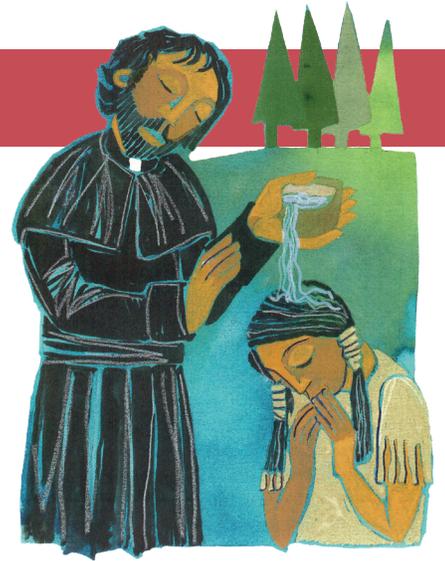


The Maiden Who Finally Found a Home



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha's life is known through a combination of journals written by Jesuit missionaries and stories told and retold by admirers. She blended the Native American ways of her people with the Christian teaching of the Blackrobes (Jesuits). Kateri Tekakwitha was a young woman of strength, faith, and courage. She overcame much adversity to belong to the Christian family.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Who makes you feel safe and "at home"? Why? Where is your true home? Why?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long time ago, a young girl was a member of the Algonquin nation, Native Americans from Quebec. She was captured by a band of warriors from the Mohawk tribe. She was going to become a slave. Instead, one of the young warriors, a chief, fell in love with her and took her as his wife. This young Algonquin woman had been baptized and raised as a Catholic while still in Canada. She continued to live as a follower of Jesus in her new home, a village in the state of New York.

The woman had two children, a son and a daughter. She wanted to have them baptized as well, but could not. Maybe her husband did not want the children to become Catholic. The Mohawks had their own beliefs and practices, and the Christian way often contradicted them. As a chief, it was his responsibility to lead his people, both in peace and in war. He would have wanted to defend the ways of his nation, and the Mohawks were very powerful and proud.

One sad year a terrible plague struck the Mohawk village. This disease, smallpox, caused many deaths. The chief died, and his wife and children became ill soon after. Only the four year-old daughter survived the sickness. She did so with scars on her face and limited eyesight. Her appearance kept her in the shadows of her village. And since strong daylight hurt her eyes, she often walked holding her arms out in front of herself. Her name became Tekakwitha, which means “one who advances and who casts something before her.”

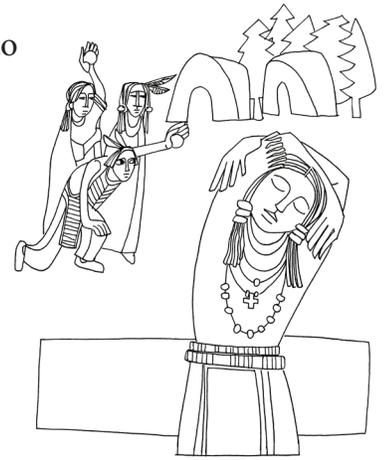
Tekakwitha was adopted by her uncle, another chieftain. Her uncle had no children, so Tekakwitha soon proved herself to be valuable. “I will take care of getting the wood for tonight’s dinner,” she would often suggest to her aunt. Then off she would go into the woods to gather the firewood and stones for cooking. Tekakwitha loved these times by herself. She would work and think and enjoy the silence of the forest.

One day, some missionaries came to the village. These men were priests and members of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. The Mohawks welcomed them with great hospitality. They stayed with Tekakwitha’s family while trying to rebuild a mission that had been destroyed in a war years before.

Tekakwitha served them with the same dignity and quietness that she showed her own family. She watched them as they prayed together and as they taught the members of the tribe who were already baptized. “How long are you staying?” she asked them.

“Only three days this visit,” one of the priests responded. “We have much to do to begin rebuilding the mission.”

Tekakwitha already knew what she really wanted to ask. She wanted to be baptized and to become one of the Christians in her tribe. But three days would not be long enough for her to be taught and prepared. So she patiently continued to serve her family and longed for the day when she could learn more about this Jesus.



