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A group of sisters wearing white laugh as they stand in front of Pope Francis

Pope Francis shares a laugh with a group of nuns at the end of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Aug. 30, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Like St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native North American woman to be canonized, all Christians must embrace their unique call to service of God and neighbor as well as the personal crosses that come with it, Pope Francis said.

"The life of Kateri Tekakwitha shows us that every challenge can be overcome if we open our hearts to Jesus, who gives us the grace we need," the pope said during his weekly general audience Aug. 30. Continuing a series on zeal for evangelization, he centered his talk on the example of the Native American saint canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

A 17th-century Algonquin Mohawk born in present-day New York State, St. Kateri converted to Catholicism at 19 after her family died in a smallpox epidemic that left her face scarred and her vision impaired. In addition to her physical challenges, the "misunderstandings, persecutions and even death threats she suffered following her baptism" gave St. Kateri a "great love for the cross, the definitive sign of Christ's love," the pope said.

"Bearing witness to the Gospel does not only concern what is pleasing," Francis said. "We must also know how to carry our daily crosses with patience, faith and hope."

"Patience is a great Christian virtue; one who is not patient is not a good Christian," he said, underscoring the need for "patience to tolerate challenges, but also to tolerate others who are sometimes tedious or put you in difficulty."

After seeking refuge in a Jesuit mission in nearby Montreal, St. Kateri participated in the spiritual life of the community while teaching children and caring for the sick and elderly.

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"Faith is always expressed in service," the pope said, putting aside his text. "Faith is not meant to be makeup for oneself or for the soul; no, it's for service."

St. Kateri realized her desire to serve the church by resisting efforts to force her to marry, and eventually making a vow of perpetual virginity in 1679, the pope said.

"Of course, not all are called to make the same vow as Kateri; still, all Christians are called each day to commit themselves with an undivided heart to the vocation and mission entrusted to them by God, serving him and neighbor is a spirit of charity," Francis said.

St. Kateri's life, he said, shows that "apostolic zeal entails both a vital union with Jesus nourished with prayer and the sacraments and a desire to diffuse the beauty of the Christian message through fidelity to one's particular vocation."

"Let us not forget each of us is called to sainthood, to everyday sainthood, to the sainthood of ordinary Christian life; each one of us has this calling," he said.