St. Elizabeth Catholic Church

119 Highway 403, Paincourtville

The legendary Father Antoine Blanc, who presided over the founding of many Catholic churches in New Orleans, blessed the first St. Elizabeth Church in 1840. (Only in the 1960s did the Bayou Lafourche area come under the jurisdiction of the Baton Rouge Archdiocese.) Although the parish of St. Elizabeth was responsible for six nearby mission churches, at first it had no resident priest of its own, relying instead on visiting professors from the Vincentian seminary in Plattenville. This arrangement ended shortly after the seminary burned down in 1855.

The present St. Elizabeth Church, known as the “Queen of Bayou Lafourche,” was blessed in 1902 and is the third St. Elizabeth Church in Paincourtville. The architect was F. B. Dicharry, who modeled it after the church in Ploubalay, France. Inside and out, the Gothic influence is noteworthy. When completed, it was topped by two magnificent spires, but these were removed by a wind storm seven years later. A stained glass medallion to the left of the pulpit shows the church with its spires intact. According to legend, one spire remains buried where it fell in the church yard.

With its delicate columns, gilt-stenciled wall designs, and fascinating stained glass windows, St. Elizabeth Church is regal. High on the side walls, ten painted monstrous animals remind worshipers of the evil of the Great Heresies (Jansenism, Manichean dualism, Eutyches, Macedonian, Ipsa conteret caput tuum, Arius, Nestorianism, Iconoclasm, Lutheranism, and naturalism). The paintings and ceiling decorations were the work of two Mexican refugees, Father Grall and C. C. Balderas.

The 1876 church bell, named La Belle Armelise for its donor, Armelise Dugas, was lowered from the belfry to a humble tower beside the church because of its weight. The marble altar was imported from Italy in 1953, and a medallion showing the original altar accompanies that honoring the church with its spires.

The stained glass windows are impressive for the realism and details of the painting. Seven are unusual in portraying the sacraments being celebrated by contemporaneous Americans, many wearing everyday clothing. Records from the Franz Mayer studio say that its studio created one window for this church in 1965, but the makers of the other windows remain anonymous.

The first St. Elizabeth’s Church contained an organ made by Cavaille Coll, a premier French organ builder. Only a small number of Cavaille Coll instruments were imported to the U.S., and the Paincourtville organ was destroyed by fire in 1854. At the time of our tour, the church lacked a pipe organ, but it has acquired a pre-owned Ferrand and Votey pipe organ. Whether funding has been raised to install it is not known.

In 1992 Hurricane Andrew removed part of the roof, letting water flood in. This damage however, was repaired. Because of declining parish rolls, St. Jules Church of Belle Rose has combined with St. Elizabeth.

Like St. Philomena Church in Labadieville, St. Elizabeths was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Plattenville was listed in 1979.)

**Windows**

St. Blaise

St. John the Baptist + St. Michael St. Francis Regis + unidentified patron saint

St. Francis Xavier + St. Elisabeth of Hungary +

Notre Dame de Rosarie Our Lady of Lourdes

Altar

Matthew + Mark Luke + John

St Anne + St. Joachim St. Robert + St. Jerome

Mary & Elizabeth Death of Joseph

Annunciation Marriage of Mary & Joseph

Presentation of Mary St. Rose + St. Cecilia

Holy Family St. Catherine [of Siena?] + Pope

St. Joseph + St. Philomena St. Anthony + Sacred Heart of Mary

Sacrament of the Eucharist Sacrament of the Sick

Sacrament of Penance Sacrament of Holy Orders

Vestibule door

Sacrament of Baptism Stairs to choir

Bishop + St. Eugene

Ornamental glass

St. Elizabeth

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