



Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, born to a Mohawk chief and an Algonquin woman in what is now Auriesville, New York, became the first North American Indian canonized a saint on October 21, 2012.

At four years old, her family died of smallpox. Kateri, also affected, was left almost blind and badly scarred. She was taken in by relatives, who strongly opposed Christianity. When she was 10, her village moved and was visited by the Jesuit missionaries. This is where she received her first knowledge of Christianity. At 18 she requested baptism. Her beliefs were met with hostility and threats. She fled to St. Francis Xavier Mission, a Christian Mohawk village where she took perpetual vows. She lived a life of prayer, teaching children, caring for the elderly and sick in her village. At 24 she died from tuberculosis. Cures and miracles attributed to Kateri followed.

The Tekakwitha Conference, named for Kateri, was established in 1939 by a midwestern bishop to support ministry among Native Americans primarily through its annual meeting. Revitalized in the late 1980's, it was through the Tekakwitha Conference, and the arduous prayerful work of many, that miracles were identified and gave way to long awaited canonization.

Today Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is recognized as the patroness of traditional ecology, the environment, people in exile, and Native Americans. Her Feast Day is July 14th.

Submitted by Annetta Sutton, member, Saint Odilia's Social Justice Council and Racial Equity Ministry