

## Your Holy Friend of the Month

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha



St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church, was born in 1656, in a Mohawk village. Her mother, an Algonquin, had been captured by the Mohawks and married to a Mohawk chief.

A smallpox outbreak, in which her entire family died, left Kateri with scarred skin, a source of humiliation in her youth. She was subsequently raised by her uncle, who was the chief of a Mohawk clan.

At age 19, Kateri converted to Catholicism, taking a vow of chastity and pledging to marry only Jesus Christ. Her adoptive parents and their neighbors were not pleased and some started rumors of sorcery. To avoid persecution, she traveled to a Christian native community near Montreal.

Kateri was very devout and would put thorns on her sleeping mat. She prayed for the conversion of her fellow Mohawks. Jesuit missionaries that served the community where Kateri lived, stated that she often fasted and when she would eat, she would taint her food to diminish its flavor. On at least one occasion, she burned herself. Such self-mortification was common among the Mohawk.

Sadly, just five years after her conversion to Catholicism, she became ill and passed away at age 24, on April 17, 1680.

Her name, Kateri, is the Mohawk form of Catherine, which she took from St. Catherine of Siena.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 21, 2012. She is the patroness of ecology and the environment, people in exile and Native Americans.

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## July 2023 Newsletter

Thrive For Life  
30 W. 16th St. | New York, NY 10011  
(212) 337-7544 | info@thriveforlife.org



## The Word Was Made Flesh

Fr. Anthony D. Andreassi, priest of the Brooklyn Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

For many of us this reading from the Gospel of St. Luke immediately brings to mind images of Christmas which of course include the birth of Jesus. However, as the heat and humidity of July reminds us, we are a long way from the cold, snow, and nativity scenes. So pulling away a bit from the setting in which we usually hear this Gospel passage, I suggest we give our attention more to Mary's initial reaction to the angel's greeting. And what is that reaction? Fear! And isn't that a bit strange if not ironic? In hearing both that the eternal God was going to take on frail human flesh and that Mary was to be invited to play a central role in this happening, her initial response was to be afraid. But on second thought, maybe this is both natural and quite human.

So often we are called to do things or find ourselves in situations where we are afraid. But when this happens and we find ourselves wanting to run away or bury our head in the sand, we might do well to remember that this is the most human of reactions to something new or challenging. Hey, even the Mother of God felt this way when she was asked to do something she had never considered before and felt herself unready and unworthy to do. But like Mary, when we step forward in trust (and with fear often not far behind) we may find ourselves bringing God to situations and persons desperately in need of the divine presence and God's merciful love. In many ways, it would have been much easier for Mary to have run away when the angel spoke to her or responded that she was just too afraid or unprepared to do what was asked of her.

Do we find ourselves in a place in our lives where we are being invited to step forth into something new? And do we find ourselves afraid about doing this? Well, like Mary, despite our anxiety, if we lean in and trust in God, we might find ourselves bringing God to persons who desperately need him. For as Christians, we so firmly believe that the only way that the word can become flesh is through both our participation (God never likes to force himself on us) and our vulnerability.

### The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

### Questions for Reflection

- 1 Do I also have Mary's openness to God's call in my life?
- 2 Where in my life do I need the message of the angel, "Do not be afraid!"?
- 3 What can I do so that God can be born again today?

## Daily Ignatian Examen

We invite you to prayerfully reflect:

### *Presence*

Become aware that God’s presence is active at each moment of your life, looking at you with love, desirous of speaking directly to your heart. How do you feel at this moment?

### *Ask*

Ask God for the grace to see the ways God is working in your life.

### *Gratitude*

Be grateful. Thank God for the gifts, both big and small of the day. What are you most grateful for today?

### *Review*

Trust that God is with you at each moment of day, during the good and challenging moments. God never abandons you. What were the good moments of today? What were the greatest challenges of today?

### *Respond*

You are not stuck. Tomorrow is a new day. Ask God to give you the grace to be the loving and generous person you were created to be. What can you do tomorrow to be more generous and loving?

*Conclude with the Sign of the Cross.*

## The Shepherds and the Angels

*Luke 2: 8-20*

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

### Questions for Reflection

- 1 At the edge of society, God becomes man in all poverty. What does this thought trigger in me?
- 2 What do I want to tell Jesus about my life at the manger? What petitions and thanks do I bring with me?
- 3 What do I, like Mary, want to keep in my heart from my life story?

## The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## And Forgive Us Our Trespasses

*David, Thrive For Life Volunteer*

Whether we have a strong or weak relationship with God, we find ourselves often asking for forgiveness. We know that we are sinners and yet we continue to find opportunities to sin. So, when we read this line from The Lord’s Prayer, we are comforted and relieved. Is it because we know that God will forgive us time after time? Is it because we know that God loves us with a love that we can hardly fathom? Yes, and yes.

God is continually calling us back to our spiritual core, i.e. God loves us! And, often when we look within ourselves, recognizing our sinfulness, we do “come home” to God. Those whose relationship with God is strong and growing, find great power and solace in the sacrament of reconciliation. We find a closeness with God that helps us navigate daily life and, as Catholics, believe that Jesus empowered his disciples to work, on his behalf, in this effort. John 20:23 states, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” This statement directly connects us, the person confessing sins, and the Priest, who is providing absolution, with God who is the forgiver of our sins.

Even those who do not go to Confession derive comfort believing that a loving God is watching over them and forgiving them, without “strings attached.” Thankfully, with God, this is not too good to be true. God does continually forgive us. And, at the same time, he asks something of us as we are being forgiven. Every time we focus on God, our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness, God enlightens us with a command for self-improvement and selfless love.

We shall see in next month’s reflection on the Lord’s Prayer that God does forgive us our trespasses and ....