

**Mass of Thanksgiving
for the Canonization of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,
Basilica of Saint John Lateran, Rome, 22 October 2012**

**Final text of homily by
The Most Reverend Richard Smith
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

[Wisdom 9:13-18; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 12:46-50]

In these wondrous days here in Rome we are the blessed, privileged witnesses of an extraordinary event that brings great joy to the people of Canada, and to our sisters and brothers of the First Nations in particular. A daughter of the Mohawk and Algonquin peoples, Kateri Tekakwitha, has been canonized, raised to the glory of the altars, by Pope Benedict XVI, and by this all Native peoples are honoured. As Blessed John Paul II said of her, in a speech to Native Americans not long after her beatification, Kateri "stands before us as a symbol of the best of the heritage that is yours as North American Indians." Now that she has been added to the canon of the Church's saints, she also stands before the whole Church, indeed the entire world, as a reminder of the universal call to holiness and a model of cooperation with the mystery of grace.

In our first reading this morning, the author of the Book of Wisdom poses this question: "For who knows God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?" He then proceeds to answer it. Although God's mysterious counsels lie beyond the limits of human reason, nevertheless they are made knowable to us by the working of God's Holy Spirit. God wants us to know his ways, indeed to know him, and he has acted to enable us to know him, so that we might respond in love and cooperate with his saving plan for us. This revelation of the wondrous truth of God has been given in his Son, Jesus Christ, who has sent the promised Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and hearts with divine wisdom, and grace us with the ability to respond in faith and love.

The meeting of God's loving initiative with a grace-filled human response is on beautiful display in the life of Saint Kateri. The earliest intimations of the working of God's grace in her life were given in the name assigned to her by her family: Tekakwitha. This name, derived from her diminished capacity for sight, is patient of a variety of interpretations: "she who feels her way ahead"; "moving forward slowly"; "one who bumps into things"; but also "one who places things in order" or "to put all into place". This diversity of meanings has to do in one way or another with seeing what lies before. It is, of course, true that Kateri's physical sight was seriously compromised due to the smallpox from which she suffered. What is equally true, however, and what is of far greater significance, is that her inner vision was clear. Deep within her heart she had received the gift of seeing clearly the truth of Christ and his Church. It is as if God, through the very name Tekakwitha and the life of the one who bore it, has drawn attention to the limits of human vision in order to point us to the true sight that comes from faith. In this Year of Faith, the life of Kateri demonstrates that the gift of faith carries with it the capacity to

see clearly the beauty of God and his plan for us, which far exceed in grandeur the sensible realities of this earth.

Here we can appreciate how our sister Kateri serves as an instructive witness for the new evangelization. These days Bishops from around the world are gathered in synod to reflect upon the call of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI to find new ways to announce the Gospel joyfully and intelligibly to the peoples of our day. Kateri reminds us that this new evangelization, to be effective, must not only be proposed anew but also find an open and ready welcome in the heart of the recipient. When the Jesuit missionary, Father de Lamberville, spoke of our Lord and the Christian faith, the Gospel message of life and hope found a home within her. No words of hers are recorded that articulate her experience. But words are not necessary. We know that our response of faith to the call of the Gospel is itself the work of grace. Thus is the witness of Kateri an invitation to all of us, who will hear the beauty of the Gospel proclaimed afresh, to ask for the grace we need to receive it with joy and respond to its call to life and hope. Only with the help of God's grace are we able, like Kateri, to make of our entire lives a living and pleasing sacrifice to God, as Saint Paul exhorts us to do. Only with divine assistance do we become, like Kateri, the mothers, brothers and sisters of Christ by doing the will of his - and our - heavenly Father.

Kateri also teaches us, in a unique way, that our response in faith to Jesus brings healing. Among the most striking aspects of her witness is the miraculous transformation of her face soon after her death. From the age of four terribly scarred by the smallpox, her face was restored to its original beauty only minutes after she had died. This was preceded by the words she spoke just as her life ended: "Jesus I love you." The love of Christ for us, and our answering love for him, heals. How greatly do we need this lesson from Kateri today! We may not bear physical scars, but so many today carry deep emotional and psychological ones. These are inflicted not by smallpox but by poverty, addiction, loneliness, and betrayal. They are caused by the abuse suffered by Kateri's modern-day sisters and brothers in their time at residential schools. So much pain, so many emotional scars! Yet Kateri teaches us that no wound, however deep, should leave us without hope. Let us remember her words: "Jesus I love you." These few words sum up her entire life. "Jesus, I love you." Kateri's facial healing is an outward sign of the interior transformation that is given to all who hand over their lives to Christ, and who do so in love.

This healing opens the way to reconciliation. Many have posed the question as to how Kateri can aid the efforts of the representatives of the Church and of our First Nations to overcome any remaining separation. Well, I believe Kateri herself would point us to her love for Christ. "Jesus, I love you." Just as her expression of love was soon followed by a healing of external scars, so too is our loving relationship with Christ the balm that covers and cures our interior wounds. Before we can be reconciled with another, we must first be reconciled to the truth that we all need the healing that Christ alone can give. Then we are set free to turn toward the other, both to extend and to receive forgiveness, and thus truly to be reconciled.

Yes, we are, indeed, privileged to witness this event of Kateri's canonization. We shall also be truly blessed if we learn from her example. So let us pray to our sister, our new saint, for this grace.

Dear Saint Kateri, please pray for us. Pray for your people, your sisters and brothers of the First Nations of Canada and the United States. Pray for all the people of our countries. Pray for the Church. By your intercession, may we receive with joy the word of Our Lord, and be faithful at all times to the will of our Heavenly Father. Help us with your prayers to make of our lives a spiritual sacrifice to God, just as you did. May we so live in love with Jesus that we will know within ourselves the healing, the hope and the joy that only he can bestow. Amen.

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