

“I Am Sending You a Saint”

Brother André was born Alfred Bessette in 1845 in Quebec, Canada. An unlikely candidate for sainthood in an active religious community of teachers, the orphaned Alfred was physically frail throughout his life and remained largely without formal education. As a young man, he spent several years as a laborer on farms, in mills, and in various trades throughout New England and Canada, but his poor health made work difficult. Yet

his faith was always constant, as was his great love for St. Joseph.

Knowing of his piety, Alfred's pastor in Quebec encouraged him to join religious life and sent him to a nearby community of Holy Cross brothers with a letter boldly telling its superior, “I am sending you a saint.” Becoming a religious brother, Alfred took the name Brother André.

Educators in the Faith

Blessed Basile Moreau founded the Congregation of Holy Cross to serve the needs of the Church through educating both mind and heart. Although he did not have much formal education, Brother André was an exemplary “educator in the faith.” He never exercised a ministry as a teacher, but he taught the faith to thousands. He loved to spend time talking with people about St. Joseph and about the Lord's Passion, teaching them to pray by lovingly praying with them. His consistent faithfulness underscores our obligation and opportunity to educate in the faith in every aspect of life.

What Is a Brother?

From the earliest days of the Church, men and women have consecrated themselves to Christ through lives of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. These consecrated religious have made their entire lives a sign to the world of the Kingdom of God.

For all consecrated religious, the culmination of their “yes” is their profession of vows, committing their life to Christ in their religious community forever. Some professed religious serve as priests. There are also male religious called to the vocation of a brother. The vocation of a religious brother is complete in and of itself, lived through his vows and his dedication to prayer, community, and service.

In service to the Church, the Brothers of Holy Cross answer Christ's call to go out to all the nations and make the Gospel known. They do this primarily as teachers, administrators, or directors in the schools, parishes, and missions of Holy Cross around the world. In their “yes” to Christ's invitation to follow him, they make themselves radically open to serving the needs of the Church and the world.

Together, the brothers and priests of Holy Cross share a common life, common prayer, and participate equally in common works. Together they are a sign of the Kingdom to the world.

Prayer

*Lord our God, friend of the lowly,
you gave your servant,
Brother André Bessette,
a great devotion to St. Joseph
and a special commitment
to the poor and afflicted.
Through his intercession,
help us to follow his example
of prayer and love
and so come to share with him
in your glory,
We ask this in the name of
Jesus the Lord. Amen
Brother André, pray for us.*

BIOGRAPHY

Born on August 9, 1845, Alfred Bessette entered the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1870 and took the name Brother André. As doorkeeper in one of the Congregation's schools, he fostered devotion to St. Joseph among the sick and otherwise afflicted and soon became known as the “Miracle Man of Montreal.” In 1904, he founded a simple shrine that would later become the world-renowned St. Joseph's Oratory. Brother André died on January 6, 1937, and one million persons paid him a last homage. He was beatified on May 23, 1982, and will be canonized in Rome on October 17, 2010.



“Miracle Man of Montreal”

Brother André's work as a doorkeeper at the College of Notre Dame in Montreal put him in contact with large numbers of people. He was easy to talk to, so people shared their lives with him. When visitors told him of their various illnesses and afflictions, he prayed with them. He had a special devotion to St. Joseph, so he often used St. Joseph medals and oil that had burned in a lamp beneath a statue of the saint as a part of these prayers.

Many of the sick and injured who visited and prayed with Brother André experienced healing. Soon, great crowds of the sick and suffering came to the college to seek his prayers. Brother André always insisted that he was not a miracle worker: “I am nothing . . . only a tool in the hands of Providence, a lowly instrument at the service of St. Joseph.” Because the growing crowds became disruptive to the school, André moved his visitations—first to a small trolley station, and then to the property across the street from the school. André would spend his days greeting sick people and his evenings visiting the sick in their homes or in the hospital. Thousands of healings were attributed to his prayers for St. Joseph's intercession, and soon André was dubbed the “Miracle Man of Montreal.” In spite of this acclaim, he was always content to refer to himself as “St. Joseph's little dog.”

