

BARAGA IN SLOVENIA

Who was Frederic Baraga?

In accord with his education, a lawyer, by vocation, a priest, missionary and bishop; with his Slovenian prayer books, above all *Soul's Pasture*, one who enkindled heartfelt piety among the Slovenian people; with the publishing of a *catechism* and other religious books in the Ottawa and Ojibwa languages, an initiator of Indian literacy; with his ethnographic collection offered to the *Land's Museum* in Ljubljana and through his monograph on North American Indians, originally in German and translated into French and Slovene, the originator of Slovenian ethnology of foreign peoples; with his apostolic zeal, one of the most distinguished missionaries of the 19th century; with the dedication of his life and his love for simple Christian believers, a candidate for Sainthood.

Born on June 28, 1797, in the manor of Mala vas, which belongs to the village Knežja vas. Baptized on June 29, in the church of St. George in Dobrnič, which at that time belonged to the patronage of the Stična seigneurie and before that to the Stična monastery, which was closed in 1784.

Frederic's father, John Baraga, an organist at the church of Stari trg near Lož, later became the caretaker of the castle Belnek and then Mirna, where he came to know the Jenčič family of Mala vas and, as a widower, married their only daughter, Katherine Jenčič. When Frederic was 3 years old, his enterprising father bought the castle and seigneurie of Trebnje and his uncle Ignatius, the castle Belbek near Moravče.

Both families lived in close friendship, and the young Frederic along with his two sisters, Amalia, the elder, and Antonia, the younger and born in Trebnje, regarded the castle Belnek their second home. Belnek, which was one of four castles in the valley of Moravče, was burned down and destroyed during World War II; only humble remains and a park give evidence of it today.

In 1808, when Frederic was 11 years old, his mother died. The former assistant priest of Moravče, Megušur, who became the pastor of Golo, took him in and prepared him, his sister Antonia, and other children for an entrance examination for schools in Ljubljana. Not far from Golo there is the well-known pilgrim church of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Kurešček. Most probably the young Baraga also pilgrimed there.

In 1809, Frederic passed his examination for entrance into gymnasium. He boarded at George Licht's, a bookseller in Ljubljana, some meters down from the bishop's palace. Frederic's father, who was an exceptional booklover, procured books from him. During that time Frederic came into contact with the art of publishing and then also became enthusiastic about writing and publishing books.

During Frederic's 15th year, his father died. At that time, Dr. George Dolinar,

a professor of church history and church law at the lyceum of Ljubljana, provided care for him and his sister Antonia, who was studying at the Ursuline school in Ljubljana. Dolinar's home, today's DZS publishing house, was only about 100 steps from Licht's. He not only provided board and room for Frederic, but was also his confirmation sponsor.

In 1816, after Frederic finished gymnasium and two years of philosophy in Ljubljana, he went to Vienna, where he studied law at the University of Vienna. He remained connected with the Dolinars in a special way through his friendship with Dolinar's daughter Anna, two years younger than himself-dreaming about her as the future "Lady of Trebnje", his wife to be. During his studies, which he completed with excellence, he was especially interested in languages. He also took joy in painting-drawings in the two keepsake albums dedicated to his sister Amalia as well as three oil paintings reveal his natural gift.

After having finished his ordinary studies of law, he returned from Vienna, renounced his inheritance, transferred his Trebnje seigneurie to Joseph Gressel, the husband of his sister Amalia, and entered the seminary of Ljubljana. He attended the theological studies at the lyceum, in the building where he had earlier completed gymnasium. Two years later, September 21, 1823, he was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Ljubljana. He gave his first homily at the Ljubljana Church of Trnovo.

In October 1824, Fr. Baraga was named an assistant priest and catechism teacher for the parish of Šmartin near Kranj. He not only spent a great deal of time hearing confessions but was also zealous in his sermons, and in the quiet of his own room fervently wrote and translated. For the occasion of the holy year 1826, he published his first work, the small booklet *Admonition* for the Holy Year. It was also in Šmartin that he composed his first prayer book, *Soul's Pasture*, which was issued in 1830.

In the church of Šmartin there is a painting of St. Aloysius, which it seems Baraga himself painted and presented to them. Baraga's self-portrait, which is preserved in the Slovenian Museum of Religion at Šticna, is also from this period.

In May 1828, Fr. Baraga was transferred to Metlika in Bela krajina. He did not complain, nor did his zeal abate. He saw that the church there was without a Way of the Cross and therefore immediately ordered one to be made. Then, after some months, he himself hung it on the church walls amidst a grand celebration. He also renovated the main altar of St. Nicolas as well as both side altars. He continued to dedicate a great deal of his time to writing and translating as also to reading and meditation. When in August 1829, a booklet on the missions of North America came into his hands, his desire for the missions matured. He then requested a release to go to the American missions from the bishop.

Just before his departure to America, he published the booklet *On the Veneration and Imitation of the Mother of God*, which could be called the

first Slovenian "*Šmarnice*" (a special Marian devotion during the month of May). In the year 1832, his second Marian book appeared still bearing his name as an assistant priest in Metlika: a translation of Alphonse Liguori's *Visiting Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament and Saluting Mary the Most Pure Virgin*, with additional prayers from Baraga's *Soul's Pasture*.

In 1836 and 1837, he journeyed from America to Europe to find new missionaries, and obtain increased financial support. In fact, a missionary had already joined him in the previous year, Franc Pirc, born in Kamnik and a distinguished promoter of fruit growing. Although Fr. Pirc was already in his fiftieth year, he became enthusiastic about the missions upon reading Baraga's missionary letters which were translated into Slovene by Janez Ceglar, the pastor of Višnja Gora. The first volume appeared in 1833 under the title *Brotherhood of St. Leopold* and the second volume, in 1837.

Fr. Baraga arrived in Ljubljana April 6, 1837, together with an ethnographic collection, his gift to the Provincial Museum. During his short stay in Ljubljana, he involved himself with the publication of his book *Meditations on the Four Last Things* as well as with the book *An Aid to Praying the Holy Rosary so as to Please God and Mary* by Michael Hofman, the former canon of the Chapter Church of Novo mesto, and for which Baraga wrote the Foreword. In returning to America, his sister Antonia accompanied him. They took the first 14 paintings of Langus with them, Amalia later procuring still more.

In 1853, Fr. Frederic Baraga was ordained bishop for the bishop's seat of Sault Marie. He needed more priests and financial support for his diocese and therefore journeyed once again to Europe. He reached Ljubljana January 27, 1854. Then, on February 1st, as described in his diary: "Offered mass in Dobrnič. There said a prayer of thanksgiving at the baptismal font for the infinitely great grace of my own regeneration on June 29, 1797, at this baptismal font."

As a missionary in America Fr. Baraga did not forget his Slovenian countrymen. He edited three more Slovenian religious books: *Meditations on Four Last Things* (1837), *Golden Apples* (1844), and *Heavenly Flowers* (1846). In 1837, a Slovene translation of Baraga's book: *Description of Customs and Manners on Indians in Midnight America* was issued; it was originally written in German and had a title picture of Pocahontas. The Blasnik printery in Ljubljana printed a book by Baraga in Ojibwe entitled *Gete Dibadjjmowin* (Stories of the Life of Jesus) in 1843.

1997, for the occasion of the 200-year anniversary of Baraga's birth. *A Catechism for Indians* was published in Ljubljana - till now, the only translation of any of Baraga's books in Indian into a European language. It was procured by the Salesian priest Fr. Charles Ceglar, who researched Baraga's life in America, and who endowed his rich collection on Bishop Baraga to the Slovenian Museum of Religion at Stična.

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