The next set of missionaries came and left. Still another set of missionaries came and left, but Tekakwitha never asked to be baptized.

Her uncle, the chief, did not like or trust the Christians. “They take our young away from us to other lands. They make them forget the ways of our people,” he reminded Tekakwitha.

Something inside of Tekakwitha wanted to be both a good member of her tribe and a member of the Catholic mission. She believed that God wanted her to live in both worlds and serve all people. So, even though she was afraid of her uncle, she watched for a chance to speak to one of the priests.

One Jesuit, Father Jacques, loved the Mohawk people. He spoke their language fluently and lived among them for many years. He often passed by Tekakwitha’s cabin, but was never invited in.

Father Jacques also knew how the chief felt about the Christians. Yet one afternoon, the missionary walked by the chief’s cabin and then paused. “It looks like no one is home, but perhaps I will try to stop by anyway.” Father Jacques wasn’t sure why he wanted to go back. When he did get to the cabin, however, Tekakwitha was home. She had injured her foot and was unable to work with her uncle and aunts that day.

For Tekakwitha, this was the answer to her prayers. She greeted the priest warmly and opened her heart to him. “I have for so long listened to you and other Christians speak about your faith. I have tried to live a good life as part of my family and my nation. I now want also to live as a part of your family and nation, the followers of Jesus.”

Father Jacques was impressed by Tekakwitha’s intelligence and passion. He agreed to instruct her. A year later, on Easter Sunday, he baptized Tekakwitha. Her Christian name was Catherine, Kateri in her language. She was twenty years old when her dream finally came true.

Not everyone felt as Kateri did. Not everyone thought she could be both Mohawk and Catholic. Some members of her tribe tried to change her mind. Her uncle and her aunts threatened and pleaded with her. One young warrior, furious because Kateri did not marry as most young women did, came to her while she was sewing beads. “Christian,” he shouted at her with a war hatchet in his hand, “turn away from your beliefs or die.”



Kateri sat calmly sewing. Her people had always valued courage and dignity. She would accept even death rather than betray either the Mohawk or the

Christian ways. Her attacker was so startled by her strength that he left her and never bothered her again.

Kateri eventually had to leave her tribe because the priests feared for her life. Two men helped her slip away and escape to Canada, where her mother had been baptized. There she joined a community of Catholic Native Americans. She still had moments of suffering and struggle, but she also found the family she so desired. Kateri was a wonderful addition to this community. Her tribal dignity and her Christian faith blended together in service to God. But her health, never very good, failed her. She died there, in the midst of her friends, when she was only twenty-four years old.

In these four years between her baptism and her death, Kateri touched many lives. She prayed constantly and never complained of her own pain. She reached out with love even when others hated and abused her.

Kateri Tekakwitha showed us that God loves all people, all cultures. Baptism in Jesus joins us with each other as well as with God.

The desire to belong is very strong in us. We want to know we are loved and we want to love others. When the Spirit is with us, we truly belong. In this Spirit, we are able to build communities of respect, patience and courage.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. Why was it so hard for Kateri to be baptized?
3. Have you ever wanted something as much as Kateri wanted to belong to the Christian family? What happened?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page (the answers are on page 8). Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: Belonging to a faith community gives us support and strength.

If, as we've already discussed, it is risky to talk about God, then it is even more scary to do what God wants us to do. But the Spirit makes sure we are never alone. Belonging to God and to the Church means we *have* a home and *are* a home for others, just like Kateri. There is challenge in following Jesus' Spirit, but there is safety and assurance as well.

