

## Day 243 – Wednesday, November 18, 2020

Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa

I realize that yesterday was the second time I send out the story of St. Maruerite Bourgeoys. Sorry about that. So I will send out my favorite Canadian saint.

St. Andre Bessette

### Facts

[Feastday](#): January 6

Beatified: Pope John Paul II

Canonized: October 17, 2010, Saint Peter's Square, Rome, by Pope Benedict XVI

André Bessette, C.S.C. (9 August 1845 – 6 January 1937), more commonly known as Brother André (French: *Frère André*), and since his canonization as Saint André of Montreal, was a lay brother of the Congregation of Holy Cross and a significant figure of the Roman Catholic Church among French-Canadians, credited with thousands of reported miraculous oil healings associated with his pious devotion to Saint Joseph

Bessette was declared venerable in 1978 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982. Pope Benedict XVI approved the decree of sainthood for Blessed André on 19 February 2010, with the formal canonization taking place on 17 October 2010. He is the first Canadian living after Confederation to be canonized.

When Alfred Bessette came to the Holy Cross Brothers in 1870, he carried with him a note from his [pastor](#) saying, "I am sending you a saint." The Brothers found that difficult to believe. Chronic stomach pains had made it impossible for Alfred to hold a [job](#) very long and since he was a boy he had wandered from shop to shop, farm to farm, in his native [Canada](#) and in the United States, staying only until his employers found out how little work he could do. The Holy Cross Brothers were teachers and, at 25, Alfred still did not know how to read and write. It seemed as if Alfred approached the religious order out of desperation, not vocation.

Alfred was desperate, but he was also prayerful and deeply devoted to [God](#) and Saint Joseph. He may have had no place left to go, but he believed that was because this was the place he felt he should have been all along. The Holy Cross Brothers took him into the novitiate but soon found out what others had learned -- as hard as Alfred, now Brother Andre, wanted to work, he simply wasn't strong enough. They asked him to leave the order, but Andre, out of desperation again, appealed to a visiting [bishop](#) who promised him that Andre would stay and take his vows.

After his vows, Brother Andre was sent to Notre Dame [College](#) in Montreal (a school for boys age seven to twelve) as a porter. There his responsibilities were to answer the door, to welcome guests, find the people they were visiting, wake up those in the school, and deliver mail. Brother Andre joked later, "At the end of my novitiate, my superiors showed me the door, and I stayed there for forty years."

In 1904, he surprised the [Archbishop](#) of Montreal if he could, by requesting permission to, build a [chapel](#) to Saint [Joseph](#) on the mountain near the college. The [Archbishop](#) refused to go into [debt](#) and would only give permission for Brother Andre to build what he had money for. What money did Brother Andre have? Nickels he had collected as donations for Saint [Joseph](#) from haircuts he gave the boys. Nickels and dimes from a small dish he had kept in a picnic shelter on top of the mountain near a statue of [St. Joseph](#) with a sign "Donations for St. Joseph." He had collected this change for years but he still had only a few hundred dollars. Who would start a [chapel](#) now with so little funding? Andre took his few hundred dollars and built what he could ... a small wood shelter only fifteen feet by eighteen feet. He kept collecting money and went back three years later to request more building. The wary [Archbishop](#) asked him, "Are you having [visions](#) of Saint [Joseph](#) telling you to build a church for him?"

Brother Andre reassured him. "I have only my great devotion to [St. Joseph](#) to guide me." The [Archbishop](#) granted him permission to keep building as long as he didn't go into debt. He started by adding a roof so that all the people who were coming to hear [Mass](#) at the shrine wouldn't have to stand out in the rain and the wind. Then came walls, heating, a paved road up the mountain, a shelter for pilgrims, and finally a place where Brother Andre and others could live and take care of the shrine -- and the pilgrims who came - full-time. Through kindness, caring, and devotion, Brother Andre helped many souls experience healing and renewal on the mountaintop. There were even cases of physical healing. But for everything, Brother Andre thanked St. Joseph.

Despite financial troubles, Brother Andre never lost [faith](#) or devotion. He had started to build a [basilica](#) on the mountain but the Depression had interfered. At ninety-years old he told his co-workers to place a statue of [St. Joseph](#) in the unfinished, unroofed basilica. He was so ill he had to be carried up the mountain to see the statue in its new home. Brother Andre died soon after on January 6, and didn't live to see the work on the [basilica](#) completed. But in Brother Andre's [mind](#) it never would be completed because he always saw more ways to express his devotion and to heal others. As long as he lived, the [man](#) who had trouble keeping work for himself, would never have stopped working for God.

On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI promulgated a decree recognizing a second miracle at Blessed André's intercession and on October 17, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI formally declared sainthood for Blessed Andre.

Prayer:

Blessed 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](#)

"Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, champagne in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming "WOO HOO what a ride!" (Hunter S. Thompson)

Sincerely,  
Fr. Jim Kaptein