

The Marian Pilgrimage: Day Nine: Friday 15 May 2020

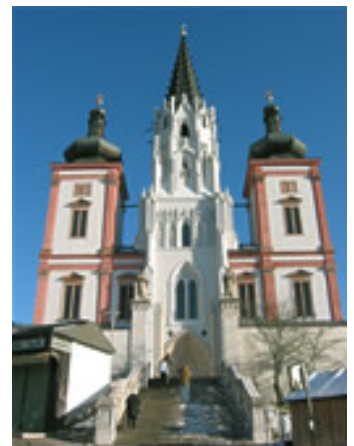
The Shrine of Our Lady of Mariazell



The territory around Mariazell was given to The Monastery of St. Lambrecht around 1103.

On the evening of December 21, 1157, a Benedictine monk named Magnus was in a forest looking for a place to build a monastery. At one point, his path became blocked by a huge boulder that was too big to go over or around, so Magnus took a small wooden statue of the Virgin Mary he had in his knapsack, knelt in prayer, and asked the Virgin Mary for guidance.

Soon there was a great rumble and the rock split in two, allowing him to pass through. Magnus placed the statue reverently on a white branch and soon after, he and some of the local people built a small chapel to house the statue. Word of the miraculous statue of the Virgin quickly spread across the countryside, and the chapel had to be built.



Legends give the town's founding day as December 21, 1157, but it is first documented in 1243. A Marian altar was dedicated there in 1266.

In the fourteenth century, a Gothic church stood at Mariazell with a 90 m high spire. Twice the church was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt and expanded and redesigned in the Baroque style by Domenico Sciassia from 1644 to 1683. To the left and right of the gothic spire, Baroque towers were built, the nave was lengthened and widened, and a Dome was added on the eastern side..

In 1907, the pilgrimage church was elevated to a minor Basilica .

The basilica has been undergoing a general restoration since 1992, which was completed in 2007.

Holy image and chapel

The older part of the building, built in 1690, contains the Gnadenkapelle. This chapel sits on the site of the first "cell" and holds a Late Romanesque miraculous image of the Virgin Mary - the "Magna Mater Austria" - a 48 cm tall statuette carved from linden wood .



The Significance of the Mariazell Pilgrimage Basilica

Hardly any other pilgrimage site in the world can look back on such an impressive past. According to records, Mariazell was founded on December 21,

1157. An inscription above the main portal, giving the date 1200, means that we can assume that the building of the Romanesque chapel began at this time. The first documentary evidence of the 'Cell' is from the year 1243. A letter of indulgence, dated 1330, from Archbishop Friedrich III of Salzburg, is given as the source for the Church of Our Beloved Lady of Cell as a much-visited place of pilgrimage. By 1344 the community had received the rights of a market town.

Of great importance for Mariazell was the awarding of a plenary indulgence by Pope Boniface IX in 1399. It was granted for the week following the Octave of the Assumption of the Virgin and led to the cultivation of penitential rites and processions, which continued after the indulgence was revoked and are documented well into the Baroque period. The stream of pilgrims constantly increased from the regions of what are today Bavaria, Bohemia, France, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Germany, Switzerland, but above all, Austria and Hungary. Pilgrims were actively seeking the help of the Mariazell Mother of Mercy.

Mariazell enjoyed a special heyday after the end of the Counter Reformation as a national shrine of the House of Habsburg, which not only placed its personal fate under the protection of Mariazell, but the entire country and its inhabitants. The example given by the ruling family moved the members of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and finally all members of society, to make pilgrimages to Mariazell.

The bestowal of city status in 1948 was not due to the size of the community, but its importance as an ecclesiastical and cultural centre acknowledged far beyond the borders of Austria. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, it is now possible for pilgrims from Austria's neighbouring countries to the south and east to again come unhindered to Mariazell.

With inhabitants numbering only two thousand, yet over one million pilgrims and visitors will come to Mariazell annually.

Pilgrimage development.

Larger numbers of pilgrims are documented beginning around 1330, when a secular court imposed a "Zellfahrt" (*Zell journey*) as atonement for its criminals, so penitential journeys became a feature which were widened in scope.

In the following years increasing numbers of pilgrims came from neighbouring lands. After the Counter-Reformation, the Habsburgs made Mariazell a national sanctuary.



However, in 1783, Emperor Joseph II dissolved the monastery in Mariazell, and in 1787, he completely banned pilgrimages there.

Joseph's policy of religious toleration was the most aggressive of any state in Europe. He was ahead of his time in many ways, yet even although 'enlightened' his despotic methods undermined any good effects.

Probably the most unpopular of all his reforms was his attempted modernization of the highly traditional Catholic Church, which in medieval times had helped establish the Holy Roman Empire beginning with Charlemagne. Calling himself the 'Guardian of Catholicism', Joseph II struck vigorously at papal power. He tried to make the Catholic Church in his Empire independent of Rome. Clergymen were deprived of the tithe and ordered to study in seminaries under government

supervision, while bishops had to take a formal oath of loyalty to the Crown. [a situation similar to that of the Established Church of England]

He financed a large increase in the number of dioceses, parishes, and secular clergy by extensive sales of monastic lands.

