



Homily given by
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VOTIVE MASS FOR SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA
137TH SUPREME CONVENTION OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 7, 2019

“Holiness... more urgent than ever”

Très chers frères et sœurs,
Brother Knights,
Dear brothers and sisters,

“At difficult moments in the Church’s life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit, just as Kateri Tekakwitha did here in America and so many other young people have done¹.” These words of Saint John Paul II, pronounced at World Youth Day in Toronto in 2002, continue to resonate in our hearts as we discover more and more how holiness is what our world needs today.

One of the very talented and versatile female singer and songwriter of this country, Jacque DeShannon, translated this need in beautiful lyrics that have emblazed the hearts of millions of people since it became so popular:

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some but for everyone.

¹ Saint John Paul II, *Homily*, World Youth Day, July 28, 2002, Toronto.

I'm sure that just as I was reading the words, the tune of the song must have sprung to your minds and hearts. Yes, my friends, our world and our hearts are in deep need of love and holiness, not only for some of us, but for everyone. We may rely on witnesses who have been pioneers in their time of what holiness is all about and how love can change the face of the world. Let's take a look at one of these great figures, moreover pertinent that she is one of us, from our world, our continent, our history.

Born in the State of New York in the 17th Century, a young native woman, known as the Lily of the Mohawks, is one of these beacons whose lights of holiness and love shine over us and speak of love to the entire world. Baptized at the age of 20, Kateri Tekakwitha entered in a deep and loving relationship with the Lord that made her a missionary-disciple in her family and community. She only lived for another four years before her death in the Province of Québec. She was then already considered a saint. Her courage and faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to the Christian faith, in the difficulties that prevailed at that time, inspire us to continue our own journeys despite the relentlessness and the trials that our Church and our faithful are now encountering.

Now, I am not suggesting that she became a saint because she died in Québec, but because she listened carefully to the words of Saint Paul: *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”*²

For most of us, that process of conversion and purification requires many more years, a whole lifetime in fact! The saints are wonderful examples because they allow us to see what God can do in our life if we open fully our heart to Him, when we listen carefully to His Word and live accordingly. The Gospel Acclamation of today's celebration is a phrase we need to remember: *“Blessed are they who hear the word of God and observe it.”*³

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation on holiness, Pope Francis wrote: *“We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.”*⁴ *“Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life.”*⁵

Isn't this encouraging? We can all become saints! In fact, we are all called to holiness. And don't think that it is impossible or complicated. All we need to do is be faithful to the will of God, obey His Word and follow Him. He leads the way. Remember how the Virgin Mary has been the perfect model of such humble obedience and how her response to the project of God has changed the course of history and our salvation!

The most difficult part in becoming a saint is taking the decision to let go on our pride and comfort and letting God be our Guide, our Master, our Lord. I once saw a bumper sticker that read

² Romans 12:2.

³ Luke 11:28.

⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, No. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 15.

like this: God is my co-pilot. Isn't that cute? God is my co-pilot. But then I got to thinking...: if God is my co-pilot, who's the pilot? That can be scary. I wouldn't want to be the pilot of my life and have God in the sidecar just in case I need Him. He is much more than that.

Jesus is "*the Way, the Truth and the Life*"⁶. We often pray with the 23rd Psalm with these words: « *The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I lack. He guides me along right paths* ».⁷ Beautiful words... but do we really believe them? Do we allow God to guide us? Do we pay enough attention to the Gospel and to the teaching of Christ? I don't like the following expression, but I dare use it anyway. It seems that we are sometimes considered as «cafeteria Catholics». We go through life picking the pages of the Gospel that we like and ignore what is more challenging. Pope Francis reminded us that God "*wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.*"⁸

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha's life went far beyond mediocrity. Her father was a Mohawk chief and her mother a Catholic Algonquin. She became an orphan at the age of 4 but she kept fond memories of her mother's faith and the stories she told her as a child. She was baptized at the age of 20, but while growing up, she often went to the woods to speak to God and to listen to Him in her heart. When she was 18, a Jesuit missionary priest established a chapel in her village and she became fascinated about what she heard about Jesus Christ.

Kateri became very devout and conversed intimately with the Lord in prayer. Her family didn't share her choice nor her beliefs. The social environment in which she lived was extremely difficult. It was a time of colonialism and terrible wars prevailed between the Algonquin and Iroquois Nations. Kateri suffered greatly because of her choice to live as a Christian. This made her an outcast. Her family refused her access to food on Sundays because she gave importance to prayer and thanksgiving on the Lord's day rather than working in the fields. She was threatened to torture or death if she did not renounce her faith in Jesus Christ.

So she fled her folk and traveled more than 200 miles towards Canada, through forests, rivers and swamps, to reach the Catholic Mission of Saint Francis Xavier, on the south shore of Montréal, by the Saint Lawrence River. There she was welcomed and sheltered by another native woman. She lived a life of service, prayer and gave evidence of her faith. Her motto was: Who can tell me what is most pleasing to God so I can do it?

We can certainly learn from Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native American to be canonized. Her humility and desire to obey God is a sure path to holiness.

Allow me to repeat the words of Saint John Paul II: "*At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent.*"

The moment in history we are living in is far from being easy, both in our world and in our Church. We need saints: men and women who are willing to take on the commitments of their

⁶ John 14:6.

⁷ Psalm 23:1.3.

⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, No. 1.

baptism and become missionary disciples in the midst of the world. Saint Kateri was able to radiate the joy of the Gospel in her daily life, not because it was easy but because she was filled with the Spirit of God and lived in communion with Jesus.

Brothers Knights, brothers and sisters in faith, could this be said of you and I? As we continue our journey in life, as we keep following Jesus Christ, He who is the Light of the World, let us not forget that he told his disciples: « *You are the light of the world*⁹. »

May our participation in today's liturgy, remembering this young North American saint and our participation in this 137th Supreme Convention, strengthen our faith and renew our desire to continue to live and serve the mission of the Church. That is the kind of holiness that God expects from us. Holiness is the answer to a renewed missionary Church. May the Lord finish in us what he has begun.

⁹ Matthew 5:14.