

## UNLESS THE GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS TO THE EARTH AND DIES...

Bishop Frederic Baraga dedicated his whole life to the service of God and His people, in particular, his beloved Ottawa and Chippewa. A man's life says much about his character, but his death teaches even more. Here you will read the story of the last years of pain and suffering of the great missionary, and will discover how, honored in many ways by God and by man, the fruitfulness of his life has continued long after his death. These passages are from accounts written shortly after Bishop Baraga's death...

### His Final Illness

The sickness which has terminated fatally the life of our departed Bishop began three years ago. That sickness, the shaking palsy, has been the consequence of his hard life. It attacked at first the arms and the legs, afterwards the heart and soon carried devastation through the whole system. Had the Bishop at the beginning of his sickness retired and kept away from trouble he would have lived longer, but his nature unused to inactivity could never rest. Though tormented day and night and fatigued on account of his excessive and perpetual shaking he never relaxed his obligations. In summer he visited all his congregation as usual, wrote himself all his correspondence, administered his diocese as if his health had been just as good as ever. (Fr. Honoratus Borion)

### Difficulties Multiply

A few days before starting for Baltimore he had had already a kind of attack, but it was only the foretaste of the other severe attack which would have terminated his life at Baltimore, had not God provided for the only remedy at the same time that he fell. His pectoral cross upon which he fell, by inflicting a severe wound near the carotid artery and causing the blood to flow abundantly saved him from an instantaneous death. God had heard his prayers, he had to come up and die, as he used to say, in the midst of his flock. I gave him to understand that it would be better for his health should he stay the rest of his life in a milder region than Lake Superior... Oh, I shall forever remember the pitiful and sorrowful look that his Lordship threw at me. That thought of being left away from his flock almost caused him another attack. No, said he firmly, I must go and die where I have lived, and even should I die on the way going home, I must try to go back. He came out from the hospital and, at his request, started for home immediately (Fr. Borion).

### His Final Days

Three weeks before he died, he sent for me. He was very low and he thought that he must surely die that same day. The palsy had attacked the lungs and he could scarcely take a breath. The remedies which he took gave him some relief. (Fr. Borion) The long sickness of the beloved prelate, or rather the gradual decline of his vital force, which began to manifest itself very much some years ago, and which slowly brought him nearer and nearer his blessed end, ended with a couple weeks of great pain. Since New Year the pious sufferer spent most of his nights sleepless. In the night before Epiphany severe pains and difficulty of breathing came upon him, so that it was considered necessary to administer to him the Sacraments of the dying. This condition lasted several days. An apparent improvement of health followed, but it was only the forerunner of the gradual extinguishing of the vital force (Fr. Jacker).

### His Last Breath

Still the dying bishop retained the use of his mental faculties to his last moments, and even when his tongue was unable to articulate, he tried to make known his wishes and orders partly by writing, partly by signs, in which he succeeded in most instances, though only after great efforts. At two o'clock in the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 1868, on which day the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus fell that year, he exhaled his pure soul after an agony of only a few moments (Fr. Jacker).



## ...BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT.

### His Funeral

The cold season of the year made it possible to postpone his solemn obsequies so long that at least some priests of the diocese were able to arrive in time to attend. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January we buried our good Father in a vault constructed for that purpose in the basement of the cathedral. Only six priests were present. But the large church could not hold the crowds of people of Marquette and the surrounding country. Not only Catholics of different nationalities were present, but also the majority of the Protestant population, who by common agreement stopped all works on that day and vied with the flock of the deceased bishop in manifesting their appreciation of his great virtues and merits.

Thus ended a man whose purity of soul and singleness of purpose, whose mortified life and burning zeal, joined to uncommon talents and acquirements, faithfully and successfully employed in the service of God and of the most abandoned of his creatures; a man whose extraordinary achievements as a pioneer of Christianity will not allow his memory to pass away as long as souls capable of appreciating so much virtue and excellence will live in this upper country, which has been the principal field of his labors and where his body now rests to await the summons for resurrection (Father Jacker).

### His Mortal Remains

Under the Cathedral close to the Blessed Virgin altar a brick vault had been constructed and there the plain pine coffin with its precious contents was deposited. End of April, 1878, during a mission given by Father Cooney, C.S.C., the vault was opened with the permission of Rt. Rev. Bishop Mrak. The remains were found in a life-like state of preservation and were viewed by the bishop and the missionary, as also by Fathers Eis, Langner, Brown and the student Peter Menard. When in 1879 fire reduced the first Cathedral to ashes, the coffin was taken out of its repository and, with the permission of Bishop Vertin, opened again. This time also the body was in a perfect state of preservation (Father Rezek).

### In His Honor

The merits of Bishop Baraga are so great for the betterment of mankind that grateful hearts have striven to surpass one other in perpetuating his name among their posterity. First of all the present village of Baraga was named for him. Then, when the new county was being organized under an act of Legislature February 19, 1875, it was thought fit to call it Baraga. Even though late, yet the city of Marquette has also paid its due tribute to Baraga. September 23, 1903 the City Council changed Superior Street, running east to west past St. Peter's Cathedral, into Baraga Avenue.

Facing St. Peter's Cathedral in Marquette rises an imposing structure, the Parochial School. Over its main façade is written, "Baraga School." It is all the work of the indefatigable Cathedral pastor, Rev. Joseph G. Pinten. Father Pinten had not only in view to rear this grand monument to the name of Baraga but to perpetuate his inestimable merits for education, for in his time there was not a congregation in his diocese without a school. As if divine Providence had directed the course of events, on the fiftieth anniversary of Baraga's Consecration the cornerstone was laid (Father Rezek).

### Prayers for His Canonization

For the fiftieth anniversary (1903) the then Bishop Eis wrote, "It is in accordance with the spirit of the Church that we honor and venerate those who, whilst here on earth, were eminent for their virtues and sanctity. It is moreover our ardent wish that on All Saints' Day Pastors speak to their people on the labors and virtues of Bishop Baraga, and thus acquaint them with the chief events in his life, reminding them at the same time of the debt of gratitude and love they owe him. On the same day we will bless and lay the cornerstone of our new parochial school, which is being erected and which will be dedicated to the memory of Bishop Baraga. In conclusion, let me beg of you, dear Fathers, to offer fervent and repeated prayers to God, that in His goodness He may deign, ere long, to inspire His church to inscribe the name of Frederic Baraga in the book of her Saints where it shall never fade."

Sources: The quotes of Frs. Borion, Rezek and Bishop Eis are taken from History of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie and Marquette, Vol. 1, by Father Antoine Ivan Rezek, 1907. Quotes of Fr. Jacker are taken from Life and Labors of Rt. Rev. Frederic Baraga by Father Chrysostomus Verwyst, O.F. M., 1900.