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Pope proclaims seven new saints, including St. Kateri, St. Marianne

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Oct. 22, 2012
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Proclaiming seven new saints -- including St. Kateri Tekakwitha and St. Marianne Cope from North America -- Pope Benedict XVI said they are examples to the world of total dedication to Christ and tireless service to others.

In a revised canonization rite Sunday, the pope prayed for guidance that the church would not "err in a matter of such importance" as he used his authority to state that the seven are with God in heaven and can intercede for people on earth.

An estimated 80,000 pilgrims from the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Italy, Spain, Germany and Madagascar filled St. Peter's Square for the canonization of the holy women and men who ministered among their people.

The pilgrims applauded the proclamation of the new saints, who included: Kateri, an American Indian who was born in the United States and died in Canada in 1680; Mother Marianne, a Sister of St. Joseph who traveled from Syracuse, N.Y., to Hawaii to care for people with Hansen's disease and died in Molokai in 1918; and Pedro Calungsod, a teenaged Philippine catechist who was martyred in Guam in 1672.

The other new saints are: French Jesuit Fr. Jacques Berthieu, martyred in Madagascar in 1896; Italian Fr. Giovanni Battista Piamarta, founder of religious orders, who died in 1913; Sr. Carmen Salles Barangueras, founder of a Spanish religious order, who died in 1911; and Anna Schaffer, a lay German woman, who died in 1925.

In his homily at Mass following the canonization, Pope Benedict prayed that the example of the new saints would "speak today to the whole church" and that their intercession would strengthen the church in its mission to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

The pope also spoke about each new saint individually, giving a short biographical outline and highlighting a special characteristic of each for Catholics today.

Pope Benedict called St. Kateri the "protectress of Canada and the first Native American saint," and he entrusted to her "the renewal of the faith in the First Nations and in all of North America."

The daughter of a Mohawk father and Algonquin Christian mother, St. Kateri was "faithful to the traditions of her people," but also faithful to the Christianity she embraced at age 20. "May her example help us to live where we are, loving Jesus without denying who we are," the pope said.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia, who is of American Indian descent, told Catholic News Service, "I think many young people today are embarrassed about embracing the Catholic faith because they live in a secular culture that's hostile toward religious experience."

St. Kateri also "grew up in a place where there was great hostility toward Christianity," Chaput said, but she resisted all efforts to turn her away from her faith, "so in some ways she would be a model of fidelity in the face of persecution on religious freedom grounds."

Archbishop Gerald Cyprien Lacroix of Quebec told CNS that the canonization of the first aboriginal of North America is "huge for us." St. Kateri, he said, is an excellent model for young people of "living a simple life, faithful to the Lord in the midst of hostility."

St. Kateri's life and canonization show that "saints don't have to do extraordinary things, they just have to love," Lacroix said.

Francine Merasty, 32, a Cree who lives in Pelican Narrows, Saskatchewan, said, "Kateri inspires me because she's an aboriginal woman. According to sociologists, aboriginal women are at the lowest (social) strata, and for the church to raise up to the communion of saints an aboriginal woman is so awesome and wonderful."

Jake Finkbonner, the 12-year-old boy from Washington state whose healing was accepted as the miracle needed for St. Kateri's canonization, received Communion from the pope during the Mass. Jake's parents and two sisters did, as well.

Speaking about St. Marianne of Molokai in his homily, Pope Benedict said that a time when very little could be done to treat people with Hansen's disease, commonly called leprosy, "Marianne Cope showed the highest love, courage and enthusiasm."

"She is a shining example of the tradition of Catholic nursing sisters and of the spirit of her beloved St. Francis," the pope said.

Leading a group of Hawaiian pilgrims, including nine patient-residents from Kalaupapa, where St. Marianne ministered, Honolulu Bishop Larry Silva said St. Marianne is "an inspiration for those who care for those most in need, which is what all Christians are called to do. Now, with universal veneration, she can inspire people around the world."

With thousands of Philippine pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, Pope Benedict praised St. Pedro, a catechist who accompanied Jesuit priests to the Mariana Islands in 1668. Despite hostility from some of the natives, he "displayed deep faith and charity and continued to catechize his many converts, giving witness to Christ by a life of purity and dedication to the Gospel."

The pope prayed that "the example and courageous witness" of St. Pedro would "inspire the dear people of the Philippines to announce the kingdom bravely and to win souls for God."

Pope Benedict also cited St. Anna Schaffer as a model for a very modern concern.

St. Anna was working as a maid to earn the money for the dowry needed to enter a convent when an accident occurred and she "received incurable burns" which kept her bedridden the rest of her life, the pope said. In time, she came to see her pain and suffering as a way to unite herself with Christ through prayer, he said.

"May her apostolate of prayer and suffering, of sacrifice and expiation, be a shining example for believers in her homeland, and may her intercession strengthen the Christian hospice movement in its beneficial activity," the pope said.

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