoples were traditional enemies. Her birthplace is also the place where, about ten years earlier, the Jesuit missionaries Isaac Jogues, René Goupil and Jean de La Lande had been put to death.

When she was about four, a smallpox epidemic took her parents and her little brother. The child survived, but the disease left her face scarred and her eyesight very weak. Her name, Tekakwitha, is said to come from this and is often translated as "she who advances hesitantly" or "she who bumps into things." She was taken in by an uncle and aunts and grew up in a new village, Caughnawaga, near present-day Fonda, New York.



Kateri Tekakwitha, after an old portrait attributed to Father Chauchetière.

Key dates

- **1656**: Born at Ossernenon, in the Mohawk River valley.
- **c. 1660**: Smallpox takes her family and leaves her scarred and nearly blind.
- **1667**: Jesuit missionaries stay in her village; she discovers the Christian faith.
- **April 18, 1676**: Baptized on Easter Sunday by Father Jacques de Lamberville, with the name Catherine.
- **1677**: Flees to the Saint Francis Xavier mission on the Saint Lawrence River, near La Prairie.
- **April 17, 1680**: Dies at the mission, aged twenty-four.
- **1884**: The bishops of the United States, meeting in Baltimore, open her cause.
- **January 3, 1943**: Declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII.

- **June 22, 1980**: Beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II, a first for a Native American.
- **October 21, 2012**: Canonized in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI.

A conversion against the current

In 1667 the Jesuit fathers Frémin, Bruyas and Pierron stayed in her uncle's village. The girl watched them and listened to their teaching, though she could not yet ask for baptism. When she reached the age of marriage, she refused the matches proposed to her: according to her biographers, she wanted to give herself entirely to Christ. This refusal, not understood in a society where marriage organized the life of the clan, brought her humiliation and a condition close to servitude in her own home.

Father Jacques de Lamberville, who met her in 1675, agreed to prepare her for baptism. After six months as a catechumen, she was baptized on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676, and received the name Catherine, in honor of Saint Catherine of Siena. "Kateri" is the Mohawk form of that name. Her baptism only increased the hostility around her: she was mocked, threatened, and accused of laziness because she refused to work on Sundays.

Life at the Saint Francis Xavier mission

In 1677, with the help of Christians from the mission at the Sault, near La Prairie, she secretly left her village and traveled hundreds of miles to the Saint Lawrence River. The Saint Francis Xavier mission, founded by the Jesuits, welcomed Native Christians from several nations. In 1716 it settled on the site of present-day Kahnawake.

Kateri lived there barely three years. She shared the work of the women, taught prayers to the children, cared for the sick and spent long hours in the little chapel. She wanted to consecrate herself to God like the nuns she had met in Montreal, and made a vow of virginity, something unheard of at the time for a

woman of her people. She also practiced very harsh fasts and penances, so excessive that her confessor had to restrain her. Her motto, recorded by her biographers, sums up her desire: "Who will teach me what is most pleasing to God, so that I may do it?"



The church of the Saint Francis Xavier mission, Kahnawake.

Death and growing fame

Worn out by illness and privation, Kateri died on April 17, 1680, during Holy Week. According to the Jesuits who were with her, especially Fathers Pierre Cholenec and Claude Chauchetière, her face, scarred by smallpox, became smooth and radiant shortly after her death. These two priests wrote her life, and Chauchetière painted several portraits of her, now lost. Healings were soon attributed to her intercession, and her grave became a place of local pilgrimage.

For a long time her cult remained limited to the Kahnawake area. In 1884 the bishops of the United States, gathered in Baltimore, introduced her cause, and Native Catholics became particularly attached to her. In 1972 her remains were placed in a marble tomb in the church at Kahnawake. After her beatification in 1980, the healing of a young boy in Washington State in 2006 was recognized as a miracle, opening the way to her canonization on October 21, 2012, on the same day as Saint Marianne Cope and Saint Pedro Calungsod.

Why is Saint Kateri the patron saint of ecology and Native peoples?

Saint Kateri shows that one can welcome the Gospel without denying who one is: she remained a Mohawk woman and prayed in her own language and culture. The Church has made her the patron of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. She is also the patron of ecology and the environment, because of her love of creation: she liked to pray in the woods, before a cross carved into a tree. And because she left her village to live her faith, she is invoked for people in exile.