Zeal Is the Burning Desire to Make God Known, Loved, and Served

Blessed Basile Moreau instilled in the Congregation of Holy Cross a great zeal for bringing others into relationship with God. This zeal is a characteristic that burned brightly in the life of Brother André. Between his dedication to prayer and the demands of his ministry, Brother André maintained an exhausting schedule. Yet he never sought to attract a following for himself; his exhaustive labors were always dedicated to leading others to God. Even as many miraculous cures were attributed to his intercession, he always deflected the praise away from himself and towards Jesus and his foster father, Joseph.

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and love and so come to share with him in your glory,
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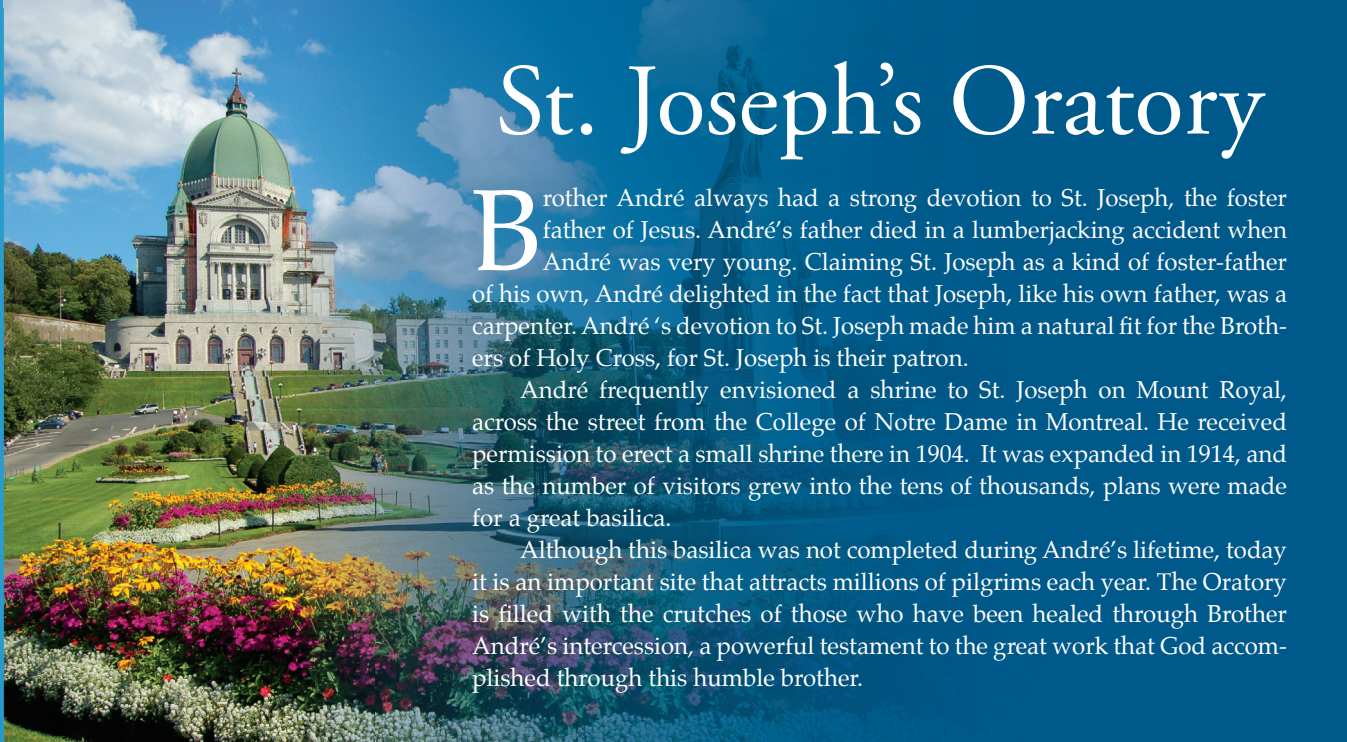
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What Is a Saint?

