

a blessed red-skin

KATERI TEKAKWITHA

The Indians were the first inhabitants of Canada, which took its name from them: Kanata- Immense Land
Great hunters and ferocious warriors, they used to torment prisoners with fire under the soles of their feet.
In the 1600s the Iroquois tribe had defeated another tribe in battle. They did not kill the women, they took them as slaves, which was worse than killing them.

But the chief, Agile Deer, had seen a beautiful woman in the destroyed village crying over her brother's corpse. He took her with him and made her, instead of a slave, a wife, a wife who, unbeknownst to him, was Christian. The French missionaries had already arrived there and had left their martyr there

A beautiful baby girl was born to Agile Deer, the tribal chief, and he called her Tekakwitha, meaning "She who advances in small steps". Her mother taught her almost without realizing it in the Christian religion with the beautiful stories of Jesus and the Madonna.

Unfortunately when the little girl was four years old, smallpox struck the fierce camp, leaving the little girl alone, herself affected, scarred on the face and almost blind and with a fever. The new chief, Big Wolf, entrusted her to her aunts.

The hardest jobs were up to the women, such as the slow and patient tanning of the skins of the killed animals. Tekakwitha grew up and helped them obediently. She fled from vain conversations and then retreated to a corner of the hut all alone.

They sent her to draw water in the woods, hard work and she had carved a small cross on the bark of a tree and stopped there on her knees, to pray, her mother's stories having remained fresh in her memory and the buckets became lighter.

At eight years old, as was the custom, her aunts promised her in marriage to a family friend. She, so small but determined, refused the plan, and her aunts, shocked by her disobedience, began to mistreat her, without losing hope of bending her.

It is 1666. Tekakwitha is a teenager, more and more beautiful, sweeter, more obedient. The French army was advancing to conquer Quebec and had allied itself with the Algonquin and Huron Indians against the rebels.

The Iroquois were defeated and their village was set on fire. They surrendered, but in the peace pact they accepted the Catholic missionaries, but secretly their leader, Big Wolf, remained hostile to them.

Tekakwitha, happy, accompanied them to visit the sick, to comfort the prisoners, while she aspired to be baptized, but the missionaries left without her having had the courage to say so and she remained so sad in her heart.

Eagle Feather, an esteemed warrior, an infallible hunter, also asked her aunts to marry her, who happily agreed, and she insisted in refusing. Then they tempted her with a trick: when they offered the young man

a drink, with that the two would be bound for life. Tekakwitha understood this and with a sudden leap she ran out of the hut and got lost in the night.

The next day she had to return, and her aunts offended and mistreated her terribly. Poor little girl, she only found comfort when she could take refuge in the forest, uniting herself with the Lord and praying to him by any means to make herself known to his Indians. For herself she only asked to be baptized.

One day a French missionary, Father Pierron, arrived in the village. Not knowing the language of the Iroquois, he preached by painting episodes from the life of Jesus and the Madonna and so, with the help of his faith,

penetrated their hearts. After him, in 1673, another missionary came, who found the harvest ripe, and thirty adult Iroquois were baptized: Tekakwitha did not receive it because her uncle forbade it. The baptized left in canoes because they could not stay. The chief was their enemy

Tekakwitha watched them leave with a great desire to follow them, but Big Wolf the chief said: "I will kill anyone in my family who imitates those renegades".

The new missionary, Father Jacques, arrived and immediately began to visit the sick. Tekakwitha sprained her foot, the Father visited her, and she revealed to him her great desire for baptism. The missionary knew her uncle's great hostility and warned her: "You will be persecuted. Will you have the strength to persevere?"

The girl answered decisively: "I have foreseen everything".

The missionary continued to instruct her, admiring her courage and sensitivity. But the Madonna watched over Tekakwitha.

In fact, a great and highly esteemed chief, Kryn, who was a Christian, came to the village and told the Indians with great faith that the God of the Christians gives happiness.

Having heard the story of Tekakwitha, he asked for the honor of being a godfather at her baptism. Big Wolf could barely contain his fury and so on Easter Day 1676, April 18, Tekakwitha was baptized and given the name Kateri, Catherine, with great celebration from the entire village. The missionary had told her the story of Saint Catherine of Siena, and her happiness was so great that she would have spent the whole day in the missionaries' chapels.

Autumn is the hunting season. The hunters go away for a few weeks. Kateri is called with the other women to carry heavy burdens on their shoulders, while the men only have weapons. The women have to skin the killed animals, cut down the trees to erect the huts, prepare the cooked food, look for and carry the water, hard work. Kateri managed to overcome this test with the Christian thought of her baptism, with Prayer.

Upon returning to the camp, Kateri had her reward, a Christian chief reached them, who, having heard of the new Christian, decided to take her with him. Canada is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, with mountain ranges, rivers, immense lakes, forests, prairies. Kateri is hidden on the bank of the great river, the St. Lawrence, and prays, the dangers vanish, and finally the Indian chief can take her and carry her away on the canoe, to the French and Christian city of Ville Marie, which became the great city of Mont-Royal, contracted to Montreal. Here is the chapel, erected by the Missionaries, to St. Francis Xavier. Kateri finds herself where her mother had been taken prisoner, it seems like a dream.

