

A NEW SAINT: KATERI TEKAKWITHA

*On October 21, 2012, at St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI will canonize a Native American woman who has been beloved by people in North America and beyond for nearly four hundred years:
Kateri Tekakwitha.*

How do you get from blessed to saint?

The road to sainthood begins when a holy person's name is brought before the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican. Careful review of the candidate's biography and writings and extensive interviews with any living eyewitnesses follow. If the cause is accepted, the holy person is declared "Venerable" and prayer asking the holy person's intercession is encouraged.

At this point in the process, the Church waits for miracles. A miracle is needed for beatification ("Blessed") and another miracle for canonization ("Saint"). For centuries, the Church has seen miracles worked through the intercession of the holy person as a sign that the person is truly with God in heaven. Just as the life, writings and impact of the holy person are carefully investigated, the miracles are subject to intense scrutiny. Medical records are submitted, doctors, nurses, family, and friends are interviewed, and the complete dossier is then submitted to Rome. When the miracle has been admitted by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, the road is open for the canonization of the holy person.

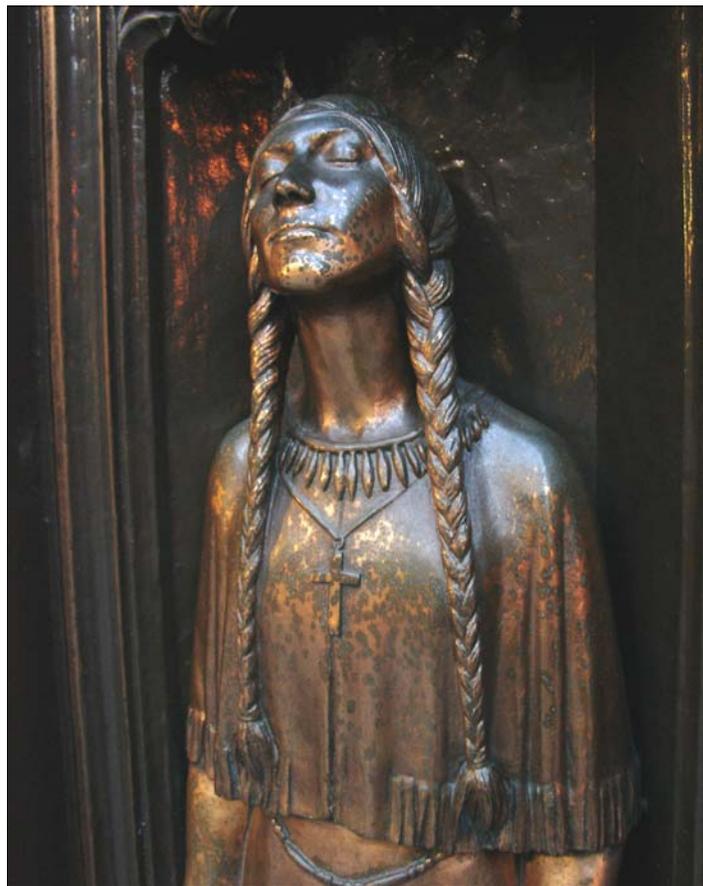
What miracle led to Blessed Kateri's canonization?

The canonization of Blessed Kateri has special meaning for the Church in Western Washington because the miracle that opened the way for her canonization took place in our own Archdiocese, with the miraculous healing of Jake Finkbonner, a young Ferndale boy who was attacked by flesh-eating bacteria in 2006. (Read Jake's story at the family website, www.jakefinkbonner.com) Jake, who is now 12, is a normal kid and a student at Assumption School in Bellingham. He and his family will be present when Kateri is canonized on October 21.

The story of Kateri Tekakwitha

Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in what is now New York to a Algonquin mother, a convert to Christianity, and an Iroquois father. When she was four years old, smallpox devastated her family and her tribe: in a few days, Kateri lost her mother, her father, and her brother. The disease left her severely scarred and almost blind (her name, "Tekakwitha" or "Tegahkouita" as it is variously spelled, is said to mean "the one who bumps into things"). She was raised by her aunts and uncles. Her situation became difficult when, as a teenager, she refused to marry the young man who had been chosen for her, and even more when, touched by the preaching of the "Blackrobes," the Jesuit missionaries, she converted to Christianity. At her baptism, Tekakwitha was given the name "Catherine" – Kateri.

Kateri endured much mockery and maltreatment for her faith. When she heard of the Mission of St. Francis Xavier du Sault, where she could practice her faith in peace, she left her home and set out on foot. There she spent the rest of her life, living among other Christian converts. She longed to enter religious life, but was not permitted to do so,



*Image of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha on the doors of
St. Patrick Cathedral, New York City*

though the Jesuit Fathers did allow her to make private vows. She lived a life of profound prayer and severe mortification until her death from tuberculosis at the age of 24, on April 17, 1680. Because of her love of chastity, Kateri came to be known as "the lily of the Mohawks." She was beatified by Blessed John Paul II in 1980, three hundred years after her death.

A prayer honoring the new saint

O God,
we thank you for your saint,
Kateri Tekakwitha,
and for all the wonders you have worked
in answer to her prayers.
Through her intercession,
gather people from every nation, tribe, and language,
to praise you in your Church
in one canticle of praise.
Through Christ our Lord.

Corinna Laughlin
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