Her life also shows the cost of faithfulness lived alone against everyone, with very few resources. Orphaned, half-blind and scarred, she had nothing to draw attention to herself, and yet she became one of the best-loved saints of North America.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Kateri in art

- **A young Native woman** wrapped in a blanket, often with braided hair.
- **A cross**, held in her hands or carved into a tree trunk.
- **Lilies**, recalling her title "Lily of the Mohawks" and her consecrated virginity.
- **A feather**, on some modern statues, such as the bronze in front of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe.

How to pray with Saint Kateri

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha and follow the novena to Saint Kateri, from April 8 to 16, or from July 5 to 13 for her feast in the United States.



The tomb of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha at Kahnawake.

Where to pray to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

- **Kahnawake** (Quebec), across the Saint Lawrence from Montreal: her tomb in the church of the Saint Francis Xavier mission.
- **Fonda** (New York): the National Shrine of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, on the site of Caughnawaga, the village where she grew up and was baptized.
- **Auriesville** (New York): the shrine of the Jesuit martyrs, near Ossernenon, her presumed birthplace.

- **Montreal**: her statue, by an artist from Kahnawake, placed in 2021 in Mary Queen of the World Cathedral.
- **Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré**, near Quebec City: her statue in the basilica.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha wrote nothing: she could neither read nor write. What we know of her prayer comes from the Jesuits who knew her at the Saint Francis Xavier mission, especially Fathers Pierre Cholenec and Claude Chauchetière. They preserved a sentence she used to repeat, which is given below, followed by an original prayer to Saint Kateri.

A word of Kateri to meditate on

> *"Who will teach me what is most pleasing to God, so that I may do it?"*

Source: words reported by her Jesuit biographers at the end of the 17th century and remembered as her motto. These accounts are the testimony of her biographers, not writings of her own.

Prayer to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks

Saint Kateri, Lily of the Mohawks, you sought God despite sickness, loneliness and mockery: pray for all who feel weak or rejected because of their faith.

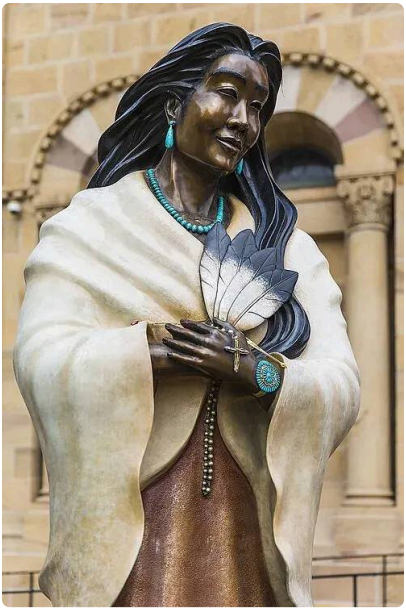
You left your village so that you could live as a Christian: support those in exile and all who must start over far from their loved ones.

You prayed in the woods and by the rivers: teach us to respect the creation God has entrusted to us and to recognize his goodness in it.

I entrust to you the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, their families, their languages and their future, and also my own intention (name it in silence).

Teach me to seek each day what is most pleasing to God, and to do it with simplicity. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.



Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is celebrated on April 17, the day of her death in 1680; in the United States her memorial is kept on July 14. Many Native Catholic communities in the United States and Canada honor her with special Masses and gatherings around these dates.

You can pray to her for a young person who feels alone in their faith, for migrants and refugees, for a family living far from home, for the care of the earth, or when you are discerning what God is asking of you. Her motto makes a good short prayer to repeat during the day.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Kateri, and read the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on April 17, begin it on April 8. In the United States, where her memorial is kept on July 14, you can pray it from July 5 to 13.

You can pray it for your own intention, for young people searching for God, for exiles and migrants, for Indigenous peoples, or for the care of creation. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry your prayer into daily life. You may pray alone, as a family or with a parish group.

Day 1: A wounded childhood

At four, Tekakwitha lost her parents and her brother in an epidemic. She was left with a scarred face and fragile eyes. God did not love her any less for that, and he does not love us less for our wounds.

Prayer: Lord, look upon children who are orphaned or wounded by life, and let them feel your tenderness.

Today: Pray for a child or young person you know who is struggling.

Day 2: Advancing hesitantly

Her name is said to mean "she who advances hesitantly." Her journey toward God was slow and patient, made of small steps. God is not in a hurry with us either. What matters is not the speed of our progress but the direction of our steps.

Prayer: Lord, I give you my hesitations. Guide my steps, even when I cannot see the path clearly.

Today: Take one small, concrete step toward a decision you have been putting off.

Day 3: Listening to the Word

When the missionaries came through her village, the girl listened in silence. Faith often begins with attentive listening, long before we find the words to answer. Kateri waited years before she could ask for baptism.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, open my heart to the Word of God.