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a saint is “a ‘holy one’ who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life.” Saints are men and women who, through humility and grace, live lives of heroic virtue and make the Kingdom of God visible. All who claim the name Christian are called to strive for such virtue and unity with God. We are all called to be saints.





St. Joseph's Oratory

Brother André always had a strong devotion to St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus. André's father died in a lumberjacking accident when André was very young. Claiming St. Joseph as a kind of foster-father of his own, André delighted in the fact that Joseph, like his own father, was a carpenter. André's devotion to St. Joseph made him a natural fit for the Brothers of Holy Cross, for St. Joseph is their patron.

André frequently envisioned a shrine to St. Joseph on Mount Royal, across the street from the College of Notre Dame in Montreal. He received permission to erect a small shrine there in 1904. It was expanded in 1914, and as the number of visitors grew into the tens of thousands, plans were made for a great basilica.

Although this basilica was not completed during André's lifetime, today it is an important site that attracts millions of pilgrims each year. The Oratory is filled with the crutches of those who have been healed through Brother André's intercession, a powerful testament to the great work that God accomplished through this humble brother.

How Is Someone Declared a Saint?

Before the year 1234, the Church did not have a set process for declaring someone a saint. The earliest publicly acknowledged saints were the apostles and the *martyrs*: those who were killed for their faith during Roman times. The memory of a martyr was often kept alive at shrines marking the place he or she was buried, and over the years, certain martyrs became publicly venerated and called "saints." In the Middle Ages, the Church slowly began to craft a more deliberate process of declaring someone a saint. Today, when a deceased member of the Church is widely recognized as having led a life of heroic virtue, the bishop of that member's local church will usually begin an investigation into his or her life as the first step toward possible *canonization*. The process of becoming declared a saint can be a long one, and involves a series of stages including declaring the candidate a "Servant of God," then "Blessed," and finally a saint.

Trust in Divine Providence

Faced with many challenges in founding the Congregation of Holy Cross, Blessed Basile Moreau placed his confidence in the support of the Lord and encouraged his community to do the same. Nowhere was Br. André's trust in divine providence more evident than in the foundation and expansion of St. Joseph's Oratory. Despite the many obstacles he encountered during its construction, he knew in his heart that this shrine was God's will. Time after time, friends and benefactors came forward to lend their skills and resources to the project when all seemed lost. During one work stoppage, when the basilica still lacked a roof, St. André famously said, "Put a statue of St. Joseph in the center of the church, and if he wants a roof over his head, he'll take care of it." The dome was completed and is the third largest of its kind in the world.

Prayer

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and so come to share with him in your glory,
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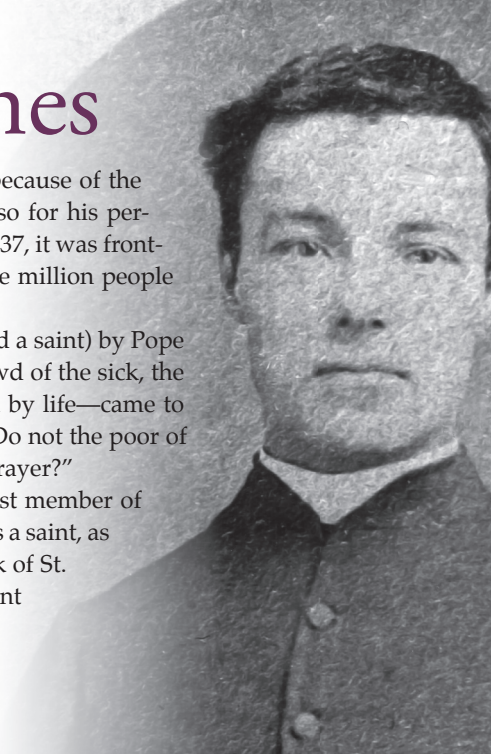


A Saint for Our Times

During his lifetime, Brother André was widely acclaimed, not just because of the Oratory he founded and the miracles that happened there, but also for his personal holiness and spiritual wisdom. When he died on January 7, 1937, it was front-page news. His body lay in state for a week after his death, and nearly one million people braved the bitter Montreal winter to pay their respects.