The Church's ecclesiastical tribunals were abolished and marriage was defined as a civil contract outside the jurisdiction of the Church.



A medal minted during the reign of Joseph II, commemorating his grant of religious liberty to Jews and Protestants.

Joseph sharply cut the number of holy days to be observed in the Empire and ordered ornamentation in churches to be reduced. He forcibly simplified the manner in which the Mass was to be celebrated. Opponents of the reforms blamed them for showing Protestant tendencies. The rise of Enlightenment rationalism and the emergence of a liberal class of bourgeois officials all contributed to the welter of mistrust. Anti-clericalism emerged and persisted among some of the more progressive, while the traditional Catholics were energized in opposition to the Emperor.

In his Patent of Toleration of 1781, the Catholic Church lost its monopoly on faith as it pertained to the Emperor and those close to him.

Protestants and Jews were permitted to practise their religion freely. Nevertheless, the Catholic precedence was upheld. This decision took effect especially in Austria.

The Secularization Decree issued on 12 January 1782 banned several monastic orders not involved in teaching or healing and some one hundred and forty monasteries were suppressed. These were home to one thousand and four hundred and forty-eight monks and one hundred and ninety nuns. The banned religious orders were: Jesuits, Camaldolese, Order of Friars Minor, Capuchin, Carmelites, Carthusians, Poor Clares, Order of Saint Benedict, Cistercians, Dominican Order (Order of Preachers), Franciscans, Pauline Fathers and Premonstratensians.

The wealth recovered from these was taken over by the Religious Fund.

His anti-clerical and liberal innovations induced Pope Pius VI to pay a visit to Emperor Joseph in March 1782. Joseph received the Pope politely and purported to show himself as a good Catholic, but refused to be influenced. Joseph's feelings towards religion are reflected in a witticism he once spoke in Paris. While being given a tour of the Sorbonne's library, the archivist took Joseph to a dark room containing religious documents and lamented the lack of light which prevented Joseph from being able to read them. Joseph put the man at rest by saying "Ah, when it comes to theology, there is never much light."

In 1789 he issued a charter of religious toleration for the Jews of Galicia, a region with a large Yiddish-speaking traditional Jewish population. Yet the charter abolished communal autonomy whereby the Jews controlled their internal affairs; it promoted Germanization and the wearing of non-Jewish clothing.



Emperor Joseph II died on 20 February 1790. He is buried in tomb number 42 in the Imperial Crypt in Vienna. He asked that his epitaph read: "Here lies Joseph II, who failed in all he undertook."

He was succeeded by his brother, Leopold II who kept in force Joseph's decrees that emancipated the peasantry and granted increased religious liberty to non-Catholics.

When we have explored the Basilica, and sought the Prayers of Our Lady, it is time to explore the adjacent chapels:

Chapel of St Michael



Leaving the Basilica, via the south exit, one comes to the Chapel of St Michael. This Late Gothic octagonal building with round tracery windows dates from the end of the 15th century and in the past served as a charnel house for bones from the closed graveyard around the church. The Undercroft still functions as such an ossuary.

The upper floor, with the stellar-ribbed vault, is used for Masses and christenings.

Chapel of the Holy Spring



The Chapel of the Holy Spring was constructed near to the Basilica in 1711 by Abbot Anton Stroz of Saint Lambrecht. The spring is claimed to have healing powers for eye ailments. In the Baroque altar is a seated Madonna with Child from the 15th century, to the left and right are statues of St Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Virgin. The healing water flows from vessels held by angels flanking the altar.

In the interior one sees a mirror ceiling with a surrounding cornice on flat pilasters. In the middle of the ceiling fresco, the Holy Spirit glides over the waters, recalling the opening of the first chapter of Genesis. There are other illustrations that refer to healing waters: Moses striking water from the

rocks, Naaman bathing in the Jordan, Jesus with the Samaritan at the well, and the healing of the blind man at the Pool of Siloam.



The Brother Klaus Church on the banks of the Hubertus Lake in the Walster area lies in the heart of an untouched landscape, nine kilometres from Mariazell. The building of the new church took place in 1966/67 in honour of St Nicholas of Flue. The enchanting work of two Styrian artists, Rudolf Szyszkowitz (concreted glass windows) and Alexander Silveri (cast-iron portal) is much admired.

St Nicholas of Flue (also known as Brother Klaus), was born on the Flüeli near Sachseln in 1417. The son of a small farmers he grew up to be a farmer.

At around the age of 30, he married Dorothea Wyss, a farmer's daughter. They farmed in the municipality of Flüeli in the Alpine foothills, above Sachseln on the Lake Sarnen. He also served in the Army until he was thirty seven rising to the rank of captain, reportedly fighting with a sword in one

hand and a rosary in the other. After serving in the military, he became a councillor and judge for his canton in 1459 and served as a judge for nine years. He declined the opportunity to serve as Landamman (governor) of his canton.

