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Adopted by her aunt and uncle, Kateri was immersed in the culture and spirituality of the Mohawks, with their closeness to nature and their respect for the Great Spirit. This helped to develop her gift of contemplative prayer. She had opportunities to gaze in awe at the natural beauty surrounding her and lift her spirit to God.

Kateri joined in the feasts of her people to thank the Creator for his gifts and ask for his continued providence. These woodland warriors would even pray to the spirits of the animals they hunted and thank them for the gift of their lives. The Natives were grateful for the food, the fur and other useful products they provided. Also, they valued the providence of the Great Spirit. They were careful not to waste what was so generously given to them and shared it generously with others.

Drawing from her Native background, we see Kateri as a contemplative, filled with a sense of gratitude, firm reliance on the providence of the Great Spirit, and respect for all of God’s creatures. We also see the strength of her people as she contributed to their life by helping with the harvesting, dressing skins of deer and bears, creating beautiful bead work and generously helping those in need. She did all this in spite of poor eyesight from smallpox and a severely weakened physi-

Examine Scripture for inspiration, we come across Isaiah’s conversation with his Creator: “You are our father, Lord. We are like clay and you are like the potter. You created us.” (Is. 64:8) The Divine Potter carefully blends the ingredients for all his new creations. After forming the pot into a strong, leak-proof container, he decorates it with lights and shadows to make it even more beautiful.

In the case of Kateri Tekakwitha, he provided this special vessel with her tribal spirituality and her Catholic Christian faith. Then he embellished it with light and shadow designs: the joys and sufferings of her life. Let us reflect on how these aspects of her life influenced her recently acclaimed holiness.

First, let us examine the influence of her Native heritage. Kateri’s mother, Kahenta, a devout Christian Algonquin, was captured in a Mohawk raid. Since Kahenta stood out among the captive slaves for her goodness, Kenhoronkwa, the great Mohawk chief of Ossernenon, fell in love with her. Soon he married her and adopted her into the Turquoise clan of the Mohawks. Kahenta bore him two children, first a daughter who would later be called Kateri and a baby boy. Kahenta shared her faith with her children and taught Kateri prayers and hymns. However, she had to do this secretly because the Mohawks were not friendly toward Christianity at that time.

At the age of four, Kateri suffered the loss of her whole family to a dreaded smallpox epidemic. As a good mother, Kahenta must have prayed for her children as she was dying, most likely asking the Lord that somehow they would have the grace of Baptism.

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lost her earthly mother early, the comfort of a heavenly mother was very special to her. Often she would be seen with the rosary in her hands or praying before the statue of Mary.

Meditation on the Passion of the Lord became a source of strength as Kateri endured emotional and physical suffering herself. Her simple cross shrines were visible proofs of her deep devotion. She often went to the woods to pray before the cross. There she was strengthened by uniting her own suffering with His.

Kateri needed this strength since she now suffered ridicule and abuse from her family and neighbors because of her faith. Since she would not work on Sundays, she was not allowed to eat on that day. Some refused to call her by her Christian name, and she was given the most difficult tasks to do.

Finally, when she refused to marry, the mistreatment became so intense that Kateri had to leave her village and travel secretly to a Christian village where she would be better treated. The Natives could not understand her desire to remain a virgin and dedicate herself to God alone.

In the Christian environment, Kateri spent hours in prayer at the Mission Chapel, in the woods and in her home without being persecuted. In spite of her poor health, she taught children about the Lord and helped the elderly.

Shortly after her arrival, Kateri became friends with a devout widow named Marie Therese Tegaiaguenta. They began to pray and work together. Eventually, Kateri requested permission to begin a Religious Community. Although this request was denied since she was so recent a convert, Kateri was allowed to make private vows.

In spite of the progression of her illness, Kateri continued to live a life of prayer and dedicated service to her people. Just before God took her home at age 24, she asked that the message be sent to her uncle and aunt that she loved them, thus exhibiting the Christian virtue of forgiveness in imitation of her Lord.

Kateri’s Catholic Christian faith gave her strength in adversity, a deep love of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, gratitude for His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross, the consolation of a heavenly mother, loving concern for others as her brothers and sisters and the grace to forgive.

It is recorded in the Jesuit archives that when Kateri died, the disfiguring scars from smallpox disappeared and her face was radiantly beautiful. The Divine Potter had blended the elements of Native American and Christian spiritualities with the joys and the sufferings of life to produce a magnificent spiritual vessel. This beautiful vessel was open to receive, hold and pour forth the Holy Spirit of God. This masterpiece we are now calling St. Kateri Tekakwitha.