

**Life**

St. Tekakwitha is a Canadian saint, and the first Native American to be canonized. She was born in 1656 in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon (present-day New York State). Her father was a chief, and her mother was a member of the Algonquin First Nation and a Christian. When she was 4 years old, there was a smallpox epidemic, and her parents and younger brother all died of the disease. She was left with impaired vision and a scarred complexion. Her name "Tekakwitha" means "she who bumped into things". Tekakwitha was adopted by her uncle and some aunts, and in 1666 she met some friendly and pious Jesuit missionaries, who impressed her deeply. Although she learned how to do domestic chores, pick fruits and vegetables, and make clothes and accessories like her peers when she was growing up, she refused to accept marriage proposals and start a family like them. Instead, she learned catechism from the missionaries. She was baptized when she was 20 years old, with the Christian name Kateri. Her family fiercely opposed her faith. They threw pebbles at her when she went to the chapel to pray. They sometimes denied her food because she refused to work on Sundays. People in her tribe often insulted her because she was a Christian. The priest encouraged her to flee to the south shore of St. Lawrence River (currently Kahnawake, Quebec, Canada) to live among the First Nations Christian community. There she focused on prayer, work and penance, but her relatives still wanted to force her to get married and even falsely accused her of adultery. She remained unmoved and instead dreamed of founding a First Nations community of consecrated life. She took a vow of chastity in 1679 and died of illness the following year at the age of 24. When she died, her face glowed, and all the scars on her face disappeared. She was honoured as the "Lily of the Mohawks." St. Tekakwitha is the patron saint of the environment and ecology.

**Reflect**

On October 21, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out during the canonization mass of St. Tekakwitha that she "remained faithful to the traditions of her people, although renouncing their religious convictions...Leading a simple life, Kateri remained faithful to her love for Jesus, to prayer and to daily mass. Her greatest wish was to know and to do what pleases God..... May her example help us to live where we are, loving Jesus without denying who we are." We are often placed in situations where Catholic values, such as respect for the sanctity of life and marriage, are criticized as anachronistic. When there is a conflict between faith and cultures, let us learn from St. Tekakwitha and know how to be loyal to our faith and ourselves at the same time.

**Prayer**

Why did St. Tekakwitha contradict her family's expectations for her to get married and refuse to live like those around her before she even became a Christian? Did she hear the call of the Creator from the blue sky, pure stream water, and lush woods? Did she feel that He had arranged a different path just for her, so she looked for a way to respond to Him?

St. Tekakwitha is the patron saint of the environment and ecology. On October 4, 2003, in a pastoral letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative, the Canadian conference of Catholic Bishops proposed that our faith tradition has different related responses to the ecological crisis, one of which is the contemplative response. The letter states: "Each one of us is called to deepen our capacity to appreciate the wonders of nature as an act of faith and love. In the silence of contemplation, nature speaks of the beauty of the Creator." Let us turn the appreciation of God's creation into our prayers. When we pick up a piece of garbage in the countryside, refuse to accept disposable supplies to reduce pollution, support tree planting, renewable energy and other practices to save mother nature, we, through actions, express our admiration for God's wonderful works and do our part so that they can continue to praise God.

May we learn from St. Tekakwitha who maintained her faith despite cultural challenges.  
Let us also try to face environmental and ecological crises with a contemplative response.

St. Tekakwitha, pray for us.