

## **Saint Kateri Tekakwitha**

*Native American Heritage Month 2023 Devotion  
Submitted by Church and Society Committee for Committee Use*

**Hebrews 12:1** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...*

The United Methodist Church, like many other Protestant denominations, doesn't recognize or acknowledge the holy men and women consecrated and canonized as "saints" by the Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches. In November we do celebrate those witnesses/saints we've loved and shared Christian fellowship with whom have departed this earth, but we don't have a list of saints and their feast days to add to our calendars. Although, maybe you've bought an icon of St. Christopher to ensure your safe travels or maybe you enjoy celebrating St. Patrick's Day, but that's probably as deep as our understanding of saints will delve.

But every time I'm in the gift shop at Mission San Xavier del Bac I'm captivated by the various saints and representations of them available to bring good luck, safe travel, good health, etc. On my last visit I discovered a real jewel: Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American consecrated as "saint." As you might imagine, she has inspired many Native Americans in their faith journey. There is even a St. Kateri Tekakwitha Mission Parish in South Tucson (a Native American parish).

According to the Mission Parish website: St. Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in what is now New York. The daughter of a Mohawk War Chief and Algonquin Catholic mother, she was left orphaned and in poor health after a small pox epidemic struck her tribe when she was four. She was taken in by an uncle, who first named her "Tekakwitha" which means "she goes putting things in order" in Mohawk. By the age of 20 she shirked the wishes of family to be baptized by visiting Jesuit priests and soon found her passion in a life of faith. She took a vow of virginity and began a walk toward sanctity. The local Mission Parish website says of St. Kateri "Always a strong, intelligent person, now with divine grace building on nature, Kateri became a woman of intense prayer, penance, and numerous works of charity. It was said of Kateri that whenever she was seen going about, it was to visit the sick, the elderly, and the poor in their homes or to teach catechism to the children." It is said that in eternity, she hoped to help her people "put things in order." She is the patron saint of ecology and the environment, of people in exile, and Native Americans.

Though our church doesn't acknowledge individual saints, may we each follow the spiritual paths of our saints, who we know as people of great faith and compassion. And may we respect and celebrate the rich diversity amongst people of faith in our backyard and in the world.

*Prayer:* God, we thank you for the witness of Saint Kateri, Star of Native People and Bright light for all! We thank you for her heroic courage, constant perseverance and deep love of the Cross. We pray our love for Christ may deepen and that we might imitate the lives of the saints in following God's Will even when difficulties arise. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

*(adapted from St. Kateri Tekakwitha saint prayer card purchased at Mission San Xavier gift shop)*