After receiving a mystical vision of a lily eaten by a horse, which he recognized as indicating that the cares of his worldly life (the draft horse pulling a plough) was swallowing up his spiritual life (the lily, a symbol of purity) he decided to devote himself entirely to the contemplative life. In 1467, he left his wife and his ten children with her consent and set himself up as a hermit in Switzerland, establishing a chantry for a priest from his own funds so that he could assist at Mass daily.

Symbolic visions continued to be a feature of his contemplation, and he became a spiritual guide whose advice was widely sought and followed. His reputation for wisdom and piety was such that figures from across Europe came to seek advice from him, and he was known to all as "Brother Klaus." In 1470, Pope Paul II granted the first indulgence to the sanctuary at Ranft and it became a place of pilgrimage, since it lay on the Jakobsweg (Way of St. James), the Camino, the road pilgrims travelled to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. His counsel prevented a civil war between the cantons meeting at the Diet of Stans in 1481 when their antagonism grew. Despite being illiterate and having limited experience with the world, he is honoured among both Protestants and Catholics with the permanent national unity of Switzerland. Letters of thanks to him from Berne and Soleure still survive. When he died, on 21 March 1487, he was surrounded by his wife and children.

Of the many spiritual insights Nicholas received in his visions, one in particular is reproduced often, as a mystical wheel. Nicholas described his vision of the Holy Face at the centre of a circle with the tips of three swords touching the two eyes

and mouth, while three others radiate outwards in a six-fold symmetry reminiscent of the Seal of Solomon.



A cloth painted with the image, known as the meditation prayer cloth, associates the symbol with six episodes from the life of Christ: the mouth of God at the Annunciation, the eyes spying Creation both in its pre-lapsarian innocence and redemption from the Fall at Calvary, while in the inward direction the betrayal by his disciple Judas in the Garden of Gethsamene points to the crown of the Pantocrator sitting in the judgment seat, the glad tidings of the Nativity scene's "Glory to God in the Highest and Peace to his people on Earth" echoes in ear on the right of the head, while the memorial of the Lord's Supper "This is my body,

which will be given for you" at the prayers of consecration in the Divine Liturgy of the Mass echoes to the ear on the left of the head.

1. These six medallions contain additional symbols of acts of Christian kindness:
2. two crutches suggest *Visiting the sick* as a work of mercy
3. hiker's walking stick with travel pouch suggests *Hospitality to strangers*
4. a loaf of bread, fish and a pitcher of water and wine represent *Feed the hungry, quench the thirsty*
5. chains indicate *Care for the incarcerated*
6. Christ's garments evoke *Clothe the naked*
7. a coffin reminds us to *Bury the dead*

This visual interpretation encapsulates the personal piety of rural peasants, many illiterate, for whom salvation history was expressed in these crucial aspects of God's loving relationship with us and the Christian duty to love of neighbour.

Sanctifying grace flows from the Paschal Victim on the Cross, an image Nicholas described in his vision by the stream, where the Tabernacle sits above a spring that flows forth to cover the earth, recalling the rivers flowing from the Temple in Ezekiel's visions. Such profound insights on the different senses of scripture are often lost in modern biblical exegesis that focuses too narrowly on the literal sense, although the historical-critical method and narrative criticism can deliver us from scriptural aridity.

Nicholas was beatified in 1669. After his Beatification, the municipality of Sachseln built a church in his honour, where his body was interred. He was canonized in 1947 by Pope Pius XII. His feast day in the Roman Catholic Church is 21 March, except in Switzerland and Germany, where it is 25 September.

As a layman with family responsibilities who took his civic duties as an ancestral landowner seriously, Brother Nicholas is a model of heroic manhood for many concerned with the flourishing of local communities and sustainable use of open land.

The new Catechism of the Catholic Church cites a brief personal prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe in paragraph #226^[5] of *Chapter 1 of Part 1, Section 2 "The Profession of the Christian Faith"* under subheading *IV "The implications of faith in one God"*, an aspect of which is making good use of created things.

My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from you.

My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to you.

My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to you.

He is the patron saint of the German-language association KLB (Katholischen Landvolkbewegung), the Catholic Rural Communities Movement. Before leaving Mariazell the local delicacies should be sampled.

Mariazellginger bread and bitters

The Mariazell bitters and ginger bread are real sightseeing attractions. Both of these delicacies productions are centuries old, for even in those times and since the catering for pilgrims is taken seriously. Gingerbread is quite delicious, nutritious, healthy, and on long journeys it keeps its freshness for a long time. In Mariazell The Pirker Family started ginger-bread baking business three hundred years ago, and the Arzberg liquor manufacturers started theirs in 1883. They use the same secret recipe that contains thirty-three different herbs.

