

*Summary of the miracle that led to the canonization of
Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha by Paolo Molinari, S.J. Postulator
of the Cause of Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha*

Jacob Finkbonner, a young boy (born February 19, 2000) belonging to the Indian tribe of the Lummi nation, who shortly before his 6th birthday, and precisely on February 11, 2006, during a basketball game collided with a pole which caused the laceration of his upper lip. At first this fact did not cause any preoccupation, but already the next day the boy appeared to be seriously ill and on February 13, 2006, his conditions were so serious that his parents took him to the local hospital where they were advised that Jacob should immediately be transferred to the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle, one of the most famous hospitals of this kind in the United States and perhaps in the world. This transfer was considered to be so urgent that the boy was immediately by helicopter brought to the said hospital where his illness was at once diagnosed to be a necrotizing fasciitis, commonly called by the name of "flesh-eating disease." I first became aware of this terrible illness of Jacob Finkbonner and his sudden and totally unexpected cure by means of the copy of a letter which Reverend Father Tim Sauer, the pastor of the parish to which the Finkbonners belonged, had written to the Archbishop of Seattle, His excellency Alex Brunett. Naturally I wrote immediately to the latter asking him what he thought about this case and whether he would eventually be prepared to instruct a canonical inquiry about it in his archdiocese. The archbishop replied immediately with a most friendly letter in which he told me that with the help of the mother of Jacob he had already obtained from the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle the entire medical documentation regarding the nature of the illness of Jacob Finkbonner, the progress of the same, the therapy he had received and the surprising cure that had taken place on March 4, 2006. He added that he had personally approached the four highly qualified and very experienced professors who had taken care of Jacob and that all four had sent him a written statement about what they had done and that they were not able to state that there existed the possibility to explain the totally unexpected and unforeseeable cure of Jacob on medical grounds. In order to underline the importance of these statements His Excellency mentioned the fact that none of these specialists was a Catholic. He concluded that he was most willing to order a canonical inquiry of this case as soon as I would petition him to do so. I naturally did so without delay and between September 2007 and May 2008 this canonical inquiry effectively took place. When the Acts of the latter were sent to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, they judged that there were some shortcomings in the observation of the required juridical formalities and ordered that they be remedied in a supplementary inquiry. I answered these charges in a detailed documentation, without ever receiving an answer. So it was necessary to celebrate the supplementary inquiry, which was held from August 28, 2008, till June 26, 2009. However, before this second inquiry, the Most Reverend Archbishop of Seattle invited me to fly to Washington, D.C. and meet there with His Excellency Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, at that time Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, who had been the President of the tribunal of the first inquiry and in the same capacity, would act in the second one. The Archbishop wanted this meeting in order that any future objections on the part of the Congregation would be avoided. When in due time we met in the capital of the United States, we discussed these issues in a most friendly and cordial atmosphere.

In all 33 witnesses were heard during these inquiries and among them the four already mentioned professors to whose care Jacob Finkbonner had been entrusted during his stay at the Childrens' Hospital. They repeated orally what they had already previously declared in writing. Their testimonies are, of course, of the greatest importance as far as the origin, the development of the illness of Jacob and his unexpected cure are concerned. Other witnesses, as for example the close relatives of Jacob reported what they had observed when they visited and stayed with him at the hospital. They and many others gave witness to the fact that they had frequently and insistently invoked the intercession of Kateri (Catherine) in order to obtain the cure of the young boy. It goes without saying that the entire medical documentation obtained by Archbishop Brunett was also included in the Acts of the inquiries. On February 12, 2010 the Congregation issued the Decree of the juridical validity of both inquiries.

It was now my task to prepare the "Positio super miro," a volume which contains 430 pages in print. For reasons of space but also in order to spare the sensitivity of the readers I deliberately refrain from mentioning here the gruesome details concerning the ways in which the doctors treated Jacob by constantly cutting away those tissues of his head, neck and chest which had been eaten away by the necrotizing virus which tormented him. But I feel bound to give at least the essential facts regarding the invocation of Kateri (Catherine) made by an exceptional high number of faithful who implored her to obtain from God the cure of the mortally ill child. As soon he heard of the grave illness of Jacob, the Reverend Tim Sauer asked the faithful to invoke the help of Kateri (Catherine). He did this during the religious services he conducted not only in the main church of his parish but also in some other churches and parishes in which he led the faithful in prayers in which the help of Blessed Kateri (Catherine) was invoked in order to obtain the cure of Jacob. Father Sauer also took the first opportunity to visit the Childrens' Hospital of Seattle where he gave spiritual assistance to the members of the Finkbonner family and with success obtained from them to pray to the Lord through the intercession of Kateri (Catherine) on behalf of their little relative.

But Father Sauer was by no means the only one to engage in this activity. Mr. Henry Cagey, the President of the Lummi nation to which which Jacob belongs, appealed to their well-known sense of solidarity and requested with success that they invoke Kateri's (Catherine's) protection on behalf of the young member of their tribe. He also with regard to other groups of Native Americans made similar requests.

