



July 14, 2020  
Memorial of  
**St. Kateri Tekakwitha**  
*Lily of the Mohawks*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

You know some of her history. Born in a Mohawk village in Auriesville, Kateri Tekakwitha was the first Native American to be canonized. Perhaps you remember that there was a nice contingent from the North Country and St. Regis parish in Akwesasne that attended the canonization ceremony in Rome back in 2012.

Did you know that this saint from our neck of the woods contracted smallpox in an epidemic in the 1600s? Her parents and younger brother died from the epidemic and her face was scarred. This woman, so much in love with God, had an urgent desire to visit the sick and receive the Eucharist. Members of her family and community were violently opposed to her conversion to the Catholic faith. Minutes after her death, her facial scars vanished and her face appeared radiant.

I thought that today, the Feast Day of the Lily of the Mohawks, would be an appropriate occasion to share these thoughts. Like St. Kateri, we know first-hand the worries, the uncertainty, and the suffering caused by a horrific disease that continues to haunt us. Let me begin by first assuring you of my continuing prayers for you and your loved ones. We pray for those who have tested positive with the virus, those who are currently suffering from it, and we ask God to look kindly upon loved ones who have succumbed to the COVID-19 virus. We are mindful of individuals who have suffered the death of a loved one and were unable to celebrate a Funeral Mass with everyone who desired to attend. It's been heartbreaking. Of course, our hard-working healthcare workers are in our prayers, as well.

As you know, our parish life has been particularly affected. Our churches are now open, albeit, with noticeable changes. I am so grateful to our pastors, staff and parishioners who worked hard to implement guidelines and introduce liturgical adaptations to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Thank you for cooperating with the measures we have taken to provide a safe environment in which to gather for public worship.

My sisters and brothers, now is the time to come back to Mass. Now is the time for healthy adults and children to reengage with your parish family. We are a Eucharistic people. Of course, we need to observe all the guidelines that have been issued. We don't want to risk setting back the progress we have made.

With that in mind, we know we don't social distance Jesus. He is essential! Please contact your parish office to confirm Mass times in your parish, both daily and Sunday Masses. Also, inform your pastor if someone desires a home visit, seeks to celebrate the Anointing of the Sick or wants to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, but is unable to come to Church. It is crucial that we tend to our ministerial life, as best we can, while observing the precautions, and help refuel our parishes so that they are running on all sacramental, liturgical, and pastoral cylinders. I am humbled and grateful for your remarkable financial support of your Church during these uncertain and worrisome times. Your faith and your support are so inspiring!

Some of our parishioners have underlying health conditions or are of a vulnerable age where the prudent decision might be to remain at home for the foreseeable future. In these cases, I continue to dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. The Sunday 8:00am Masses will continue to be livestreamed from St. Mary's Cathedral.

Let us continue to pray for each other as we seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and St. Kateri for healing and peace in this time of trial and testing. See you in Church!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley  
Bishop of Ogdensburg