Today: Read the Gospel of the day slowly.

Day 4: Baptism

On Easter Sunday 1676 she was baptized and received the name Catherine. For her, a new life began. Our own baptism is the same new beginning, even if we received it as infants.

Prayer: Lord, renew in me the grace of my baptism.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or pray near a baptismal font.

Day 5: Faithful despite mockery

After her baptism, Kateri was mocked and threatened by those around her. She did not respond with hatred, and she did not give up. She was even accused of laziness because she refused to work on Sundays, the day she kept for God.

Prayer: Lord, give courage to those who suffer for their faith, and keep us from despising those who do not believe as we do.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians.

Day 6: Leaving home to live the faith

In 1677 she secretly left her village to reach the Saint Francis Xavier mission on the Saint Lawrence River. The journey was long and dangerous, hundreds of miles through forests and along rivers, but she trusted God to lead her. Sometimes being faithful means having the courage to leave.

Prayer: Lord, walk with exiles, migrants and all who have had to leave their homeland.

Today: Welcome, help or simply greet someone who has come from elsewhere.

Day 7: Serving in everyday life

At the mission, Kateri worked with the other women, taught prayers to the children and cared for the sick. Her holiness was lived in ordinary tasks, done with love. She also spent long hours in the little chapel: work and prayer were not separate for her.

Prayer: Lord, make my daily work a prayer.

Today: Do someone a quiet favor without telling anyone.

Day 8: Praying in creation

Kateri liked to pray in the forest, before a cross carved into a tree. The Church has given her as patron of ecology and the environment. Creation itself can lead us to praise God, if we take the time to look, to listen and to give thanks.

Prayer: Creator God, teach me to respect the earth, the water and everything that lives.

Today: Spend a moment praying outdoors, or do something concrete for the care of creation.



A statue of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

Day 9: Giving everything to God

Kateri died at twenty-four, having sought in everything "what is most pleasing to God." Her life was short, but it was given completely. Those who were with her said that her scarred face became smooth and radiant after her death, as if

God wanted to show the beauty that had always been hidden within her.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, teach me to love you without holding back. Amen.

Today: In prayer, offer God something you are attached to.

Closing prayer

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented to you. Pray for Indigenous peoples, for exiles and for all who are searching for God in the dark. Obtain for us a simple, faithful and courageous faith. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha and the prayer to Saint Kateri.

PILGRIMAGE

Sanctuary of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha at Kahnawake

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha rests at Kahnawake, a Mohawk community on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River, across from Montreal. Her tomb is in the church of the Saint Francis Xavier Mission, heir to the Jesuit mission where she lived the last three years of her life. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the first Native American saint of North America.

A Jesuit mission on the Saint Lawrence

The Saint Francis Xavier Mission was founded in the 17th century by the Jesuits to welcome Native people who had become Christians, from several nations. It moved several times along the river: it was at one of its earlier sites, near La Prairie, that Kateri arrived in 1677 and died on April 17, 1680. The mission settled at the present site of Kahnawake in 1716. Kateri's memory has been kept alive there for more than three centuries.



The church of the Saint Francis Xavier Mission at Kahnawake.

The tomb of Saint Kateri

In 1972 her remains were placed in a marble tomb inside the church. Pilgrims leave their intentions there and pray before her relics. The sanctuary also preserves the memory of the mission's life and displays a portrait of Kateri painted in the 19th century, long wrongly attributed to Father Chauchetière, her contemporary.



The tomb of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. At her tomb, take time to entrust an intention, then say the prayer to Saint Kateri. The days before her feast on April 17 are a good time for the novena to Saint Kateri. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia. Kahnawake is a Native community: the visit calls for discretion and respect for the place and its residents.

Other places of Saint Kateri

- **Fonda** (New York State): the national shrine dedicated to her, on the site of the village of Caughnawaga where she grew up and was baptized.
- **Auriesville** (New York State): the shrine of the Jesuit martyrs, near the presumed place of her birth, Ossernenon.

- **Montreal**: her statue, the work of an artist from Kahnawake, installed in 2021 in Mary, Queen of the World Cathedral.
- **Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré**, near Quebec City: her statue in the basilica.

Practical information

Kahnawake is about a twenty-minute drive from downtown Montreal, over the Honoré-Mercier Bridge. The church is an active parish church: opening hours and Mass times may vary with the seasons and celebrations. Ask the Saint Francis Xavier Mission or the archdiocese before you come, especially for a group.

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