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Below is a great article from Catholic News Service about 15 year-old Gold medalist Katie Ledecky. Kate won Gold in the 800 meter freestyle on Friday! She says a Hail Mary before every race, and loves attending Mass every Sunday. As the article below indicates, she's one of Catholic America's shining stars! We are so proud of you, Katie!

BETHESDA, Md. — When teenage swimming sensation Katie Ledecky slices through the water during the 800-meter freestyle race at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, she may not be able to hear the roaring cheers of adoring fans back home, but she's convinced they will be with her in spirit.

Katie Ledecky celebrates after winning the women's 800-meter freestyle during the U.S. Olympic swimming trials in Omaha, Neb., July 1. At age 15, Ledecky is the youngest member of the U.S. team competing in the London summer games. (CNS photo/Jeff Haynes , Reuters)

"Everybody has been so great this year. During this whole experience, I realize more than ever that I have the best community," said Ledecky, who will be a sophomore at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred this fall.

Ledecky said that qualifying for the Olympics seemed "far-fetched" just a year ago. But anyone watching her swim at the Olympic trials in Omaha, Neb., would never have believed it. Ledecky won the 800-meter freestyle event, touching the wall in a record-setting time of 8:19.78. Her time broke the Olympic trials record of Katie Hoff set in 2008. Ledecky also broke famed Olympic swimmer Janet Evans' age-group record in the 400 freestyle but finished third, one spot shy of making the Olympic team for another individual event.

Years of pre-dawn practice at the Curl-Burke Swim Club in Bethesda, being a member of the Stone Ridge Gators swim team and almost 10 summers on the community pool swim team have brought Ledecky to this moment. Not only is Ledecky the youngest member of the U.S. swim team, she is the youngest athlete on the entire 530-member U.S. Olympic team.

Ledecky, who has been swimming competitively since she was 6, describes her journey to swimming's highest pinnacle as a dream.

"This is all sort of surreal," she said.

The day before leaving for Knoxville, Tenn., where the U.S. swim team was training prior to the Olympics, Ledecky was like any normal teenager getting ready for a big trip: last-minute packing, getting her hair cut and spending time with family and friends.

She spoke with the Catholic Standard, newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese, about her life, family, school, swimming career and strong Catholic faith, which, she said, keeps her focused on God and what matters most in life. She and her family are longtime parishioners of the Church of the Little Flower in Bethesda.

"I always pray right before a race," Ledecky said. "The prayer I say is the Hail Mary.

"I also love going to Mass every week. It's a great chance to reflect and connect with God. (My faith) has been a big part of my life since I was born," she explained.

Ledecky said she has always loved St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and chose her name for

confirmation. Because her birthday is March 17, Ledecky also has a special devotion to St. Patrick.

She credited the example of men and women religious she has known for inspiration. She called the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who taught her at Little Flower School in Bethesda, "great role models."

Her godfather, Jesuit Father Jim Shea, provincial of the Maryland Province of the Jesuits, is a close family friend and another Ledecky supporter.

"I couldn't have done any of this without everyone's support," Ledecky said. "My family, teammates, coaches, everyone at Little Flower, Stone Ridge and my neighborhood, all cheering me on and watching. It means so much to me."

She counts her family, which includes her dad, David, her mom, Mary Gen, and her 18-year-old brother, Michael, as among her greatest role models and boosters.

"They never pushed me too hard. They've been so supportive with everything," she said.

Ledecky said watching Michael swim inspired her to take up the sport. She eventually became a distance prodigy.



"I just always loved the social atmosphere and the competitive nature, and the way you work so hard and see yourself improve on a daily basis," she said.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Rosemaron Rynn, principal at Little Flower, said the school community is rooting for the young swimmer and held a special send-off to the Olympic trials for her. "She's a great young girl. She's kind, caring, responsible and very unassuming. We just wish her the best, and everyone here is cheering her on," Sister Rosemaron said.

The Stone Ridge community is just as proud of its Olympic swimmer. The school's website lists her swimming accomplishments and even has T-shirts available: "Ledecky Team USA. London 2012. A Stone Ridge Girl."

"Everyone is extremely excited for Katie. This couldn't happen to a more deserving young lady," said Dwayne Bryant, the school's athletic director. "She's a regular, sweet kid, and the true definition of a student athlete."

[Fr. Mark Noonan](#)

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