

**HOMILY**  
**DECEMBER 5, 2021**  
**ADVENT # 2**  
**By Fr. Bert Foliot, S.J.**  
*Prepare the way of the Lord!*

*They went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies,* said the prophet Baruch in today's first reading. *They went out weeping,* sings the Psalmist to us today. Tears flowed from their eyes as parents had their little children forcibly taken from their arms by the Indian Agent, by the police and by the priest. The Government's declared policy was "to separate children from the influences of their parents and their community, so as to destroy their culture... because when the school is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write." The only way to success was for these children to become like Europeans. Tears flowed from the children's eyes when the clothes which had been specially bought for them by their parents or grandparents were stripped off them and replaced by a drab uniform identical to those of all the other children whom they had never met before. Tears flowed when these children had their precious and even sacred braids unceremoniously chopped from their heads and thrown into the garbage. Tears flowed when these very young children were punished for wetting their beds, or for speaking their Indigenous language, the only language they knew. Tears flowed when these children saw their classmates get very sick and die alone so far away from home. Tears flowed from their eyes when these children tried to fall asleep at night but could not, because the mush they were given to eat left them so hungry. Tears flowed at night when the lights went out and they were overwrought with a deep loneliness for home. Tears flowed at night when they were seized by a terrible fear of being sexually abused by an older child or by one of those big tall authorities wearing black and white religious clothes. Tears flowed when out of desperation they ran away from that horrible school only to find themselves all alone, not knowing the way home to where they had longed and hoped to be hugged by their mothers, fathers and grandparents. As the psalmist says to us today, *they went out weeping.*

After the last of all the poorly federally funded residential schools were finally closed down, similar tears began to flow from the eyes of children who were now

taken away by social workers and placed in foster homes, homes so different from their own homes. Their own homes may not have been perfect in every way, but they were homes, where these children knew that their parents were trying their very best to love them. In some foster homes where their foster parents tried to care for them, they may have felt expected to change their identity and become like the foster parents who had been charged with “taking the Indian out of the Indian.” Some Indigenous young people went missing. Some were murdered. Some over the years may have felt so lost and so full of tears and broken-heartedness, they may have seen no other alternative for themselves than to hit the streets. Not only did many suffer much abuse and violence, nobody cared enough to search for them. We shout out, *Tear open the heavens and come down, Lord. Tear open the heavens and come down, Lord.* We need a Saviour!

The prophet Baruch says in today’s first reading, *they were led away by their enemies, but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory.* Could St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk who died at the age of 24 in 1680, was canonized in 2012, be one sign of God’s saving action? After her Christian mother and brother died of smallpox, Tekakwitha, a 4 year-old Mohawk child, was adopted into her uncle’s family which was hostile to Christians. Like her mother and brother, Kateri also suffered from smallpox and was badly scarred. At the age of 18, contrary to the will of her uncle, Kateri insisted on being baptized. And despite the great pressure and mocking of her aunts, Kateri refused to be married. She said, “I have consecrated myself totally to Jesus. I have chosen him for husband, and He alone will take me for wife.” Her final words were, “Jesus, Mary, I love you.” Fifteen minutes after her death, her many smallpox scars were said to have disappeared. St. Kateri Tekakwitha now stands with all the saints in heaven interceding for her people.

Many survivors of residential schools live with painful memories of their childhood. Some have never found their identity and have lived as lost souls. Some never knew how to express love and affection for their own children, because they never experienced parenting when they were young. Some of their descendants are caught up in anger at what happened to their parents and grandparents and at all the family life they missed.

To survivors and to all of us who have come to this land, today’s Gospel tells us that John the Baptist cries out to us, *Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made*

*low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.* And Paul in today's letter to the Philippians boldly professes a message of hope for us, *I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you, will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.* With the prayers of St. Kateri for her Indigenous brothers and sisters and for settlers, we repent for the mistakes and deliberate sins of our past history. We commit ourselves to try to listen with our hearts to the pain of those still suffering from the residential schools and to be patiently and respectfully present to the healing process however long it may take. We promise to *Prepare the way of the Lord.*

**Outline of points for a homily:**

- Listen with the heart to the tears of those hurt by residential schools.
- Tell the story of the Mohawk saint, Kateri Tekakwitha.
- Hear the call to *Prepare the way of the Lord*, and call us all to repentance.
- Invite faith in God's promise to *bring to completion the good work in us.*