



St. Kateri Tekakwitha Of The Iroquois (1656-1680)

By Br. Robert Lentz O.F.M.

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in the forests of what is now New York State. She was a member of the Mohawk Iroquois nation, the daughter of a chief and a captive Algonquin mother. Orphaned at four, she was raised by her uncle. At 20 she was baptized by a French Jesuit. The following year she left her own village secretly and went to a new Christian Iroquois village near Montreal. She was known for her gentleness, kindness, and good humor. She died before her 24th birthday and was immediately revered by those who had known her holiness.

In this icon she wears typical Iroquois clothing and a blue blanket from French traders. In her right hand she bears one of the most important symbols of her culture, the tree of peace. By the mid-15th century, blood feuds had almost destroyed her people. A holy man named Dekanawidah appeared, preaching peace and reconciliation. He taught that all people were brothers and sisters and that differences were better resolved by discussion than war. Through his influence, the five Iroquois tribes formed a unified government and stopped fighting among themselves. The symbol of this vision was a huge tree under which all peoples could find peace. When more people would come, the branches of the tree would simply grow longer. An eagle lived at the top of the tree and warned the people whenever peace was threatened. The tree, like all the earth, rode on the back of a giant turtle's back.

Her feast day is July 14.