A young woman embraces her and begs her to accept her as a sister: she is the wife of the chief, Hot Ash, who saved her (brought her???). They are near the most famous waterfalls in the world. They are Indian tribes of various origins, who live in peace with each other and with the French.

Everyone admires Kateri for her sweetness and goodness, and she submits to the most humble chores, while she waits with visible anxiety to receive her First Communion.

Father Chilonec promises it to her and prepares it for us. We are back in winter, with its severity. The Christian Indians have maintained their customs, and as a penance they burn their feet, as they used to do with prisoners. Kateri, a prisoner of Jesus as she considers herself, also burns her feet, and the missionary must warn her that their God is a God of goodness and does not like those cruel penances, especially now that they are forced to walk in the snow.

Here we are at Christmas. Kateri is in the Chapel, splendidly dressed, with beautiful Indian clothes, rich in color. All the people surround her happily. The missionary, in the investigation of duty, found only praise for Kateri, especially in the works of charity, towards the sick, the little ones, the poor. She volunteers spontaneously for the hardest works. She is beautiful, sweet and bright. We are at a family celebration. In the Chapel a Nativity scene has been set up with the characters donated by the French colonists. It is the first Nativity scene that this Indian has seen and with the imagination of the Indians she is enchanted.

At the Mass, sung – the Indians sing willingly – at the moment of Communion, Kateri approaches the altar first, and receives that Jesus so loved and so desired. She has finally received Jesus, to whom she has devoted herself with the gift of her life.

Now there is the winter hunt. Kateri is chosen with the wife of the chief “Cenere Calda” to follow the hunters, who will be away for a few months. Kateri does not show anyone her sadness at leaving, in the Chapel, Jesus Eucharist.

The Iroquois are skilled hunters, and return to the Village at the end of winter with meat and furs, which the whites will pay with weapons and ammunition.

Kateri can finally feed again on the Eucharist, which allows her to endure new suffering, slander on her purity and new marriage proposals this time with a good Christian warrior that she still manages to refuse.

Jesus and the Virgin watch over her. In fact, one day Kateri goes to the nearby city of Ville Marie to see the work done by her hands and there she meets Mother Marguerite Bourgeoys, apostle of the young. The two women immediately understand each other: their goal will be to become missionaries to make Jesus known to the still pagan Indian tribes.

And Kateri returns to her Prairie, where she wanted to pronounce her vows officially, and she speaks about it to the Missionary, who first hesitates, then becomes convinced that the young Iroquois has truly special gifts, and on March 25, 1679, the day of the Annunciation, Kateri can officially pronounce the vow with which she renounces marriage forever and becomes the Bride of Christ. She is happy. She feels that such a great grace has been obtained for her by the Madonna, and her life of prayer and donation becomes total.

Summer and winter, Kateri gets up before dawn and prays on her knees in front of the still closed Chapel. She is in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, even in the snow.

She is always on the move, she gives her food to the poorest, she does penance, she prays for long hours, and her body suffers because of it.

She slowly wastes away and the sweetness of her face is now limited to her eyes. The Iroquois understand that they will not have her with them for a long time and they suffer because of it.

One winter day Kateri returns from the river with buckets full of water and falls exhausted into her hut, never to come out again.

Everyone goes to visit her, and she, regardless of her cough and fever, still tells her beautiful Christian stories to all those who go to visit her and the missionary brings her the Eucharist, for her it is Heaven.

In spring she renews her baptismal promises and stays all day in adoration of Jesus. Kateri is sick.

On Holy Wednesday the women must go into the forest to collect wood and they fear that Kateri will die during their absence.

And she with a sweet smile prophesies: "Go, I will wait for your return".

Only when the last woman returned, comforted by the missionary and pronouncing the names of Jesus and Mary, Kateri entered into agony and died at the age of 24. Her face became luminous, of an incomparable beauty; even the traces of smallpox had disappeared.

She was buried where she wanted, on the banks of the St. Lawrence. The missionary described her: "The Genevieve of New France". On the 6th day after her death Kateri appeared to the missionary Father Chauchetière in a light of glory, and the miracles followed one after the other.

The parish priest of the small parish of Lachine testified that after taking a little dust from Kateri's tomb and diluting it in water, with that drink all the sick, whatever their illness, were healed. When the Indians moved for their needs, they took her relics with them.

Kateri's tomb was finally set in Canghnarvaga, also on the banks of the St. Lawrence, and the Cross bears this inscription: "Kateri Tekakwitha- 17- 4- 1680, with this phrase in Iroquois: The most beautiful flower that bloomed on the banks of the St. Lawrence".

Today, an Iroquois priest is the parish priest in that village.

And after 300 years, on June 22, 1980, John Paul II entered her in the register of the blessed, together with the first bishop of Quebec and Mary of the Incarnation, founder of the Ursulines of Canada.

It is to these saints that we can ask for the union of the Indians, who still live on their reservations, and the union of peoples and races, as is the heartbreaking desire of the Holy Father, the missionary pope.

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Translation made with "Google translate" (not knowing the English language), available to accept correct translation to be sent to: giusepppecarrara44@gmail.com