

Today, the mortal remains of Blessed Brother André lie in a black marble sepulcher in the back of the Oratory, the shrine he dedicated his life to erecting for Saint Joseph. In front of the Basilica towers a statue of Saint Joseph holding the Child Jesus. The millions who file past it every year see on its stone pedestal the words which the saintly old guardian calls out from heaven: **ITE AD JOSEPH — GO TO JOSEPH**

### Two miracles attributed to Brother André

The canonization campaign for the man many faithful call the "Miracle Man of Montreal" began soon after his death in 1937 at age 91.

Over the years, millions of people have signed petitions asking for his sainthood.

Before such recognition, the Vatican must accept that someone is responsible posthumously for two miracles. The first miracle attributed to the Canadian came to the Vatican's attention in 1958, when New York businessman Joseph Audino said he had recovered from terminal cancer after asking for André's spiritual guidance.

The second case involved a young Quebec boy who in 1999 recovered from severe head injuries suffered when he was riding his bike and was struck by a car. Relatives said they prayed to Brother André.

Benedict announced Brother André's canonization in February after recognizing the second miracle attributed to him.

The lay brother is the first saint born in modern-day Canada.

([www.catholicism.org](http://www.catholicism.org))

**Interesting Note:** When Tom's family researched their Family Tree; they discovered Brother Andre was a part of the family on the maternal side. His mother was French-Canadian. Surprised by this discovery and elated since they had a devotion to Brother Andre for years.

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### Prayer

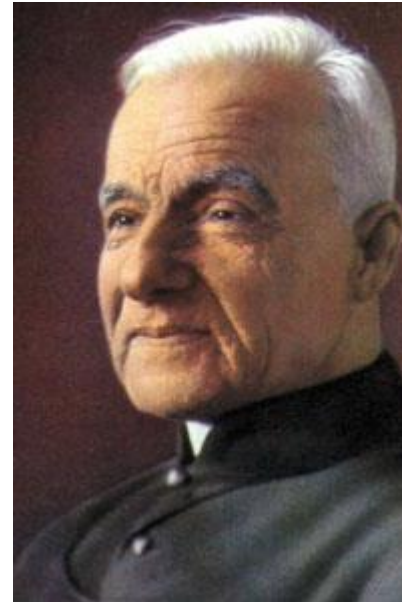
Brother Andre, your devotion to Saint Joseph is an inspiration to us. You gave your life selflessly to bring the message of his life to others. Pray that we may learn from Saint Joseph, and from you, what it is like to care for Jesus and do his work in the world. Amen

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### The Pilgrim Center of Hope

A Catholic Evangelization Ministry

[www.pilgrimcenterofhope.org](http://www.pilgrimcenterofhope.org) 210-521-3377



## St. Brother Andre Bessette "Lay Brother"

**Born:** August 9, 1845

**Occupation:** Religious, Doorman

**Died:** December 31, 1937

**Feast Day:** January 6

**Canonized:** October 17, 2010

**Patron Saint of:** the Sick & Family Caregivers

### A Part of His Story

On August 9, 1845, Alfred Bessette was born to Isaac and Clothilde Bessette, the eighth in what would become a family of twelve children. The Bessettes were a poor French-Canadian family who lived in the farming village of St. Gregoire, thirty miles from Montreal. His parents were devout Catholics who, by their own example, taught their children the virtuous habits of prayer and hard work, habits which were to become for Alfred the key to his ultimate sanctity as Brother André. Alfred was born a very sick baby; so sick, in fact, that his father baptized him shortly after birth, fearing he would not survive. This lack of physical health and strength stayed with him throughout his entire life, yet he lived to the incredible age of ninety-one.

Alfred was twelve years old when his mother died. He was sent to live with an uncle, separated from his brothers and sisters.

He did not have the physical stamina required to perform the chores asked of him.

Here are Brother André's own words describing these years of his life: *"I was never very strong. From the time when I was a little boy, ten years old, I have suffered from dyspepsia [indigestion]. It seems as if I was always sick from it. I have had it all during my life, and it still annoys me."*

On Sundays, he would spend the afternoons in the Church, which was quite heroic for a child of his age. The pastor of the Church became André's

spiritual father; he instructed the child for his first Holy Communion & inspired him to a devotion to St. Joseph. This most likely began his road to the religious life.

Penance is nothing without prayer, though. And here was the true sign of the boy's holiness: He relished being united with God in prayer. His spare time was spent either in the presbytery of the parish, talking to Father Provincial, or in the church itself in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, absorbed in prayer for hours at a time. It was during these years that he started what was to be his lifelong habit — long, deep conversations with Saint Joseph. In his Epistle to the Philippians (3:20), Saint Paul said, "Our conversation is in Heaven."

