

Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700)

A missionary with an apostle's heart and the precursor of a new people



ILLUSTRATION: Anne Marie Forest

The sixth child in a family of twelve, Marguerite was born in 1620 and grew up in Troyes, France. At the age of 20 she perceived, through a mystical experience, the burgeoning sprout of the incredible mission that awaited her. Something had changed within her; she felt transformed, as if under the effect of an unction. The young woman had no idea that she would witness a “visionary” intuition and that she would have to work so that she might open the path of knowledge to an unborn world. In fact, she would give her life for the edification of a new people that emerged: the French-Canadian society.

A builder's soul

In October 1640, after joining a procession in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, young Marguerite felt within her the beginnings of the Lord's call. While observing the statue of the Virgin Mary, she felt moved and then renewed by a grace of total surrender to God's will.

Marguerite took the first step in this process of total surrender by entering an association for young girls, which was dedicated to the education of children in the poorest neighborhoods of Troyes. As part of her commitment, she took a vow of chastity. One day, after she had discovered the existence of a newly founded city named Ville-Marie (Montréal), the Virgin Mary revealed herself to her once again. This revelation was an authentication of her call to leave everything behind and migrate to New France.

In 1652, a concrete sign affirmed her vocation. Marguerite met the Sieur de Maisonneuve, the founder and governor of New France, who was looking for a lay teacher. This person would need to be independent and willing to instruct, free, the children of the French settlers and the Amerindians. She did not hesitate to take up the challenge; she left Troyes without possessions, but filled with hope, because she knew that she had the support of the Virgin Mary. She arrived in Montréal at the end of a difficult journey that lasted nine months. She was 33 years old.

Marguerite, recognizing the needs of the youth of New France, undertook the establishment of an educational system. This inspirationally pious woman quickly became a pillar of New France, the keystone of the colony. This community grew, little by little, thanks to the foundations she built. She opened a boarding school as well as a housekeeping school that provided for the education of children and the training of young “Filles du Roy,” who were destined to become accomplished housewives. She also established the Bonsecours Chapel, a religious institute that is not cloistered, all the while making a fervent contribution to the instruction of young Amerindians.

Marguerite Bourgeoys died in Montréal, on January 12, 1700. She is considered the cofounder of Montréal (along with Jeanne Mance). Renowned for her great sanctity, she is also recognized as the cofounder of the Church in Canada. Beatified in 1950 by Pope Pius XII, she was canonized on October 31, 1982, by Pope John Paul II.

Brother Silvan



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Blessed Catherine of Saint-Augustine (1632-1668)

Shining star in the firmament of the third millennium

Catherine of Longpré was a teenager when she embraced within her heart, the call of God to renounce everything and consecrate herself to an unusual mission. She immediately revealed her response in a fervent and fulgurating manner. Then, she distinguished herself through a loving and mystical repartee, which took the form of a mysterious odyssey that marked the history of our country forever in the middle of the 17th century. Catherine disembarked in the wilderness, she was only 16 years old and she was already participating joyfully in laying the foundations of the Canadian Church.

God puts the finishing touches to his instrument

Catherine was born on May 3, 1632, in France, in the region of Normandy. Born into a large family, she was entrusted to her maternal grandparents, who were strongly animated by faith, committed with the sick and the poor. Thus, at a very young age, she immersed herself of the neighbourly love and she grew in virtue, already very attentive to God's will. The spirit of the Lord grew within her, an immeasurable love for the Eucharist and the Church, which led her to answer her vocation to serve God.

Committed in a deep relationship with God, therefore, the young girl rapidly went through the steps that led her to give her life to the mission. In 1646, her amazing adventure started when she entered into a spiritual battle that never ceased until her death. Since then, after a few months of tumultuous interior "deliberations," in a battle with the most subtle human ties, which like a thorn, persisted in hindering her path, Catherine overcame the mourning of the world's vanity. She asked and received the permission to join the Community of the Augustines Hospitalières de l'Hôtel-Dieu of Bayeux, where she took the habit, rooted more than ever to the Listening prayer while waiting for another imminent step to take.

A novice in the cloister, the young and candid sister convinced her superiors to allow her to go and assist the Hospitalières of Québec, who were out of resources. She pronounced her solemn vows the day after her 16th birthday, took the name of Mary-Catherine of Saint-Augustine, then, undertook a long and dangerous journey through the Atlantic, to which she miraculously survived.

On the colonized land, the tremendous ordeals came one after another in a rigorous climate, in the middle of an Amerindian tribal war and under the threat of martyrdom. Suffering from a precarious health, but intrepid and peaceful, favoured by the most extraordinary mystical graces, Catherine of Saint-Augustine, nursed tirelessly, evangelized, directed and built, impassioned by an indescribable love for the Church and for the people in her adopted country. With a heart overflowing with radiant joy, attired with sanctity, she surrendered her soul to God, on May 8, 1668, at the age of 36.

