

"Each of us is called to holiness"

In his 30 August general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

08/30/2023

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Now, continuing our catechesis on the theme of apostolic zeal and passion for proclaiming the Gospel, we look today at St. Kateri

Tekakwitha, the first native North American woman to be canonized. Born around the year 1656 in a village in upstate New York, she was the daughter of an unbaptized Mohawk chief and an Algonquin Christian mother, who taught Kateri to pray and sing hymns to God. Many of us were also first introduced to the Lord in family settings, especially by our mothers and grandmothers. This is how evangelization begins and, indeed, we must not forget that the faith is always transmitted in this dialect by mothers, by grandmothers. Faith should be transmitted in dialect, and we received it in dialect from mothers and grandmothers. Evangelism often begins this way: with simple, small gestures, such as parents helping their children learn to talk to God in prayer and telling them about His great and merciful love. And the foundation of faith for Kateri, and often for us as well, was laid in this

way. She received it from her mother in dialect, the dialect of the faith.

When Kateri was four years old, a severe smallpox epidemic struck her people. Both of her parents and her younger brother died, and Kateri herself was left with scars on her face and vision problems. From then on, Kateri had to face many difficulties: the physical ones from the effects of smallpox, certainly, but also the misunderstandings, persecutions, and even death threats she suffered following her Baptism on Easter Sunday 1676. All this gave Kateri a great love for the Cross, the definitive sign of the love of Christ, who gave Himself to the end for us. Indeed, witnessing to the Gospel is not only about what is pleasing; we must also know how to bear our daily crosses with patience, trust, and hope. Patience in the face of difficulties, of crosses: patience is a great Christian virtue. He who does

not have patience is not a good Christian. Patience to tolerate: to tolerate others, who are sometimes annoying or cause difficulties. Kateri Tekakwitha's life shows us that every challenge can be overcome if we open our hearts to Jesus, Who grants us the grace we need. Patience and a heart open to Jesus – this is a recipe for living well.

After being baptized, Kateri was forced to take refuge among the Mohawks in the Jesuit mission near the city of Montreal. There she attended Mass every morning, devoted time to adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, prayed the Rosary, and lived a life of penance. These spiritual practices of hers impressed everyone at the Mission; they recognized in Kateri a holiness that was appealing because it stemmed from her deep love for God. This is proper to holiness: to attract. God calls us through attraction; He

calls us with this desire to be close to us and one feels this divine attraction. At the same time, she taught the children of the Mission to pray; and through the constant fulfilment of her responsibilities, including caring for the sick and elderly, she offered an example of humble and loving service to God and neighbour. The faith is always expressed service. The faith is not about putting on make-up, putting make-up on the soul; no, it is to serve.

Although she was encouraged to marry, Kateri preferred to dedicate her life to Christ. Unable to enter the consecrated life, she made a vow of perpetual virginity on March 25, 1679. This choice of hers reveals another aspect of apostolic zeal that she had: total surrender to the Lord. Of course, not everyone is called to make the same vow as Kateri, but every Christian is called to give themself daily with an undivided

heart to the vocation and mission entrusted to them by God, serving God and one's neighbour in a spirit of charity.

Dear brothers and sisters, Kateri's life is further proof that apostolic zeal implies both union with Jesus, nourished by prayer and the sacraments, and the desire to spread the beauty of the Christian message through fidelity to one's particular vocation. Kateri's last words are very beautiful. Before she died, she said, "Jesus, I love you."

May we too, like St. Kateri Tekakwitha, draw strength from the Lord and learn to do ordinary things in extraordinary ways, growing daily in faith, charity, and zealous witness for Christ.

Let us not forget: Each one of us is called to holiness, to everyday holiness, to the holiness of the common Christian life. Each one of

us has this calling: we go forward along this path. The Lord will not fail us.

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