Alfred met the Holy Cross Association as a young adult. He was impressed by them; their black habit with Roman collar, cincture and medal of Saint Joseph, their manly bearing and devotion all attracted him. Nevertheless, he was nervous. These men were educated; they ran a school. Alfred was still illiterate. But Father Provincial relieved him of that worry, assuring him there was a need for janitors and manual laborers.

On the brothers' part, however, there was reservation. Could this frail person actually live up to the great rigor of religious life? Could he take the formation that they had all been through? Was his apparent piety enough to overcome such deficiencies? These were real concerns for the brothers, though they did not express them to Alfred. Alfred was not at all put off by the brothers' lack of enthusiasm. As was already his common practice, he sought Divine Assistance to overcome this challenge and prayed all the more.

They accepted him into the novitiate, and he took the habit of the order. The novice master, Father Gastineau, gave him a great welcome. Perhaps he was expecting much of the new arrival, because before Brother André got to the novitiate, the novice master received a letter from Father Provincial which said, "I am sending a saint to your Congregation."

Brother André was a good novice, well liked by his superiors and respected by the brothers. He also learned to read, a skill which he applied with great fervor to the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation of Christ, as well as to the lives of the saints. As part of the Holy Cross religious formation, novices were required to memorize the entire Sermon on the Mount. But Brother André didn't stop there. In later years, he memorized the Passion of Our Lord as it is contained in each of the four Gospels, being able to recite the entire Passion word for word

according to whichever Evangelist he wished. In addition to this, he had whole sections of many spiritual books memorized.

His first assignment was as porter of the College of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur in Côte-des-Neiges, the same college where he spent much of his novitiate. This was the position he held for nearly forty years. As is common in the lives of all of the saints — and, indeed, in the lives of all men — there was never a time when he was without crosses, some of them serious. His superior at the College, Father Louage, was not particularly impressed by Brother André and oftentimes disciplined him in what seemed to be an unfair manner. It was soon after his assignment at the college that miracles started to happen.

He cured many of the students at the college, so many that he developed a reputation as a great miracle worker. One day, as the pious porter was scrubbing the floor in the parlor of the college, a lady came to see him, having heard of his reputation. She was so afflicted with rheumatism that she could only walk with the assistance of two men supporting her by holding each arm. Her request to Brother André was simple enough: "I am suffering from rheumatism. I want you to heal me." Not looking up from the floor he was still busily scrubbing, Brother André said to the men assisting her, "Let her walk." The woman walked out unassisted.

In early life, our diminutive porter acquired the habit of frequent, long, and devout prayer. As he advanced in years, this habit did not decrease. During the daytime, which he typically spent cleaning and doing other chores, Brother André received many visitors. At night he frequently visited hospitals, often times returning with crutches to add to the growing collection in the Oratory. After such a day, he would spend much of the night in prayer. One of his intimates said about this, "Frequently, after his sick calls, he invited me to sleep in his cell over the primitive chapel. More than once I struggled against sleep in order to watch him. Towards morning I fell asleep while he remained in prayer. When I awoke, about five o'clock, I often noticed his bed had not been touched."

Though he is known for his tremendous devotion to Saint Joseph, all those who knew him said that Blessed André's central devotion was to the Passion of Our Lord. Many times, he would turn a worldly conversation into an emotional narration of Our Lord's sufferings, often bringing those present, including himself, to tears. Because of this devotion, the good brother led Friday Stations of the Cross every week at the Oratory, hoping one day to construct a large set of stations around the Basilica's exterior.

An immense project was being realized and larger crowds were swarming to the Oratory. The first small chapel had been erected in 1904, but it soon became too small to receive all the people who were coming to the mountain. The chapel was extended in 1908 and again in 1910. Still, a larger church was needed.

In 1917, a new crypt church, able to hold a thousand people, was inaugurated. This, however, was only the starting point of an even more important endeavor. During his whole life, Brother Andre devoted his efforts to building the Oratory, which was to become the world's greatest sanctuary dedicated to St. Joseph.

In the ninety-first year of a life dedicated to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the miracle man sensed his imminent departure from this vale of tears. Late in 1936, he told one of the priests in his order that Christmas of that year would be his last in this life. At 8:30 in the evening of December 31, the wonder worker who cured so many was himself admitted to that very hospital for what the physician thought was a mild heart attack but was later diagnosed as acute gastritis.

He spent his dying days as he had spent his whole life, unconcerned with his own sufferings — which were great, considering that he refused any pain medication — and constantly praying for others. He offered up his prayers and mortifications for Catholic Spain, then being torn asunder by civil war, prior to General Franco's defeat of the Communists.



His words during his final agony: “My God how I suffer. . . Heaven is so beautiful that it is worth all the trouble with which one prepares for it. . . How good God is. . . How beautiful. . . How powerful. . . Mary, Sweet mother, mother of my sweet Savior, be merciful to me and help me . . . Saint Joseph...  
“Over one million attended his wake and funeral.

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