

November 3, 2019

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**Reading:** I John 3.1-3; 4.7-12, 16b-21, 1

**The Message:** Remembering Who We Will Be

Who are the saints?

In the Catholic tradition, a saint is someone who demonstrates heroic virtue, is a role model and is responsible for two posthumous miracles where people are healed when they ask for the person's help.

Slide 1

A statue of Kateri Tekakwitha by artist Estella Loretto outside the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, New Mexico

born in 1656 New York state in a Mohawk village

parents: a Mohawk chief and a Roman Catholic Algonquin who had been captured from Trois Rivieres

Mohawks were integrating people from other tribes to offset the lost of folk to European diseases and warfare.

Scarred and orphaned by small pox.

The Jesuits' account of Kateri said that she was shy, avoiding social gatherings; she covered much of her head with a blanket because of the smallpox scars

Slide 2

She became skilled at making clothing and belts from animal skins; weaving mats, baskets and boxes from reeds and grasses; and preparing food from game, crops and gathered produce. She took part in the women's seasonal planting and weeding. She was pressured to consider marriage around age thirteen, but refused.

The Jesuit mission of Kahnawake south of Montreal attracted native converts. Kateri joined them when she was 21.

Jesuit priest Chauchetière came to believe that Kateri Tekakwitha was a saint. He described her "charity, industry, purity, and fortitude."

As people believed in her healing powers, some collected earth from her gravesite and wore it in bags as a relic. One woman said she was saved from pneumonia, and gave the pendant to her husband, who was healed from his disease.

Tradition holds that Tekakwitha's smallpox scars vanished at the time of her death in 1680. Pope Pius XII in 1943 declared this an authentic miracle. Pilgrims that attended her funeral reported healings.

On December 19, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI approved the second miracle needed for Blessed Kateri's canonization. The authorized miracle dates from 2006, when a young Lummi (First Nation) boy in Washington state survived flesh-eating disease. Doctors had given up but the parents, family and friends prayed through Tekakwitha for healing. A nun, Sister Kateri Mitchell

visited the boy's bedside and placed a relic of Tekakwitha, a bone fragment, against his body and prayed together with his parents. The next day, the infection stopped its progression.

Here is what Benedict wrote:

"Kateri impresses us by the action of grace in her life in spite of the absence of external help and by the courage of her vocation... In her, faith and culture enrich each other! May her example help us to live where we are, loving Jesus without denying who we are."—Pope Benedict XVI

Slide 3

We do tend to 'sanitize' saints and while there are hundreds of statues around North America of Kateri, this is the only one I could find that has a hint of the small pox scars that affected her so deeply through her life. It's at the doorway of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan -- statue by John Angel -- but I am not sure they are intentional, or more related to the weather and pollution.

Saints often show how the Christian faith "turns the world upside down," as Luke puts it.

The Jesuit missionaries to New France were supposed to be the heroes; the Indigenous converts were supposed to be the beneficiaries.

- Chauchetière was supposed to be the master disciplined and educated in the faith;
- Kateri the untutored "savage";
- he the teacher,
- she the convert;
- he the priest,
- she the layperson;
- he the man,
- she the woman.

But as we read what he wrote about her after her death, we see that she turned that all upside down. He was full of doubts about his vocation, discouraged about what he was doing, and when he visited her in her mission compound as she lay sick, he recognized a kind of aura of holiness about her, her sense of God in the world, her faith, her peace. He had little to give her; she had a great deal to give him, and she received her spiritual centring not from the Jesuit missionaries, but from the group of Indigenous Christian women that she lived with, who shared their insights into sacred texts and their experiences of God.

That's one kind of saint.

But there are other saints.

Paul starts his letter to the Romans: "To all the saints in Rome"

When I was first ministering at St. Matthew's, Richmond Hill, we started a Bible Study on Paul's letter to the Romans with that verse. Alan asked, "Who are the saints?"  
Dead silence.

Our administrator had brought along her intellectually disabled son who was sitting outside the group. He suddenly piped up, "We are! We're the saints!"

That's right! In the reformed tradition, we are the saints.

So look to your left.

Now look to your right.

These are the folk with whom you will be spending eternity. You are a saint.

"No, I'm not," you're thinking. But if you hear and live Jesus' two commandments, you won't be able to avoid being a saint:

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup>you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

What is a saint? A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. Leonard Cohen

Any ordinary person can be a saint: just one moment of worshipping God, just one expression of love for a neighbour.

As we remember those we have lost, we are remembering our personal saints. They have made us who we are, and so they live on in us -- and so, in our remembering, we are bringing them with us into the future.

All Saints' Day has been a way to lift up the grace of God as it is lived out in the lives of the saints since the third century. And the church, our church, will be better because of the saints who have walked with Jesus.

The glue that holds the church together is God's love, which has bound them and us into one family as children of God.

("abide") in Christ by walking "just as he walked" (2:6). Let's live in community in such a way that our lives reflect their walk with Jesus.