



**Mass of Thanksgiving**  
**Canonization of Saint Kateri Tekawitha**  
**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**November 18, 2012**  
*Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
**Cathedral of St. Joseph**

If the world ended tomorrow, would we be comfortable with this being our last day on earth? As November moves on and the Church liturgical year eases to an end, our readings raise the question of when will Christ come again to judge the living and the dead. That it will happen we believe in faith. When it will happen is a matter of speculation. People have often tried to calculate the end of time, the second coming of Christ.

With the multitude of tragedies in the world, some believe that the end must be coming soon, that the haunting prophecies from the Old and New Testaments seem to be happening. There are wars and insurrections, volcanoes rumbling and earthquakes cracking, hurricane induced floods, and dismal dry drought, disease and other destructive forces at work.

We must not confuse any specific problems or catastrophes of our day as signals of the end of the world. There have been such catastrophes throughout history. Jesus in the Gospel stated it clearly, "But of the day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels, nor the Son, but only the Father<sup>1</sup>." In other words we ought not to waste time speculating on things we cannot know. What should concern us is living each day we are given faithfully, savoring each day, using each day well and preparing for our or the world's Day of Judgment whenever it comes.

To do so we should seek to live each day with the hope that is based on the promise of eternal life Christ won on the cross for those who persevere in faith. As the Gospel of Mark puts it, "They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the ends of the sky<sup>2</sup>."

Certainly the saint we remember today, Kateri Tekawitha, was ready whatever winds came her way because Christ was the love of her life.

Among the great gifts the Church offers us are the saints. Today, of course, we in a special way thank God for His Church raising up for us Saint Kateri, Lily of the Mohawks, the first Native American declared a saint.

Saints are ordinary people living ordinary lives in an ordinary Christian way. The reason they seem extraordinary, and are so often rejected, persecuted or ridiculed is because there are so few of us, and I include myself, who live our lives in an ordinary Christian way. We need saints like Kateri to be raised up to call us to a higher standard that we might grow in holiness.

These are the words Pope Benedict XVI spoke on October 21 when Saint Kateri was canonized along with six others. He said,

“Kateri Tekakwitha was born in today’s New York state in 1656 to a Mohawk father and a Christian Algonquin mother who gave to her a sense of the living God. She was baptized at twenty years of age and, to escape persecution, she took refuge in Saint Francis Xavier Mission near Montreal. There she worked, faithful to the traditions of her people, although renouncing their religious convictions until her death at the age of twenty-four. Leading a simple life, Kateri remained faithful to her love for Jesus, to prayer and to daily Mass. Her greatest wish was to know and to do what pleased God. She lived a life radiant with faith and purity<sup>3</sup>.”

That is a very short summary of her short but admirable life. Many of you know her challenging yet beautiful life story which included losing her parents at a young age, scared physically by small pox, yet resilient even as a juvenile – rejecting earthly marriage at personal risk in order to be married to Christ. She was baptized at the age of 20 on Easter, received her first Holy Communion on Christmas and dedicated her life to Christ through a personal vow of chastity on the holy day of the Annunciation, also offering herself to the Blessed Mother as her daughter. She then lived her faith in a humble but powerful way.

The Jesuit priest who led the cause for her canonization, Father Paolo Molinari, said of her: “After her baptism she kept living the life of a normal Indian. She continued to be an Indian young lady and yet did it with the spirit of the Gospel: showing goodness and tenderness to people who were in need<sup>4</sup>.” If more simply followed her example of showing goodness and tenderness to people who were in need, how much better would the world be.

There are three important lessons that I think we can take from the life of Saint Kateri. First is that she was a model of faithfulness having persevered in the midst of misunderstanding, hostility and personal suffering, exercising her innate right of religious liberty and freedom of

conscience. We might ask ourselves can we be faithful in our day when challenged by the secular religion that rejects moral truth which is deeply entrenched even in our government, or by some in our families who marginalize our beliefs as old-fashioned or nonsensical, or by our own sinfulness which the evil one exploits in media, gadgets and other subtle ways. She was faithful come what may; may her example touch us.

Secondly her canonization affirms that prayer succeeds, including intercessory prayer, but always according to God's will and way. People have prayed for her intercession since the day her earthly life ended. The first Native American religious convent was founded in Mexico fifty years after her death where the nuns began praying for and to her. Many healing miracles attributed to her have been documented. Throughout the world peoples of many cultures and backgrounds have prayed for her being named a saint for over three hundred years, knowing in their hearts that she already was one but believed that the Church ought to acknowledge her healing and holy presence to allow others to be drawn to her and be inspired by her. She was a woman of deep prayer who listened for and did God's will; may we too become men and women of deep prayer who listen for and do God's will.

And thirdly her sainthood affirms that Christ came to save the many and his Church is a church for all. We are grateful that Saint Kateri is the first Native American declared saint, but every saint is a saint for us all. At times in history some human leaders of the Church have discriminated against and treated harshly and with lack of respect Native Americans and others, Saint Kateri being one of them. In what meager way I am able as a bishop, I apologize for those sinful ways. What Pope Benedict has reminded us in this declaration of Kateri as a saint is that all peoples are children of God deserving of respect and dignity from conception to natural death and that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we are one family in Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI concluded her canonization with these words. "Kateri impresses us by the action of grace in her life in spite of the absence of external help and by the courage of her vocation, so unusual in her culture. In her, faith and culture enrich each other! May her example help us to live where we are, loving Jesus without denying who we are. Saint Kateri, Protectress of Canada and the first Native American saint, we entrust to you the renewal of the faith in the first nations and in all of North America! May God bless the first nations!<sup>3</sup>" She exemplified courage in her vocation, allowing faith and culture to enrich each other. May we as best we are able, do the same.

As the Collect or opening prayer put it so beautifully: “O God, who desired the Virgin Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to flower among Native Americans, in a life of innocence, grant through her intercession, that when all are gathered into your Church from every nation, tribe and tongue, they may magnify you in a single canticle of praise”. Her life on earth was a canticle of praise to God in Christ and she continues to sing it from heaven.

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us, that we like you may with humility and with courage declare as you did with your last spoken words, “Jesus, I love you<sup>5</sup>.” Then we will be prepared as were you when we are called home. May we sing, Jesus, Mary, I love you.

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<sup>1</sup> – Mark 13:32

<sup>2</sup> – Mark 13:26-27

<sup>3</sup> – His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, Canonization Mass homily, October 21, 2012

<sup>4</sup> – Rev. Paolo Molinari, SJ, Inside the Vatican, November 2010

<sup>5</sup> – Saint Kateri Tekawitha Conservation Center