

St. Kateri Tekawitha



There was once a little Native American girl named Kateri. Well, when she was four years old she became known as Tekakwitha, which meant The-One-Who-Bumps-Into-Things. This is because she got a disease called smallpox and lost almost all of her sight. Because she couldn't see very well, she kept bumping into everything! She also lost her mother and father and baby brother to the terrible disease. So, as you can imagine, Kateri had a pretty difficult childhood. When her parents died, she went to live with her aunt and her uncle who was actually the Chief of her tribe.

The Mohawk tribe in which Kateri grew up was a pagan tribe, which meant they didn't believe in Jesus. But Kateri's mother had been a Catholic from another tribe and had told her little daughter all about Jesus before she died.

When Kateri was eighteen years old, a brave Jesuit priest, Father de Lamberville, came to visit her village. Kateri remembered the stories about the good Jesus that her mother had told her when she was small so she asked the priest to tell her everything he knew about Jesus. Then she asked him to baptise her. That was when she was given the name Kateri, or Catherine in our language. After Kateri became a Catholic she changed a lot. She began to pray more and to offer up the cold and the heat as a sacrifice to Jesus. She even refused to marry because she wanted to belong completely to Jesus. All of Kateri's old friends and family started to bully her. They refused her food on Sundays because on that day she did not want to work. Instead, she went to Mass because she knew that was what Jesus wanted all Catholics to do. Little children would make fun of her and threw stones at her.

Before long, Kateri knew if she wanted to serve God freely, she would have to leave the tribe. She left her village in the middle of the night and travelled more than three hundred kilometres through deep forests and over dangerous rivers to the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier, near Montreal in Canada. It took her two whole months to get there! Because she was so determined and brave in the way she lived her faith, she was allowed to receive Jesus for the first time in Holy Communion on Christmas day in 1677. For her, it was the best Christmas present ever, because it was Jesus himself being born in her heart just like he was born in Bethlehem!

Kateri spent the next few years growing in her friendship with Jesus. She went to visit him in the chapel as often as she could, and helped the poor and sick in the village. She loved to make crosses out of sticks and tie them to the trees around the mission. When she saw one of them, she would think of Jesus, her Best Friend, and she liked to talk to Him during the day.

Because Kateri always thought of others more than about herself, her already fragile health began to fail. On April 17, 1680, at three o'clock in the afternoon, she died at the age of just twenty four. Her last words were: "Jesos Konoronkwa" which means, "Jesus, I love you." The minute she died, all the ugly scars that marked her face from the time she had smallpox so long ago vanished, and she became very beautiful. It was no surprise, because her Best Friend knew how beautiful she was inside and, finally, He had come to take her home to Heaven.

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