

Remembering Lily of the Mohawks in July, the month of her Feast Day

Jesuit missionaries arrived in the Huron Valley in 1632, dedicated to spreading “one faith,” evangelizing Native Americans and ministering to white settlers. They accepted their mission and the bleak future it offered: “hard work . . . a lonely death, an unknown grave.” However, their work among the Hurons was verified by the faith and virtue of the natives, among them **Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks.**

St. Kateri Tekakwitha (pronounced kä’tu-rē tek”u-kwith’u) was born in 1656. Her father was a Kanienkehaka chief, and her mother, an Algonquin Catholic. Smallpox swept through her village, killing her parents and her baby brother, and left Kateri weakened, scarred, and partially blind. When a Jesuit priest arrived in Kateri’s village, she converted to Catholicism at the age of 19. She was ostracized for her decision by many in her community. She traveled 200 miles across harsh landscape to arrive at the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier at Sault Saint-Louis, near Montreal, where she lived with other indigenous Catholics for the remainder of her short life. She died on April 17, 1680 at the age of 24. Her first miracle was witnessed moments after dying, her face scarred by smallpox miraculously cleared. “Saint Kateri recognized the inherent dignity of all people, and thus offers a bridge of peace between European and other immigrants and the Indigenous Peoples” (Source: Kateri.org).

The south rose window in the Cathedral features St. Kateri Tekakwitha along with the beatitude, “Blessed are the clean of heart.” Unusually, the Cathedral stained glass window was produced even before she was beatified. The artist used the name Catherine, her baptismal name. Pope Benedict XVI canonized her on October 21, 2012.

The feast of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is celebrated on July 14 in the U.S. and July 17 in Canada.