

## **KATERI TEKAKWITHA: FIRST NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN SAINT**

VATICAN CITY, 20 DEC 2011 (VIS) - The Holy Father yesterday signed decrees acknowledging miracles attributed to the intervention of seven blessed (four women and three men) who will shortly be canonised. One of the new blessed is Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native North American to be raised to the glory of the altars.

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in Ossernenon (present-day Auriesville, U.S.A.). Her father was a Mohawk chief and her mother a Roman Catholic Algonquian who had been educated by French missionaries. At the age of four she lost her family in a smallpox epidemic which also left her disfigured and with poor eyesight. Adopted by a relative, the chief of neighbouring clan, she continued to nurture an interest in Christianity and was baptised at the age of 20.

The members of her tribe did not understand her new religious affiliation and she was marginalised, practising physical mortification as a path of sanctity and praying for the conversion of her relatives. Having suffered persecutions which put her life at risk, she was forced to flee to a native American Christian community in Kahnawake, Quebec where she made a vow of chastity and lived a life dedicated to prayer, penance, and care for the sick and elderly. She died in 1680 at the age of 24. Her last words were: "Jesus, I love you". According to tradition, Kateri's scars disappeared after her death to reveal a woman of great beauty, and numerous sick people who participated in her funeral were miraculously healed.

The process of canonisation began in 1884. She was declared venerable by Pius XII in 1943 and beatified by John Paul II in 1980. As the first native North American to be beatified she occupies a special place in the devotion of her people. Her feast day falls on 14 July.  
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## **MORE ON KATERI TEKAKWITHA**

Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha, known as "the Lily of the Mohawks," was born in 1656 in upstate New York. Her father was a Mohawk chief and her mother was an Algonquin who was raised Catholic. A smallpox epidemic killed both of her parents and left her with poor eyesight and a badly disfigured face at a young age.

Despite objections from her relatives, she was baptized at age 20, after meeting several Catholic priests. An outcast from her community, Bl. Tekakwitha lived a life of deep prayer, with a strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

She died in 1680 at the age of 24. Witnesses said that the scars on her face disappeared after her death.