



# 2024 History Essay Contest

## Homeschool 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Winner

### A Bishop to the Native Americans

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“Stand firm in the faith, adore, respect, obey, and love God all the days of your life.”<sup>1</sup> This is a quote from the first and only pastoral letter written in a native American language. It was written by Bishop Frederic Baraga, the first bishop of the diocese of Sault Sainte Marie, which is now the Catholic diocese of Marquette, Michigan. Bishop Baraga grew up in Slovenia, which was at the time a part of the Kingdom of Austria. After he became a priest, he felt called to become a missionary to the United States. Once there, he perseveringly journeyed across vast territories to bring the Gospel to the Native Americans of the north of the United States.

Frederic Baraga was born in a castle on the twenty-ninth of June in 1797, in the Kingdom of Austria, which is modern day Slovenia. When he was eleven years old, his mother died. Unfortunately, four years later, his father also passed away, so that by the time he was sixteen, both his parents were gone. After he was twenty, he entered the seminary. Two years later, he was ordained. Francis II, the king of Austria, had forbidden devotion to the Sacred Heart, however, Frederic increased this devotion. He authored seven prayer books about devotion to the Sacred Heart, at which his fellow priests were infuriated.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Kelly, *The Snowshoe Priest: Venerable Frederic Baraga* (Catholicism.org, Sept. 29, 2009), 5.

Providentially, Bishop Edward Fenwick of the United States, who had appealed for missionaries, invited Fr. Baraga to traverse the Atlantic. When he arrived in the United States, he spent one year in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Bishop Fenwick resided. Then he traveled north to where the Ottawa tribe lived, and learned the Ottawa language. Throughout his journey, he baptized five hundred forty-seven people, wandering from village to village and traveling thousands of miles. Each day he woke up at four in the morning to start traveling. Once, while he was traveling with guides, they had not had food for a long time, so he prayed to God. Thankfully, they saw some birds and followed them, and found one hundred-thirty eggs. Baraga trekked further north and baptized two hundred people from the Ottawa tribe. Because he founded a church and a school, the white people in the area were enraged with him and attacked him.

The United States government, which was composed almost entirely of Masons and Protestants, pushed the Native Americans further westward. Baraga courageously defended the natives. He had spent eight years with the Ottawas, now he moved to the Chippewa tribe. He published a grammar book and a dictionary for the Chippewa tribe and ministered to them. He traveled thousands of miles and received the nickname “The Snowshoe Priest”. Eventually, he learned the Chippewa language. In 1853, he returned to Cincinnati to be consecrated the first bishop of Sault Sainte Marie (now the diocese of Marquette, Michigan). At this time, he was sixty years old, and he had health problems, but he still traveled hundreds of miles to preach to the Native Americans. When he was seventy years old, he died among his Native American people.

Frederic Baraga, who despite having a hard childhood, still remained close to God and became a priest. He felt called by God to go to the United States when asked by Bishop Fenwick. Tirelessly, he devoted his life to sharing the Gospel with the native American people. Because of his perseverance and love, he was able to bring about the conversion to Catholicism of many native American peoples, which was his most significant achievement. Through his love for God, Bishop Frederic Baraga dedicated his entire life to his ministry to the Native Americans; the fruit of that love having established what is now the diocese of Marquette, Michigan.

# Bibliography

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