A Short but Rich Life

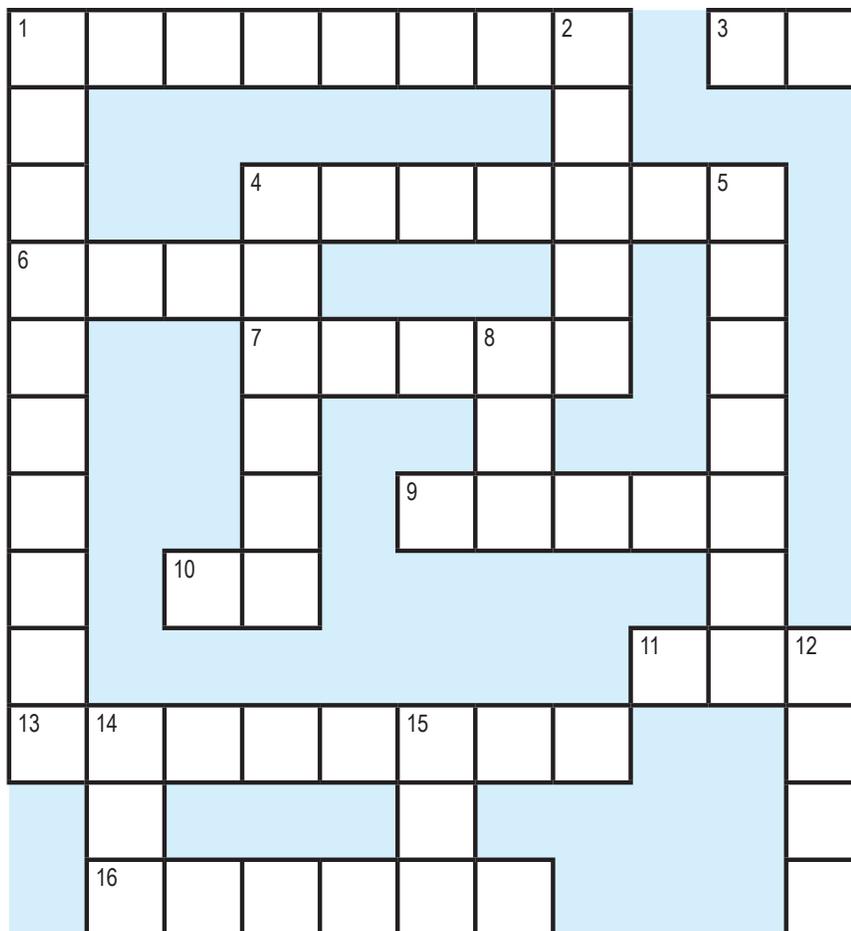
Kateri did not live long, but we still remember her today. She lived a life of great love for the Spirit. The crossword puzzle below has many words from her life. See how many you remember from your reading!

ACROSS

1. Kateri Tekakwitha wanted very much to be ____
3. Short for New York
4. Father ____ baptized Kateri.
6. The missionaries ____ and left too quickly to baptize Kateri at first.
7. Kateri was left with many ____ after her illness.
9. Her ____ was the chief.
10. Kateri wanted to feel ____ home somewhere.
11. What we use to see
13. The disease that killed Kateri's family
16. Kateri's tribe

DOWN

1. What the Mohawks called the missionaries
2. Musical instruments
4. A member of the Society of Jesus
5. An organized body of people (Hint: look at #4 down.)
8. To move quickly
12. A popular breakfast food
14. The member of Kateri's family who was Catholic
15. Seat in a church



Welcome Home!

