

Signpost

Kateri Circles Vol. 6 Issue 10

October



St. Tekakwitha Opening prayer:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled Your Creation with

Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our heard words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son through her short life marred by sickness, suffering and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples.

Amen

Who do we need to bring in the circle?

Who do we need to pray for:

Family members who are sick. Family members who have died. Struggles that we are facing.

Let us bring our joys and sufferings into this circle.

Direction:

Fall

West

Blue

Sin - Self Centeredness/Greed/Covertness

Fruits of the Holy Spirit - Charity/Kindness/Chasity

Gifts of the Spirit - Good Counsel

Topic:

Pastoral Framework

Part Two: A Call to Mission

A Return to Authentic Evangelization

In some parts of the world, the original process of evangelization accompanied colonization efforts. Honest missionary efforts to communicate the Gospel were often tarnished by the mistreatment of Indigenous people by settlers, colonizing powers, and even representatives of the Church. For some, this history has given rise to the idea that evangelization is just another form of oppressive colonialism.

*However, the authentic Catholic approach to evangelization is predicated on the idea that all cultures are open to the truth of the Gospel. The Catholic Church teaches that within each culture is found goodness, planted there by God for the benefit of his children as rich soil in which the Gospel can take root and bloom. As the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*,¹ enunciated:*

“Missionary activity makes Christ present, he who is the author of salvation. It purges of evil associations those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God; and it restores them to Christ their source . . . So, whatever goodness is found in the minds and hearts of men, or in the particular customs and cultures of peoples, far from being lost is purified, raised to a higher level and reaches its perfection, for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon, and the happiness of men. (AG, 9)

“The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices; as it likewise strongly defends the right that no one should be frightened away from the faith by unjust persecutions. (AG, 13)

And also, “[the Church desires to] carefully consider how traditions of asceticism and contemplation, the seeds of which have been sown by God in certain ancient cultures before the preaching of the Gospel, might be incorporated into the Christian religious life.” (AG, 17)

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, December 7, 1965.

Centuries before the Second Vatican Council's constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Vatican instruction Varietates Legitimae addressed inculturation,² Spanish Dominican Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas (1488-1566) advocated to religious and secular authorities to promote the dignity and rights of Native peoples. As a young man, Las Casas traveled to the West Indies, where he was revolted to witness the exploitation and physical abuse Indigenous Peoples suffered under Spanish conquerors. After undergoing a personal conversion, he gave up his own extensive land holdings and slaves and then returned to Spain repeatedly to petition the Spanish Crown to pass laws against the physical abuses of the Indigenous.³

The concepts Las Casas developed were revolutionary for his time. He promoted and publicly defended the inherent dignity of Indigenous Peoples, spoke against the exploitive heart of colonialism, and called for enculturating the Gospel through a peaceful, Christlike invitation rather than through forced conversion. Drawing upon the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and Plato, Las Casas promoted a natural law basis for human rights that eventually found its way into the political systems of many nations.

Las Casas's ideas have taken centuries to influence nations. But God has always found ways, in the meantime, to affirm the dignity of Indigenous peoples and their receptivity to the Gospel when it is presented as an invitation. In 1531, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared as an Indigenous woman to an Indigenous man, St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, near present-day Mexico City, signaling that God embraces all his children, regardless of skin color, culture, or

² See Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), December 4, 1963, no. 123, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Varietates Legitimae* (Fourth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy, Nos. 37-40), March 29, 1994.

³ See *The Pivotal Players Complete Special Edition*, episode 12, "Bartolomé de las Casas (2020)" (Washington, DC: Word on Fire Publishing, 2020), DVD.

station in life. Through Our Lady of Guadalupe and through St. Juan Diego's testimony, millions of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas were led to embrace Catholicism. They were attracted to the faith because the Mother of God conveyed the message that God sees them, loves them, and wants them to thrive in this world and in the world to come.

