



W. Wood

ST. KATHARINE DREXEL

PATRON SAINT OF RACIAL JUSTICE
AND PHILANTHROPISTS

1858 – 1955

“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.”

ATTRIBUTED TO KATHARINE DREXEL

USCCB’s “Open Wide Our Hearts, The Enduring Call to Love: A Pastoral Letter Against Racism,” 2018.

Let us pause and consider our call to steward resources as we listen to the life of St. Katharine Drexel, contemplative activist for Native and African American persons.

Born into wealth, St. Katharine knew the ease and opportunity granted to those in affluent positions. Yet her father, a prominent faith-filled banker, introduced her to a life of generosity. He opened their Philadelphia family home several times each week to serve the poor and concluded each day in prayer. It is no wonder, then, that St. Katharine was similarly called to be a contemplative in action. Seeing the destitute and vulnerable conditions of those her family served increased her desire to ensure access to health and education for all.

Once traveling on a train with her family through Washington state, she was aghast at the poverty she witnessed in the Native American reservations outside her window. Shortly thereafter when she was afforded Pope Leo XIII’s ear, she shared with him the heartbreak

she felt in seeing impoverished Native American communities. To this, he responded, “My child, why don’t you become a missionary yourself?”



Taking his words to heart, Katharine returned to the Dakotas to establish missionary aid through Red Cloud, a Sioux leader. She eventually founded a religious order, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Through her multi-million-dollar inheritance, St. Katharine and the Sisters focused on providing care and education for Native Americans and African Americans. They established a boarding school in Santa Fe, a system of black Catholic schools in 13 states with many mission centers and rural schools, and Native American mission centers in 16 states. St. Katharine’s commitment for progress persisted in spite of much opposition, and in 1925, she established Xavier University of Louisiana’s College of Liberal Arts and Science, the first U.S. Catholic university for African Americans.

St. Katharine Drexel’s life exemplified gratitude, generosity and governance.

- ✦ How is the spirit of gratitude operative in your own life?
- ✦ How might the way you freely offer your resources inform a spirit of generosity in others?
- ✦ As you consider the resources gifted to you, how might you seek to govern them with excellence?

O HOLY MYSTERY OF LOVE,

*By Your Spirit you compelled St. Katharine Drexel to live in joyful generosity,
Investing her gifts and good fortune to marginalized people, yielding Gospel seeds
in Native and African American communities.*

*Recommit us today to serve you earnestly
With our hands, our eyes, our thoughts, and our hearts.*

All you Holy Men and Women: pray for us.

AMEN.