

## Saint KATERI TEKAKWITHA (Canonized October 21, 2012)



**Goal:** To provide a lesson for children about a saint who exemplifies a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others, thereby becoming a missionary.

**Materials Needed:** This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow up activities.

### Objectives:

1. To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to reach out to one another and help them as Jesus did - that is, to be missionaries.
2. To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a missionary?

One who:

- loves and respects everyone in God's family
  - teaches others about Jesus
  - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's newest Saints: Kateri Tekakwitha, telling as much of, or parts of, the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level.
  4. To learn that Kateri was a missionary because she spread Jesus' Good News
  5. To learn some traditional Native American values
  7. To help the children develop listening skills
  8. To expand children's vocabulary, as appropriate: **longhouse, Great Spirit, rosary, beading, generosity, traditional, value, hoe, smallpox, Jesuit, orphaned, communal, and frail.**

### Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Kateri's story. (Have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Kateri Tekakwitha. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. **Pray: *O God, may we be enriched by the example of the pure and tender lily, Kateri Tekakwitha. May her canonization make us aware of the need to spread the Gospel to those with whom we live. Help us to imitate Kateri's virtue of generosity to others. Amen.***
4. Use the follow up questions (below)
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

### Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

Kateri Tekakwitha was a member of the Turtle Clan of the Iroquois nation, which includes the Mohawks. Born in 1656 in what is now New York State, she was given the name Tekakwitha, which means "putting things in order." When the white settlers came to Tekakwitha's land, they brought terrible illnesses with them. These diseases were ones to which the native population had never been exposed; sometimes whole villages were wiped out. Whole families were devastated by measles or small pox. Children were orphaned. So it was with Tekakwitha. Her parents died of small pox when she was four years old. She, too, contracted the disease but survived, though with a scarred face and weakened eye sight. She was adopted by her maternal uncle.

Though sometimes her eyes could not stand the sunlight, or were blurry because of the lingering effects of the disease, Tekakwitha did chores around the longhouse in which she lived: getting water, cooking corn meal, getting firewood. She shared in the communal women's work of planting corn and using a hoe in the fields. In the fall, she helped pick the corn and put it away for the winter. They were difficult jobs, but Tekakwitha wasn't afraid to work hard to help others. Working for the common good of everyone was a traditional Native American value that she embraced.

One day, some white men came to visit Tekakwitha's village. The people called them "Black Robes" because that is what they wore all the time. They did not come to trade things like the other white men did. They asked the chiefs if they could talk to the people about God, the Great Spirit. They said they had some Good News about Him for the people to hear. The "Black Robes" (Jesuit missionaries) stayed among the people and spoke often about Jesus. Tekakwitha heard them and felt her heart come alive as never before. She was only 12 years old, but had many questions. The "Black Robes" were there for

the next eight years teaching, preaching and answering all questions about the faith. Tekakwitha wanted to ask to be baptized, but feared displeasing her uncle who had taken her in. She finally felt that she must do what God was calling her to do. True to her name, she put things in order – Tekakwitha put God first in her life - and was baptized on Easter in 1676. Her new name was Kateri, the Iroquois form of Catherine. From then on she felt very close to God and prayed to Him often. At first, Kateri's life did not look different. She still worked as hard as ever and took care of her relatives. But gradually, some of her people began to tease her. They felt she was betraying her people and their beliefs by becoming Catholic. She tried to tell them that God, the Great Spirit who made all people, belonged to everyone. Her tribe persisted in their mistreatment of Kateri because of her faith. It was a hard time for Kateri but she put up with it because she loved God. She often went to the woods alone to speak to Him and to listen to God with her heart. She loved the tall trees and quiet of the woods. Being in harmony with nature was a value she had learned as a small child from her tribe. Now she knew it as God's world to love.

Kateri loved the rosary and wore it around her neck always. She used it to chant her prayers in her Native way, mixing her new faith with her old custom of beading. All this time, her people continued to try to convince her to give up her promise to love God. Finally, she realized that things were not going to change and that it would be better for her to leave her home village. Other converts from her village had already done the same so Kateri travelled for days by foot and by canoe to join them. In the new place Kateri's days were busy, working in the cornfields, gathering firewood, and picking berries with the other women to share with the village. She was still a frail girl and the others encouraged her not to work so hard but Kateri was a generous soul and wanted to share in the duties of the community as much as she could. Her Native American tradition and Catholic faith nurtured that generosity.

Kateri was good at beading and made beautiful things, which she gave away. Sometimes she would make something beautiful for God and put it in the village chapel for Him. She was also sought after for her counsel and wisdom, giving good advice when asked for it. Kateri was also known as a talented story teller. She remembered everything she had learned about the life of Jesus and his followers and would tell these stories as if they were happening at that moment. Gradually, Kateri's health worsened and she was bedridden. Kateri died on April 17, 1680 at the age of 24. It was springtime, when mother earth is giving new life to trees, plants, and animals; God was giving new life to Kateri Tekakwitha. After Kateri's death, those who were with her noticed a change-the skin on her face that had been full of scars and marks from small pox looked smooth and fresh. They knew that this was a sign from God of His love for Kateri and that she was now with Him. In 1980 Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha became the first Native American to be declared Blessed. She is patroness of the environment and ecology, and her feast is July 14.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012.

**Follow-up Questions:** (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Tekakwitha means "putting things in order" in the Mohawk language. What things did Kateri put in order?
2. What are some traditional Indian values that Kateri lived?
3. How did Kateri's life stay the same after she was baptized? How did it change?
4. A missionary is one who shares the Good News of God's love. What did Kateri do that showed she was a missionary?
5. What did you especially like about Kateri?

**Follow-up Activities:**

1. **Younger students:** Kateri told stories about the life of Jesus. She made the stories seem very real. What is your favorite story about Jesus? Illustrate by drawing or act it out in a skit.
2. Bring in sticks from outside (home or parish) or use craft sticks to make a cross as Kateri did in the woods. Write a prayer intention on a slip of paper and attach it to the cross with tape or write it on the craft sticks. Place the crosses in a basket on your classroom/school/parish prayer altar.
1. **Older students:** The Iroquois founded a League to maintain peace and resolve disputes between its members. Its primary law was called the Great Law of Peace. Write your own Great Law of Peace for **your** nation.
2. Kateri was a great story teller, making the stories of Jesus' life come to life for listeners. Using your favorite story from the life of Christ, place it in today's world, in a modern setting. See how His message is the same in today's society.
3. **Any Age Level:** BEADING is a traditional Native American craft. Using embroidery floss and beads create a small chaplet (10 beads on the string, knotted at each end. Add a small medal or cross to one end if available). Kateri prayed as she beaded. Pray to Blessed Kateri with the chaplet, as a class – a Hail Mary on each bead – for the students' intentions.