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# KATERI



Illustration by Gus Antone reprinted from Cross and Feather News, by permission of the Tekakwitha Conference

## In many eyes, she is a saint

A century before the United States declared its independence, a shy Algonquin/Mohawk youth in what would become eastern New York was declaring her own allegiance to a new life. She asked a Jesuit missionary to baptize her; later she fled to a mission near Montreal, walking some 200 miles, to devote herself to Christ.

Today, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is remembered in many ways by many people — though not as an official saint, which her devotees believe she should be.

"She would never believe where she is today — on the verge of sainthood," said Ann Maloney, a parishioner of St. Mary's Church in Rochester who prays for her canonization.

Kateri, born in 1656, lived during a time of constant war between colonists and the Iroquois. She became an orphan at 4, when her father, mother and brother died in a smallpox epidemic. Smallpox left its marks on her, as well. It claimed much of her vision ("Tekakwitha" means "she who bumps into things" or "she who moves things")

and scarred her face with pocks. A missionary reported that the pocks miraculously disappeared just moments after Kateri's death.

Kateri's uncle, a Mohawk chief, took her in after her parents' death. When warfare destroyed her home in Ossernenon (Auriesville), she moved to Caughnawaga, west of Fonda today, where the National Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine is located. There she met Jesuit missionaries and was baptized at age 20 in 1676. The Iroquois persecuted her for accepting Christianity, and she finally fled to Canada with other Christian Indians. She was said to be the first North American Indian to make a private vow of virginity.

"Every morning, winter and summer, she was in our church at four o'clock and often she arrived even before the bell which rings every day at that hour," wrote Father Pierre Cholenec, spiritual director at the Mission of Sault Saint-Louis to whom Kateri was referred. Devotees of

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Story by staff writer Kathleen Schwar