Pope John Paul II proclaimed her as "Blessed," on April 23, 1989, and the process of canonization is in progress.

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Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680) Inspirational Model of the New Evangelization



ILLUSTRATION: Anne Marie Forest

In the 17th century, during the colonization of America, a young and gentle Algonquin named Kateri Tekakwitha came to know Jesus Christ. Deeply moved by his love, she devoted herself entirely to Him, and by so doing, incurred the wrath of her community. Nevertheless, she became a radiant witness of the Gospel, an unwitting missionary among her family. The intrepid Kateri pursued her singular vocation under the influence of the Holy Spirit until her very last breath. Her brief but memorable life on earth revealed a spiritual journey rich in intensity.

Second Patroness of the Missionary Church

Kateri, born in 1656, grew up in an Iroquois village named Ossernenon near the banks of the Mohawk River. This hamlet, located in the state of New York, is now called Auriesville. Kateri's father was a Mohawk leader who was hostile to Christianity; her mother was a convert to Catholicism. It was from her that Kateri developed a taste for prayer. Kateri became almost blind after a deadly outbreak of smallpox that killed her parents and brother. Afterwards, her aunt and her uncle adopted her.

It was through meetings with the Jesuit missionaries that Kateri, at the age of 10, felt a deep calling from God. Over the next decade, she received the sacraments of baptism and communion. During that long period of waiting, Kateri's relationship with God deepened, edified through her exemplary purity and charity towards everyone. However, she continued to experience continued violent persecution from those around her.

When Kateri was 20 years old, she was baptized. Her family rejected her and Kateri was banned from the village. The Jesuit fathers who had played such an important role in her faith formation took her under their protection. One day, she fled 200 miles from her hometown to the Catholic Mission of Saint-Francis-Xavier, located near Montréal—on the current territory of Kahnawake—where she continued her Christian formation. She immersed herself in a life of asceticism devoted to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Kateri was only 24 when, already elevated to sanctity, she succumbed to tuberculosis. The virtuous testimony of her life, the favours and miracles granted through her intercession, earned her the designation of “protector of Canada” by Pope Benedict XVI, who canonized her on October 21, 2012. Thus, she became the first Aboriginal saint in North America. In 1983, during her beatification, Pope John Paul named her the “second patroness of the Missionary Church” (behind Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus), because her young life was a model of sanctity and heroic courage in pursuing her faith vocation while remaining faithful to her aboriginal identity.

Brother Siloan



Venerable Délia Tétreault (1865-1941)

A dream within the heart

During this month of October, which is dedicated to the mission, the Synod of Bishops on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” will take place in Rome. These two events blend well together, especially when one considers the life and work of Délia Tétreault, founder of the first female missionary community in America. She is a real missionary disciple and witness of the Church that goes forth!

An emerging vocation

Délia Tétreault was born on February 4, 1865, in Sainte-Marie-de-Monnoir (Mariville), Québec. From an early age, she took refuge in the attic to read the Annals of the Holy Childhood and the Propagation of the Faith. One night, she had a significant dream in which she saw a large wheat field whose ears turned into the heads of unbeliever children from different nationalities.

Délia sought her vocation. After entering the Congregation of the Grey Nuns of Saint-Hyacinthe at 18 years old, her calling became clearer: “One evening, it seemed to me that Our Lord told me to found a community of missionaries and to contribute to the foundation of a seminary similar to the one in Paris.” Unfortunately, an epidemic forced her to leave. When she was 26, she joined the Béthanie community centre in Montréal; she devoted herself to the poor, the sick, and immigrants for 10 years. Her missionary dream still pursued her. Some eminent people encouraged and guided her.

A dream that takes off

In 1902, Délia Tétreault founded an apostolic school that became the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. This mission was an expression of her gratitude for the grace-filled love of God for all peoples as demonstrated through the work of the various mission societies. Many young girls shared her dream. In 1909, a first departure to China took place; other countries would follow. Needing support for her mission, she sought the collaboration of the laity.

While prioritizing mission work abroad, missionary animation in Canada was also part of her vision. From 1906, she collaborated with the Pontifical Mission Societies. In 1917, she was officially entrusted with the revival of the “Holy Childhood” in the diocese of Montréal (other dioceses would follow), and in 1918, the one of the Propagation of Faith. This year marks its 100th anniversary! Believing in the power of communications at the service of the mission, she launched the missionary magazine *Le Précurseur* (1920). Who has not received a visit from the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in their parish or school?

A last addition to her dream... Discreetly, she played a decisive role in the foundation of the Society of Foreign Missions of Québec, by the bishops in 1921!

On October 1, 1941, she died. The headlines in the newspapers said: “A saint has just died!” In 1997, she was proclaimed as VENERABLE; her cause of beatification and canonization is still in progress.

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