

Who exactly is Fr. Nelson Baker?.....a *local saint-to-be?.....really?*

The setting is Buffalo, New York, 1892, an impoverished money-tight era, and out of a modest Catholic church several young altar boys process along while holding lighted candles with a regal-looking priest bringing up the rear. They march out through a complex of charitable institutions and buildings to a grassy field and gather around the priest. He reverently pulls out a pocket-sized statue of Our Lady of Victory from beneath his cloak and buries it a few feet into the ground, then sprinkles Holy water about the area. On their knees, they all begin praying to Our Lady; they are praying for a natural gas line to be discovered in that field because the surrounding institutions cannot pay for heat. The boys have done this ritual for several days now, with the priest doing all-night vigils before the statue of Our Lady. No gas line found, lots of scoffers. The ritual began to be dubbed "Father's Folly" by skeptics. But the priest was no stranger to perseverance. One last attempt, the priest prayed intently all night long.....the next day, at 1,137 feet, the hired drillers found and tapped into a gas line against all odds, *enough gas to support a large portion of Lackawanna and all the charitable institutions!*

This priest was Fr. Nelson Henry Baker, born in 1842, a man of slight stature, 5'4" inches tall, bespectacled, unassuming, smart as a whip, and of the kindest, gentlest nature imaginable, always with a twinkle in his eye. As a young man, Nelson actually served a brief stint in the army during the Civil War followed by working in his family's business, then a feed and grain shop. He had an outstanding acumen as a businessman and could turn a dime like no other. But his heart was not truly with business; it was with the Catholic Church. He attended daily Mass with his very devout mother for years. He was drawn to the needs of poor children and while visiting an orphanage, he became enamored by the priest who ran it, Fr. Hines; this priest helped get Nelson into the seminary. As part of Nelson's discernment to the priesthood, he traveled abroad to visit the great Catholic shrines. While in Paris, he developed a stunning devotion in his heart for Our Lady of Victory. This devotion eventually led him to finance, fund-raise and build the church of his dreams in Buffalo, Our Lady of Victory, now a basilica that hosts thousands of visitors yearly.



Fr. Baker devoted his life to creating and funding many charitable institutions, mostly which became home to the fatherless, home to unwed mothers, home to abandoned infants, home to the forgotten, home to the lost. Anyone who grew up in Buffalo will humorously remember how their parents threatened to drop them off at Fr. Baker's if they misbehaved. (Just ask Susie Gallo). He had an uncanny knack for identifying the needs around him and providing for others, advocating for justice, sometimes using his own personal funds, other times cajoling money out of thin air. He was a very powerful man with a powerful love, a love for Jesus, Mary and all of God's children. A mover and a shaker, charismatic, Spirit-led, he lived to be 94 years old; half a million people descended upon Buffalo to pay their respects the week of his death. Through his kindnesses, generosity, and prayer life (he was never seen without a Rosary in hand), he brought more souls to the throne of God than words can express.

So, a local saint-to-be, a larger-than-life priest who worked tirelessly to help despairing people, troubled youth, young infants, a man whose devotion rose above the tides of mediocrity and shed a very Holy light on history.....will he be canonized? **YES! YES! YES!....REALLY! ☺**

**The following is a prayer for Fr. Baker's future canonization:*

*“Lord, you gave us Your Servant Nelson Baker as an example of service to the poor, homeless and the young. By Fr. Baker's ardent concern for those in need, inflame our hearts and lives with compassion for the poor, justice for the oppressed, hope for the troubled and courage to those in doubt. We pray through the intercession of Our Lady of Victory, if it be the Lord's will, that your servant, Nelson Baker, may one day be fully canonized.
Amen. Glory Be (3x), Our Lady of Victory, pray for us.”*

(Stay tuned for the next flyer coming soon: Learn about Fr. Baker's multiple miracles and some stories of great interest, the journey to canonization, along with more details about CCBT's planned trip to visit Fr. Baker's remains at Our Lady of Victory Church in Buffalo, NY, this coming May.)

To learn more about Fr. Baker now, go to ourladyofvictory.org, or try one of these great books: Father of the Fatherless by R. Gribble, CSC, or The Father Baker Code by J. Koerner, c. 2009