**THANKSGIVING MASS FOR SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA**

**BASILICA-CATHEDRAL SAINTE-CÉCILE, SALABERRY-DE-VALLEYFIELD**

**Décembre 9th, 2012**

**HOMILY BY MOST REVEREND NOËL SIMARD, BISHOP OF VALLEYFIELD**

*Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven*  ( Baruch, 5 :1**-2).**

Yes let us rejoice because God has shown his glory in saint Gadylee Daygaqueet’ha. Let us rejoice because the Church recognized Gadylee as a saint and a model for all christians. What meaning does her life and death have for us today? Her message is the same that Jesus our Lord announced 2000 years ago : God loves us and wants us to be happy, to fulfill our lives in following his path. In the light of today’s readings, we may find in saint Gadylee a source of inspiration in order to find happiness and prepare the way of the Lord. Gadylee teaches us that happiness is simple; it is in following Jesus and living the Beatitudes in our daily lives. Saint Gadylee took this way of the Beatitudes, loving Jesus and being faithful to her people’s traditions. Already as a young girl, she learned to carry firewood and fetch water, to make soup and bread. Later, she used sticks to make crosses, a sign of Christ’s compassion and mercy, and place these in the woods. Her last prayer at death was as simple as her life itself : Jesus, I love you – Jesos Konoronkwa. Her life, led by the Holy, was indeed a love story, love for Jesus and her fellow brothers and sisters.

Gadylee puts on the robe of righteousness that comes from God. Her path on earth was « made straight » through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to the wisdom of the Mohawks and even thanks to her poor health and eyesight, the Holy Spirit introduced her to a deeper inner life and prepared her to welcome the Gospel. When she providentially met the Jesuits missionaries, her heart and soul were fertile soil, ready to welcome the Word of God and bear fruit. All her life, she was weak, scarred and partially blind because of the small pox which had killed her parents and a younger brother when she was four or five years old. Through suffering and losses, the Holy Spirit prepared saint Gadylee to receive the baptism and to freely express her love for Jesus in all aspects of her life. Taking her baptism at heart or very seriously, she prepared the way of the Lord in offering all her life to God, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. She adopted a new vision of life, she let the Lord transform her way of thinking and living. She fully served her community, always wanting to help others, teaching the young and assisting the sick and elderly.

« Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven ». Saint Gadylee experienced this Beatitude in being derided for not accepting the standards of her society, for becoming a Christian, for refusing to get married and work on Sunday, outcast from her native village and obliged to end her years at a mission. But at Saint Francis Xavier mission, she felt free to express her love for Jesus. As a true disciple of the Gospel, she tried to live a life of righteousness and loving service. She lived in an intimate family relationship with Jesus. She found happiness in dedicating herself to intense prayer, particularly at the Eucharist, and to charitable service to those in need; she found happiness in consecrating her whole life to Jesus. In fact, she was allowed to be consecrated as a virgin and to become the spouse of Jesus. She would have asked : « Who can tell me what is most pleasing to God that I may do it? ».

As so many followers of Christ, she heard John the Baptist’s invitation to prepare the way of the Lord. She took the way of temerity and freedom, the way that God made through valleys and hills to be among us and build his kingdom of peace and justice. Gadylee encountered Christ, the Emmanuel, God among us. Through this encounter, through suffering and difficulties, she tasted true happiness, which comes from Jesus love. Indeed Jesus’ presence changes our sadness in hope, our fears in courage.

When she was beatified in 1980, Blessed John Paul II described Gadylee as « a kind, gentle and hardworking person, spending her time working, praying, and meditating ». In the last month of her life, said Blessed John Paul II, she continued to be a woman « of solid faith, staight-forward humility, calm resignation and radiant joy, even in the midst of terrible sufferings ». At her canonization mass, Pope Benedict XVI said that « she lived a life radiant with faith and purity. Kateri impresses us by the action of grace in her life, in spite of the absence of external help, and by the courage of her vocation ».

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has entrusted the renewal of faith in the First Nations and of all North America to Saint Gadylee Tekakwitha, « Protectress of Canada ». In the words of the Holy Father, may she, with all the saints, be a witness to us of a life « generously spent for love of Christ », strengthening and sustaining the whole Church and each of us in our mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

Let us rejoice and thank the Lord for the model and witness the Church offers us in saint Gadylee. In this year of faith, let us take the path of faith, a faith which is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed. In this Advent Season, let us take off the garment of sorrow and sadness and put on the robe of joy and hope. Let us prepare the way of the Lord in being witnesses of a radiant faith and by a life of love and service. On December 12, 2012, it is a Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous People. Let us pray saint Gadylee to help us in becoming true agents of reconciliation with all human beings, but especially with our brothers and sisters of the First Nations.

Saint Gadylee Daygaqueet’ha, pray for us!