



**St Kateri Tekakwitha**  
**Feast Day: July 14**  
**(1656 – 1680)**

Kateri Tekakwitha is the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. She was born in 1656, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon. Her mother was an Algonquin, who was captured by the Mohawks and who took a Mohawk chief for her husband.

She contracted smallpox as a four-year-old child which scarred her skin. The scars were a source of humiliation in her youth. She was commonly seen wearing a blanket to hide her face. Worse, her entire family died during the outbreak. Kateri Tekakwitha was subsequently raised by her uncle, who was the chief of a Mohawk clan.

Kateri was known as a skilled worker, who was diligent and patient. However, she refused to marry. When her adoptive parents proposed a suitor to her, she refused to entertain the proposal. They punished her by giving her more work to do, but she did not give in. Instead, she remained quiet and diligent. Eventually they were forced to relent and accept that she had no interest in marriage.

At age 19, Kateri Tekakwitha converted to Catholicism, taking a vow of chastity and pledging to marry only Jesus Christ. Her decision was very unpopular with her adoptive parents and their neighbors. Some of her neighbors started rumors of sorcery. To avoid persecution, she traveled to a Christian native community south of Montreal.

According to legend, Kateri was very devout and would put thorns on her sleeping mat. She often prayed for the conversion of her fellow Mohawks. According to the Jesuit missionaries that served the community where Kateri lived, she often fasted and when she would eat, she would taint her food to diminish its flavor. On at least one occasion, she burned herself. Such self-mortification was common among the Mohawk.

Kateri was very devout and was known for her steadfast devotion. She was also very sickly. Her practices of self-mortification and denial may not have helped her health. Sadly, just five years after her conversion to Catholicism, she became ill and passed away at age 24, on April 17, 1680.

Her name, Kateri, is the Mohawk form of Catherine, which she took from St. Catherine of Siena.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 21, 2012. She is the patroness of ecology and the environment, people in exile and Native Americans.