

The St. Francis of Assisi Parish Church

Budapest–Ferencváros

AFTER THE OTTOMAN ERA, the new life of Ferencváros, named after Francis I, who took the throne in 1792, began on the ruins of medieval Szentfalva. On 1 November 1822, a great dream of the mostly German-speaking founders came true and in a temporary church, built on the outskirts of today's Bakáts Square, the Franciscans started to run their ministry until 1900.

Due to the damages caused by the great flood of 1838, the church was closed in 1865. The church building committee, which won the patronage of Queen Elisabeth, chose the Neo-Romanesque design of Miklós Ybl, architect of the Opera and the St. Stephen's Basilica, instead of the Gothic-Revival idea of Imre Steindl, architect of the Parliament. The church, built with the financial support of the state and mainly of Budapest, was consecrated in the honour of St. Francis of Assisi on the 24th of April 1879 by archbishop János Simor (his coat-of-arms is on the altar).

It was the first historicist church in the capital, quite different from the contemporary (late) baroque churches decorated with plaster and gilding. The work that was carried out by the great artists and masters of the time, earned even the recognition of the royal pair and also by Mihály Munkácsy and Franz Liszt.

The building is characterised by a consistently executed neo-Romanesque style. Ybl also designed the furnishings himself, creating a unified effect. The monumental, basilican elements (such as the blinds of the side aisles), which at first glance appear puritanical, are in fact a richly detailed design, from the floral ornamentation, through the mythical depictions of animals, to the starry sky that remained only on the ceiling of the crypt.



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Side-altar of King St. Ladislaus (TM)
altarpiece: King St. Ladislaus wrings water from the rock (TM)
tabernacle: Jesus blessing the fish
below: winged ox (Luke the Evangelist), St. Elisabeth, St. Adalbert, St. Margaret, winged lion (Mark the Ev.)

Altar of the baptistery (TM)
central: the Paschal Lamb
left: the baptism of Jesus
right: Ark of Noah

St. Augustine (TM)
St. Anne with the child Mary (TM)
St. Ambrose (TM)
John the Baptist (TM)

Daniel (LK)
The last communion of John Hunyadi (LK)

The Sacred Heart of Jesus (GJ)

Isaiah (TM)
St. Francis in front of Pope Innocent III (TM)

The death of St. Francis (TM)

Main altar (TM)
central: Jesus, as a good shepherd
left: the engagement of St. Francis with Lady Poverty
right: the stigmatization of St. Francis
below: coat of arms of János Simor

St. Peter (TM)
Christ (TM)
St. Paul (TM)

Cherub (TM)

Cherub (TM)

Glorification of St. Francis (TM)

The Immaculate Heart of Mary (GJ)

baptismal font

Jeremiah (LK)
St. Francis preaching (TM)

Side-altar of King St. Stephen (TM)
altarpiece: St. Stephen King is giving alms (LK)
tabernacle: Last Supper
below: vulture (John the Evangelist), St. Gerard, St. Emeric, St. Maurus of Pécs, angel (Matthew the Ev.)

The preaching of Saint John of Capistrano (LK)
Ezekiel (TM)

The period's characteristic feature is the national-themed painting and former stained-glass windows, which was made under the guidance of bishop Arnold Ipolyi. The best painters of the time, Mór Than and Károly Lotz, painted the secco. Three themes: (1) the life of Saint Francis, (2) biblical figures and church fathers, (3) Hungarian saints. It was the first time in Hungary when a secular historical figure (John Hunyadi) was depicted on a church mural.

In 1900 the church was taken over from the Franciscans by the diocesan clergy. During WWI, two of the five bells were taken. In the 1940s, stone sculptures were made, fit into the Neo-Romanesque milieu. After WWII, the dictatorship suppressed civil and charitable activity. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the tower and the main gate were hit, and the garden became the site of executions and temporary graves – commemorated now with a monument.

The mechanical organ, designed by Sándor Országh, was restored in 1994 and the church was renovated between 2017 and 2022. The mural and glass windows, the organ case and the decorative painting need restoration. Nowadays, it is scene of liturgical services and also cultural programmes.

PAINTINGS, CARVINGS, BUILDING PERIOD:
FL: Feszler, Leó
LK: Lotz, Károly
TM: Than, Mór

SCULPTURES, RELIEFS, 20TH CENTURY:
FB: Ferenczy, Béni
GJ: Grantner, Jenő
KA: Káldor, Aurél
SZB: Szappanos, Béla