



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 30 August 2023*

[Multimedia]

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 19. To pray and to serve with joy: Kateri Tekakwitha, first native saint of North America

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

At the General Audience on Wednesday, 30 August, Pope Francis continued his series of catecheses on apostolic zeal, this week reflecting on the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native North American woman to be canonized. He encouraged the faithful to follow Saint Kateri's example of complete trust in God. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's words.

Now, continuing our catechesis on the theme of apostolic zeal and passion for proclaiming the Gospel, we look today at Saint 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 "dialect" by mothers, by grandmothers. Faith should be transmitted in dialect, and we received it in dialect from our 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 difficulties and also 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 she felt this grace of 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 through 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 completely dedicate her life to Christ. Unable to enter the consecrated life, she made a vow of perpetual virginity on 25 March 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 him- or herself daily with an undivided heart to the vocation and mission entrusted to them by God, serving Him 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 Saint 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. Let us go forward along this path. The Lord will not fail us.

APPEAL

The day after tomorrow, 1 September, we will celebrate the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, inaugurating the Season of Creation, which will last until 4 October, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. On that date I plan to publish an Exhortation, a second *Laudato Si'*. Let us join our Christian brothers and sisters in the commitment to care for Creation as a sacred gift from the Creator. It is necessary to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, striving to put an end to the senseless war on our common home, which is a terrible world war. I urge all of you to work and pray for it to abound with life once again.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the cyclists from England; I assure them of my prayers for their efforts in the fight against cancer. I also greet the altar servers from Malta and the various groups from the United States of America. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

I greet with affection the Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular, the confirmands from the diocese of Chiavari – they're making a lot of noise, aren't they? Dear young people, you have recently received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Commit yourselves to find strength and courage in God daily. I greet the parish of St. John the Apostle in Barletta, which is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its establishment: may this anniversary strengthen in each one the spirit of faith and ecclesial communion. I also greet the Castelvenere band and thank them for their cultural and social commitment.

I now turn my thoughts to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Only Christ has words of eternal life. Therefore, I wish you to always follow him with an open and enthusiastic heart and to witness to him every day of your lives.

And please let us renew our closeness and our prayers for dear and tormented Ukraine, so tried

by great suffering.

I give my blessing to you all.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we have been reflecting on the spread of the Gospel through the witness of men and women of every time and place. Today we consider Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native American saint of North America. The daughter of a Mohawk chief and an Algonquin mother, Kateri was scarred by smallpox at an early age; her sufferings drew her to a great love of the cross and a close identification with Christ in his redemptive love for humanity. Persecuted for her faith, she found refuge in a Jesuit mission. Her deep piety and prayer, marked by devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary and acts of penance, was accompanied by charitable concern for the elderly and the sick, and for the instruction of children in the faith. A year before she died, Kateri sealed her complete dedication to the Lord by taking a solemn vow of perpetual virginity. Saint Kateri Tekakwitha's example shows us the power of the Gospel to bear rich fruit in a holiness expressed in quiet, everyday actions that nonetheless have the power to transform our world.