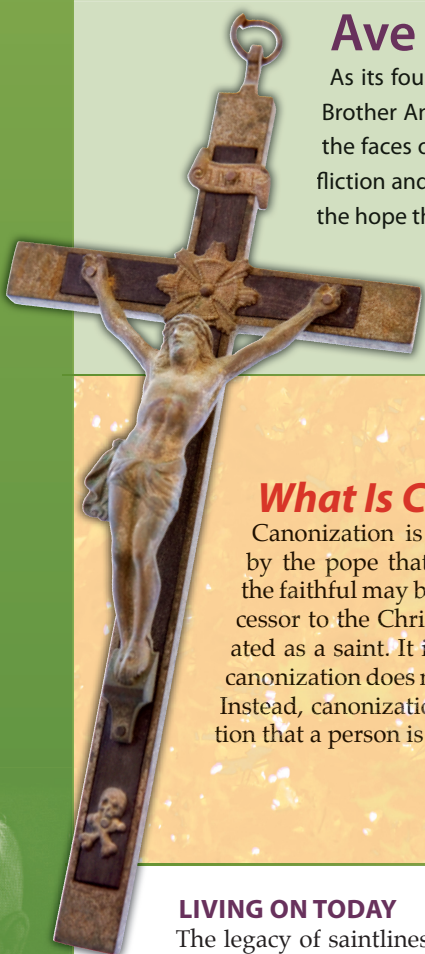
André was beatified (named “Blessed,” the last step before being named a saint) by Pope John Paul II in 1982. In his beatification homily, the Pope said, “A daily crowd of the sick, the afflicted, the poor of all kinds—those who were handicapped or wounded by life—came to him. They found in his presence a welcome ear, comfort and faith in God. Do not the poor of today have as much need of such love, of such hope, of such education in prayer?”

André Bessette will be canonized on October 17, 2010 in Rome, the first member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, his religious community, to be recognized as a saint, as well as the first Canadian-born male saint. His legacy continues in the work of St. Joseph’s Oratory and in the faith that this work inspires. This humble servant continues to serve God’s Church as a heroic witness to Christ, a powerful intercessor in heaven, and a modern-day example of God’s love and concern for the least among us.



Ave Crux, Spes Unica

As its founder, Blessed Basile Moreau gave to Holy Cross the motto: “Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope.” Brother André knew the cross very well. He encountered it in his own life and in his daily ministry. In the faces of the people who lined up outside of the Oratory to see him, he saw crosses of sickness, affliction and desperation. He never shied away from these crosses, year after year, because he also knew the hope that comes from the Cross of Christ. Not everyone who saw him experienced physical healing, but all experienced the love of Christ in this humble brother. Because he was a man with hope to bring, he enabled the sick and the suffering to experience that same hope in their own crosses.



What Is Canonization?

Canonization is the solemn declaration by the pope that a deceased member of the faithful may be called a model or intercessor to the Christian faithful and venerated as a saint. It is important to note that canonization does not *make* someone a saint. Instead, canonization is the formal recognition that a person is already a saint.

Prayer

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LIVING ON TODAY

The legacy of saintliness left by Brother André can be seen today in the life and ministry his religious family, the Congregation of Holy Cross. André House in Phoenix, Arizona, continues his ministry of bringing hope to the poor as a soup kitchen and drop-in center, offering services like showers and a clothing closet for the homeless. The Brother André Clinic in Peru provides a range of medical services and personal attention to people who would otherwise be unable to afford such care. Thousands of pilgrims continue to come to the St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal, seeking the prayers of St. Joseph and Brother André. Those are but a few examples of the many works and ministries throughout the world that draw their example from the ministry of Brother André. God has clearly used this humble Holy Cross brother to lead many others to a greater holiness. And he can do the same for us.