Then there was the initiative of the President of the Assumption Catholic School, which Jacob had frequented, and who obtained that all the children of the school and also the staff daily beseeched Kateri (Catherine) in this intention.

Finally there was the appeal of Sister Kateri Mitchell, the organizer of the Blessed Kateri Annual Conference which are very numerous in the United States but which exist also in other countries. There were requested by a flow of emails to pray for the cure of Jacob through the mediation of Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha. Several thousand persons of all walks of life thus increased the army of those who prayed in this sense.

Speaking about Sister Kateri Mitchell another fact ought to be mentioned which turned out to be of paramount importance for the furthering of the Cause of canonization of Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha. Years ago Reverend Sauer had heard that after her Beatification a precious relic of her had been donated by the Voice-Postulator of the time to a religious who was living in Montana. He remembered this now and spoke about

it. Immediately a search of the whereabouts of this Sister was begun. When Sister Kateri Mitchell was approached to help in this search, she declared that she herself was the religious to whom the Canadian Vice-Postulator Father Henri Béchard, S.J. years ago had given her this relic which was still in her possession and taken with her on all her numerous travels. She added that on March 4, 2006, she had to attend a meeting in Seattle and that she would on this occasion bring this relic to the Childrens' Hospital when she would pay a visit to Jacob Finkbonner. She did what she had promised to do and in the early afternoon of March 4, 2006, she and the mother of Jacob jointly placed this relic on the body of the still mortally ill youngster. Then a most extraordinary thing happened. On this very same day, March 4, 2006, the laboratory of the said hospital, which constantly analyzed the blood of Jacob, informed the doctors who treated him that suddenly and totally unexpectedly "the Protein Reactive C" (CRP) had returned normal. As the doctors in question explained, this meant that the deadly virus had ceased its activity and that Jacob had been cured. Both the medical doctor, who was a member of the tribunal of the canonical inquiries and the President of the latter, His Excellency Bishop Tyson, underlined this very significant and important coincidence and this was, of course, also done during the discussions which later took place in the Congregation.

I conclude this section by indicating some data concerning these discussions in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints:

- September 15, 2011: The Medical Board of the Congregation unanimously declared that the cure of Jacob is "scientificamente inspiegabile (cannot be explained scientifically)."
- November 8, 2011: The meeting of the Theologians (Il Congresso dei Teologi) states that his scientifically inexplicable cure must be attributed to a divine intervention through the intercession of Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha consecutive to her invocation on the part of the faithful.
- December 13, 2011: In their Ordinary Session the Cardinals and Bishops (Members of the Congregation) judge that the case in question (the cure of Jacob) is a true miracle to be ascribed to the intercession of the Blessed Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha.

Without indicating the precise date the following statement is added to the above mentioned data: "The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI has authorized the congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the respective Decree about this miracle.

Two data must be added to this list: On Saturday February 18, 2012 His Holiness presided over an Ordinary Consistory on the occasion of the creation of 22 new Cardinals. After those who were entitled to cast vote, had done so with regard to this question, the Holy Father also asked them whether they agreed to the canonization of seven Blessed, one of which was Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha on behalf of whom I had prepared a small booklet with all the relevant data concerning her life and her Cause. As in all the previous questions regarding the Cause, the answers of the votes were unanimously positive. At the end of this Consistory the Pope declared that he had decided to proceed with the canonization of these seven Blessed and that their canonization would take place on Sunday October 21, 2012.

In a solemn ceremony on the said day, October 21, 2012, Blessed Kateri (Catherine) was canonized and thus declared a Saint who as such has to be recognized and venerated by all the faithful of the Catholic Church.

The canonization of Catherine Tekakwitha by Pope Benedict XVI carries a very special meaning that is bound to have wide-ranging pastoral consequences for the whole people of God, and, in a particular way, for the thirty million Amerindians of whom Catherine is the first to be raised to the honours of the altar. This young Iroquois woman, whose life was sustained by her Christian faith and by an ardent love of Jesus present in the Eucharist, found in Jesus Christ the strength to withstand the hostile pressure of the non-Christian culture in which she lived and to keep with heroic fidelity the vow of virginity which she pronounced on March 25, 1679.

In this way, poor and unlettered, but rich in the strength and beauty that God gives to the pure of heart, she becomes an accessible model for the young people of today who are so often subjected to intense and varied pressures that urge unchastity as the norm.

There is still another message conveyed by this canonization, which has special bearing on contemporary pastoral commitment. In many dioceses of North America, both Canada and in the United States, there are significant groups of native Indians, Eskimos and people of mixed Indian descent. There has been a growing pastoral concern in recent years to take seriously the cultural heritage of these communities, not only their languages, but also, and more importantly, their outlook, their customs, their special way of life, and the way in which all these influences shape their lives. Today the church proclaims Catherine Tekakwitha a Saint. That fact alone is one of the most effective steps towards the development and promotion of a "local Church" that is authentically Indian.