

Chapter 3
The Church Grows and Defines Herself
[*St. Kateri Tekakwitha* by Fr. Claude Chaucetière]

In this assignment, students will read a reflection on the life of St. Kateri Tekakwitha and her devotion to the Lord in the Holy Eucharist and then write their own reflection connecting personal suffering to the Holy Eucharist.

St. Kateri Information and Reflection

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American to be canonized by the Catholic Church, had a deep devotion to the Eucharist. Her familiar nickname is “Lily of the Mohawks,” but because of her devotion, she also has been called “Princess of the Eucharist” and “Lily of the Eucharist.”

Born in 1656 to a Mohawk father and Algonquin mother in what is now New York, she lived a difficult life. Her parents and brother died during an outbreak of smallpox when she was a young child. She was left with facial scars, weakness, and difficulties with her vision.

Inspired by the lives of the Jesuit missionaries who came to her village, Tekawitha refused to marry any of the suitors her uncle wanted for her, for which she was punished and given extra work. She converted to Catholicism at nineteen and was baptized with the name Kateri after St. Catherine of Siena. Baptism not only transformed Tekawitha but also caused greater animosity from her tribe. She was treated like a slave, and because she would not work on Sundays, went without meals.

Tekawitha wanted Jesus to be her only love, saying “I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love. The state of helpless poverty that may befall me if I do not marry does not frighten me.” Her piety and vow of chastity were not understood by her people and Tekawitha was forced to flee, walking two-hundred miles to a Christian Native American community near Montreal, where she grew in holiness. She was known for being an ascetic, often inflicting harsh penances on herself as she prayed for the conversion of her people.

Tekawitha found true nourishment in the Body of Christ. She said, “I have abandoned this miserable body to hunger and any other misery so my soul could be content and have its usual nourishment.” She spent much time in prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, waiting for the chapel to open at dawn and remaining there until after the final Mass of the day.

She died in 1680 when she was twenty-four and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. Though she suffered immense physical and emotional trials, Tekawitha trusted in God’s goodness, grace, and mercy. She recognized the miracle of the Eucharist, giving her life to Jesus.

While we may not be called to endure the same mortifications and sacrifices as Tekawitha, we can accept the crosses that Jesus entrusts to us. By developing a greater devotion to the Eucharist, we can learn how to unite our daily sufferings and struggles to the suffering of Christ on the Cross.

How can you bring your suffering to the Eucharistic Lord this week?