Another saint whose life demonstrated the power of the Gospel to bloom in Native soil is St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Indigenous woman of the Americas to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. St. Kateri was born in 1656 in what today is upstate New York, just nine years after the Jesuits St. Isaac Jogues, St. John de Brébeuf, and their companions were martyred by Iroquois warriors. Orphaned by smallpox, which also scarred her severely and left her partially blind, St. Kateri was baptized into the Catholic Church at age nineteen against the desires of her adoptive family.

The experience brought St. Kateri closer to Christ but estranged her from her Indigenous family, many of whom associated Catholicism with oppressive French colonialism. Yet the young woman remained faithful to Christ, and to those who mistreated her she returned only love. Today, many Indigenous Catholics across the United States face similar crosses. Like St. Kateri, they strive to maintain their faith amid family members and a wider Tribal community who resent the Church due to past sins against their people. St. Kateri is a guide who can help Native Peoples meet profound suffering by seeking God's will through faith in Jesus Christ, connecting to his Church, and forgiving their persecutors.

We celebrate many other examples of Indigenous Peoples who willingly embraced the Gospel when missionaries offered it to them. Across these lands—from the Apalachee in Florida to the Yup'ik in Alaska, from the Mohawk in New York State to the Tohono O'odham in Arizona to the Osage in Oklahoma and the mission Indians of California—many Indigenous Peoples

welcomed missionaries and received the Gospel with joy. In the 1800s, the Salish of Montana sent four delegations to St. Louis, Missouri, asking for more “Black Robes.” Many other Tribes requested Catholic missionaries. Since the beginning of the Church’s missionary efforts here, Indigenous Peoples of these lands have recognized the truth of Jesus Christ and embraced his Church.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ad Gentes, Pope St. John Paul II wrote his encyclical Redemptoris Missio, in which he insisted that God fertilized every culture with sufficient beauty, goodness, and truth to receive the Gospel.⁴ Consequently, Indigenous Peoples have a right to be evangelized in and through their own cultures, in ways that respect their unique “nature and genius.” This inculturation of faith will organically transform Indigenous communities over time.

Ad Gentes encouraged Indigenous Catholics to “give expression to this newness of life in the social and cultural framework of their own homeland, according to their own national traditions. They must be acquainted with this culture; they must heal it and preserve it; they must develop it in accordance with modern conditions, and finally perfect it in Christ, so that the Faith of Christ and the life of the Church are no longer foreign to the society in which they live, but begin to permeate and to transform it.”⁵

Commentary:

In this section of the Pastoral, the document begins with a look at historical missionaries and holy men and women that have shaped Catholic Native ministry. It is also an examination of what true and authentic missionary activity is like. The most important foundation of proclaiming the Word of God is a deep and abiding respect to that one minister with. Without the respect, then the missionary might fall into the trap of the for cultural superiority. This theme is also woven

throughout the rest of the document. There is a positive tone set by the introductory chapters that proclaim Native Catholic as a great gift to the Church, not a burden, problem, or need changing. The celebration of this giftedness is a celebration of all the Church.

The proclamation of the Word of God is both the duty of the missionary, today and in the past, but is also the duty of those who receive it, to embrace it and share it. Great missionaries have three things in common. They know that the Holy Spirit has gone before them, they are always in dialogue, and they come from the attitude of a servant.

Discussion Questions for the Pastoral Framework:

- 1) What can missionaries both in the past and modern about our faith?
- 2) In what ways to I proclaim the Gospel?
- 3) In what ways do I tell the stories of missionaries?
- 4) What people in my life have given me the gift of faith?

Discussion Questions for the Church and Indian Country Podcast:

Closing prayer:

From the Black and Indian Mission Office:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled your creation with Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our hearts words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant, the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ, to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son throughout her short life marked by sickness, suffering, and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples. May she who sought our Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lead up to similar reverences for the Eucharist so that, like Saint Kateri, our last words may be, “Jesus, I love You.” Amen.

Notice:

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Rev. Mike Carson