

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha First Class Relic Story

On June 22, 1980, following the Eucharistic Celebration for the Beatification of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy, Rev. Fr. Henri Béchard, S.J., the Canadian Vice-Postulator at the time, entrusted me with a First Class Relic of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha blessed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

During my ministry years as an Itinerant Native Catechist, I have had the privilege to travel to many communities throughout North America among our Creator's people of multi-cultural backgrounds. I have prayed with many Indigenous people on this continent we call Mother Earth and introduced Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Indigenous woman of North America honored as a holy woman in our Roman Catholic Church. Our people have great respect for sacred objects in our traditional spiritual ways. Likewise, as Indigenous Catholics the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha First-Class Relic was reverently and respectfully held, venerated, prayed with and blessed with whether for personal intentions or healing prayers for various illnesses and addictions for family members and friends.

Faith and trust in Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha continued. One day in February 2006, I received a phone call from Sr. Julie, a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace in Seattle, Washington with two requests. Firstly, that I send out a message to our National Kateri Circles Members to pray through the intercession of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha for a little boy who was in hospital and in serious condition. Secondly, Sr. Julie asked if I knew where a First-Class Relic of Blessed Kateri could be obtained to pray for a little 5-year old boy, Jake (Jacob) Finkbonner whose life was being threatened by a very invasive flesh-eating disease, after falling on the rusted base of an outdoor basketball hoop at his home near the Lummi Reservation. Jake

Finkbonner's lip was cut and immediately began to swell. He was rushed to Seattle Children's Hospital. The doctors had told little Jake's parents that he was not expected to survive because the infection was so severe and moving very rapidly upward on his face.

After listening to this life-threatening story of a little 5-year-old boy, I told Sister Julie that I was privileged to have a Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha First-Class Relic, and since I would be traveling to Seattle for a 2006 Annual Tekakwitha Conference Planning Meeting the following week, I would bring the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Relic and go to Seattle Children's Hospital to pray for little Jake.

When I arrived at SeaTac airport, Sr. Julie was waiting to drive me to Seattle Children's Hospital. Upon our arrival at the hospital, we entered the waiting room anxiously waiting to be allowed to enter Jake's hospital room after his treatments doctors had to scrape his face periodically to try to prevent the infection from traveling to his eyes and brain. When we walked in, Jake's parents were standing on each side of their son's bed. Jake's mother asked if I had the relic and that I place it on her son's body. I was hesitant because his entire little body was surgically wrapped. I wanted his mother to place the relic on her son, but she did not want to touch the sacred relic. Immediately, I offered to put the palm of my hand over hers while holding the relic, and together we would place the relic of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha on her son. She felt comfortable and agreed to this gesture.

Then, we began praying short spontaneous prayers through Blessed Kateri's intercession for Jake's healing. I prayed "Blessed Kateri heal your little brother Jake from this invasive infection". I usually carry Prayer Cards for Her canonization and invited all of us gathered around Jake's bedside to pray the canonization prayer with the special intention that

Blessed Kateri heal her little brother. Shortly after, Sister and I left the room and the hospital.

Months later I was told that at Jake's next treatment the doctor exclaimed "this is a miracle because the infection has stopped"!

July 2006 when I arrived in Seattle for our Annual Tekakwitha Conference, I was informed that Jake had been released from the hospital, returned home, finished his school year and was playing basketball once again with his friends. Monsignor Paul Lenz, Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha approached me and asked that I write my story about my visit to the Seattle Children's Hospital to pray for Jacob (Jake) Finkbonner with the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Relic. Apparently, Archbishop Brunet of the Archdiocese of Seattle would begin the process for Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's canonization because of the 'miraculous' healing of Jacob Finkbonner. It was the possible first-class miracle needed for Kateri's canonization.

A few years later Monsignor Lenz asked me to travel to Bellingham, WA to give testimony before the Seattle Archdiocesan Tribunal to tell the story about my visit and prayer with the Blessed Kateri Relic for Jake's healing. I was sworn to secrecy during this whole process. Apparently, documentation from a number of testimonies was compiled and sent to Rome to begin the process for the canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

In November 2011, I was informed by Monsignor Lenz that the canonization process was advancing. (and) I was named to a liturgy committee to begin plans for a canonization mass and to compile a list of Indigenous people for readers, intercessory prayers, processions, music ministry, choir etc. because the approval of a first-class miracle was imminent. Again, we still had to wait until the Three Cardinals for the Cause of Saints to approve. If they approved the contents of the

documentation as a first-class miracle, this would warrant the title of ‘a new Saint’ in the Roman Catholic Church. In the name of the three cardinals, the Chair then was to present their endorsement that a first-class miracle was authenticated, and this would be given to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

In Mid-December 2011, Pope Benedict XVI received the affirmation from the Cardinals that they (have) approved the miracle for Jacob Finkbonner’s healing. Pope Benedict XVI approved the first-class miracle attributed to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. When this announcement went public, (especially the) Indigenous Catholics remarked that this was the best early Christmas gift ever!

Next came the anticipation of the announcement of a canonization date and the planning for a long-awaited trip to Rome. What rejoicing when the Pope would proclaim our holy woman a SAINT in the Universal Roman Catholic Church!

In February 2012 during the gathering of the College of Cardinals in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI announced that the Canonization of New Saints would be October 21, 2012 at the Vatican.

The journey to Rome for October 21st, was one of great excitement and affirmation to be present on St. Peter’s Square when Kateri Tekakwitha is proclaimed Saint.

The North American people present for this moment of jubilation waited with great excitement for His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to name our Indigenous holy woman, “Saint Kateri Tekakwitha”.

Yours truly was privileged to carry the beautifully encased relic of Kateri Tekakwitha in procession to present to His Holiness then to be placed on a table near the altar for the Eucharistic Celebration.

When Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed “Saint Kateri Tekakwitha” the loud exuberant cheers of joy echoed throughout Vatican City. This rejoicing was also accompanied by many tears. What a day for all who have come to know and honor our holy, humble, young Mohawk-Algonquin woman who received the gifts of prayer, healing powers and mostly an unsurpassable love for Her Creator God, Jesus the Healer, the Great Medicine Man.

Young Jacob (Jake) Finkbonner accompanied by his parents Don and Elsa and his two younger sisters were not only present for Saint Kateri Tekakwitha’s canonization but also received Eucharist from Pope Benedict VI.

To this day, people of many cultures have heard of the healing gift of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk Algonquin young Indigenous woman, and continue to ask Her intercession for the healing of mind, body and spirit.

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us.