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

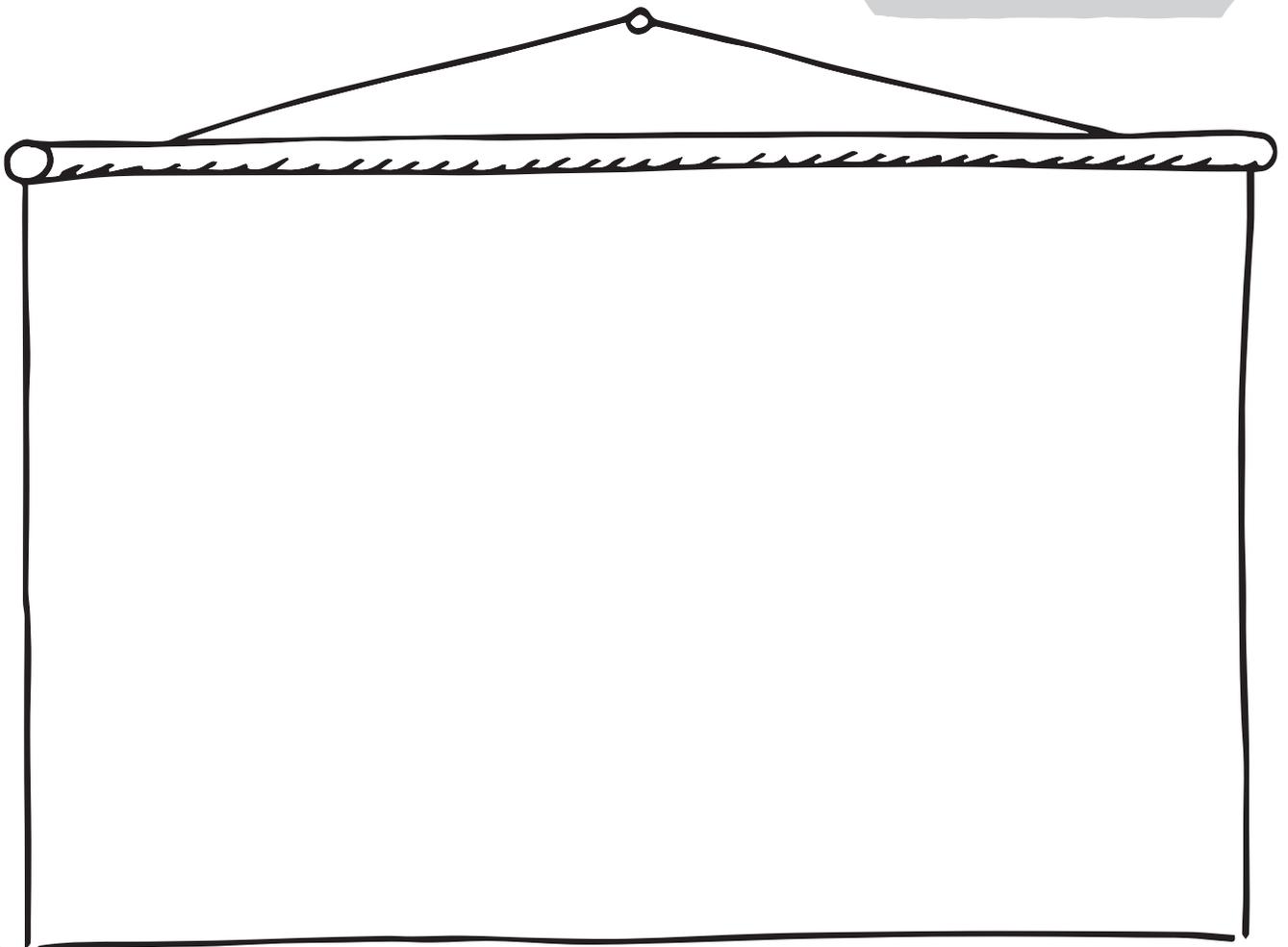
Just for you: Some churches have a “Homecoming” or “Welcome” Sunday. This is a time when parishioners who have moved away, left the church for a time, and those still seeking a Church family are warmly invited to attend.

Pretend your church is having a “Welcome” Sunday and you are in charge of designing a banner for the front door. Consider how you would answer the questions below.

3

- What is especially good (unique, valuable) about your church?
- How do the people in your church make others feel welcome?
- Why is it important for us as Christians to be a welcoming community?

Once your child has completed the activity, design your banner together. Remember, a banner has only a few words on it and uses color and design to catch the eye.



Finally Finding a Home

Kateri Tekakwitha struggled with wanting to belong and to feel at home. Eventually she found a place where she was welcomed.

Think about some words and actions that make people feel welcome. Then place these words or actions in the puzzle below, using one of the letters in the word WELCOME in each phrase. The letters may be used at the beginning, middle or end of the phrase. (For example, "hoW are you?" or "sMile.")

_____ ho**W** are you? _____
_____ **E** _____
_____ **L** _____
_____ **C** _____
_____ **O** _____
_____ s**M**ile _____
_____ **E** _____

_____ **W** _____
_____ **E** _____
_____ **L** _____
_____ **C** _____
_____ **O** _____
_____ **M** _____
_____ **E** _____

