

and argued against the mistreatment of African Americans. She also attempted to spark interest in a failed anti-lynching bill after Claude Neal's 1934 mob lynching in Florida. Each Blessed Sacrament convent superior asked President Roosevelt to revisit the bill.⁴

While her work was plagued by the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups and individuals, Mother Katharine found her strength in the Eucharist. "In Holy Communion, the life of God in a particular way is imparted to my soul. It is there that God becomes the soul of my soul; to do, to suffer all for love of him who died for you. And if You are for me, if You are with me, what can I fear, O my God?"

In 1935, Mother Katharine had a severe heart attack, and suffered declining health in the following years. Another Mother Superior was elected in 1937, and Katharine's activities were limited to the Motherhouse. She once exclaimed, "Oh, how far I am at 84 years of age from being an image of Jesus in his sacred life on earth!" Finally bed-ridden, she was able to have daily Mass celebrated in her room. Mother Katharine devoted these seemingly limited years to praying for the success of her Sisters' work. She passed away at the ripe old age of 96 years.

The two miracles which enabled her canonization were related to the healing of a little boy's inner ear and then of a seventeen-month-old girl's deafness. Pope John Paul II made Mary Katharine Drexel the second American-born canonized saint on October 1, 2000. In 2018, her body was solemnly transferred to the Philadelphia Cathedral, where she and her Drexel sisters had donated an altar in honor of their parents.

"Peacefully do at each moment what at that moment ought to be done. If we do what each moment requires, we will eventually complete God's plan, whatever it is. We can trust God to take care of the master plan when we take care of the details." – St. Katharine

"If we wish to serve God and love our neighbor well, we must manifest our joy in the service we render to him and them. Let us open wide our hearts. It is joy which invites us. Press forward and fear nothing." – St. Katharine

Socials with the Saints

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Sources incl.: 1. Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament 2. St. Katharine Drexel Mission Church (Haymarket, VA) 3. Xavier University 4. Rachel Bulman article, *Word On Fire* (3 Mar 2021) 5. Shrine of St. Katharine Drexel, Philadelphia 6. Murray, Cecilia. "Katharine Drexel: Learning to Love the Poor".



Saint Mary Katharine Drexel

Born: November 26, 1858

Died: March 3, 1955

Feast Day: March 3

Banker Francis Drexel (the brother of JP Morgan's business partner) and his wife Hannah welcomed their second child into the world, Catherine Mary, in 1858. Only five weeks afterward, Hannah passed away. Grief-stricken Francis entrusted the care of their first daughter Elizabeth and baby Kate to a brother and sister-in-law.

In 1860, Francis married Emma, the daughter of a French immigrant, and brought the girls home with them. The couple welcomed a third daughter in 1863, and soon purchased an estate just outside Philadelphia, naming it after St. Michael. It was not far from the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, where Mrs. Emma Drexel's sister, Mother Louis Bouvier, lived for some time. Little Katy Drexel and her sisters would visit frequently with their mother.

The Drexels taught their children that money was entrusted to them for the care of others, and they set this example as notable philanthropists. Three days a week, the girls saw their mother distribute food, clothing, shoes, medicine, or rent money to any person who came to their door. She also hired an assistant who visited tenements, assessed needs, and gave residents a ticket to present to Mrs. Drexel for fulfillment.

As the girls grew older, they were encouraged to begin a Sunday school in their home for the children of their father's employees. In making and teaching these sessions, Kate grew devoted to St. Francis of Assisi and was determined to follow his example by giving all to the poor. Her devotion to Jesus was clear to the family, and she considered a religious vocation, although she dreaded the thought of community life.

Mrs. Drexel was diagnosed with cancer, and Kate learned about suffering as her nurse for three years. After her death, the grieving family traveled to Europe together. Kate made a private vow of celibacy for one year at

St. Mark's in Venice. In Rome, a bishop and a priest fascinated them with stories about serving on Native American reservations.

Mr. Drexel took the girls on a business trip 'out West', where they witnessed reservation life with their own eyes. Kate, wanting to help, used \$100 of her allowance to purchase a Marian statue for a mission church that didn't have one. Although she was afraid to tell her father about this purchase, when he found out, he put his hand on her shoulders and said, "I'm glad you did, Katy. It was a good thing."

Mr. Drexel died two years after his wife, in 1885. The funeral revealed his will, written to protect the girls from speculating suitors. Kate and her sisters received a generous income for the rest of their lives. Ten percent of Mr. Drexel's fortune was to be donated to his favorite charities.

In the mid-to-late 1880's, the Drexel sisters again went West, at the invitation of Bishop O'Connor. Kate began building schools, providing food and clothing, and paying salaries for teachers, on Native American reservations. She also searched for priests to serve the people.

Still, she severely grieved the loss of her father. Her sisters, worried about Kate's health, decided to travel together to Europe. While Kate was cared for at a spa, her sisters spent weeks visiting institutions to learn administration. They continued traveling and, in a private papal audience in Rome, Kate requested of Pope Leo XIII that he send missionaries to staff Native American schools. He responded, "Why not, my child yourself become a missionary?" This rocked her to the core.

She became convinced of this vocation, and was further consoled by the news of her sisters' plans to marry. Kate entered the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh, with the understanding that in two years she would found her own order, the **Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People** (today simply called Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament). Her sister Louise's dedication to serving African Americans had inspired her to add this to her mission. In late 1889, she received the religious habit and the name Sister Mary Katharine.

Elizabeth Drexel married in January 1890, and became pregnant on an extended honeymoon. She returned ill. She and her child died in September. Bishop O'Connor, too, died that year, leaving Kate wondering how she could manage to fulfill her grand vocation.

Her own bishop offered his support. In 1891, along with thirteen other women, she established the new Order. They immediately faced threats of violence. Dynamite sticks were found at the laying of their house's cornerstone. The Sisters opened schools for Black and Native American youth, including training in vocational skills for economic advancement.

Due to the reality of politics and racism, Mother Katharine knew that some Southern states would force segregation between Black and White sisters and create obstacles to the Order's mission. She decided to refrain from accepting Black sisters, praying that these women would instead join orders for Black sisters which had already been established.

Her life had taken a drastic turn when she'd vowed poverty. She used every resource to its last, wearing clothes with patches on top of patches and shoes with holes. Taking away the pencils of her schools' students and replacing them with new ones, she used the old ones down to the nub.

In 1915, aware of the lack of Catholic education in the South, she desired to build a school in New Orleans. Because of her legacy for building 'Colored schools,' she knew she'd likely be denied a property that interested her. She sent a priest to survey it, then she purchased it through a male agent. Once the reason for the purchase was discovered by locals, the building's windows were smashed. Still, it opened as Southern University of New Orleans. In 1917, it became Xavier University. The school was focused on the education and formation of Black teachers. Many of its graduates went on to teach at Black Catholic parochial schools. Xavier is now the only historically Black, Catholic university in the United States, and the first Catholic university founded by a saint.

Another major project was Mother Katharine's decision to fund the successor of Lucy Eaton Smith—the founder of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de' Ricci—to care for Afro-Cuban children in Havana, Cuba during and after the Spanish American War. As a result of the war, many children had been orphaned, with no other church or government entity willing to support them because of their ethnic background.

So busy at work was Mother Katharine in reviewing and fulfilling requests for aid that she had neither the time nor inclination to supervise her projects. This resulted in very few conflicts with bishops. She rather preferred to spend her time speaking and acting against racist practices. In 1927, she was interviewed by the manager of the Associated Press,