

Brother André died as he lived, suffering heroically, praying fervently, and even working great cures. The purely spiritual mission of his life became more evident when, during the exposition of his body – which lasted a week – confessionals were filled with repentant sinners who had been away from God’s grace too long. Not only at the Oratory, but all over Montréal sinners were returning to God in great numbers as more than one million people streamed past his poor little coffin. Some of these people had been sworn enemies who had spurned the miracle worker as a fake, having dubbed him, “the old fool on the mountain.” The “old fool’s” prayers very well may have saved many of these from an eternity without God, just as they may have saved Canada from the clutches of Communism.

Today, the mortal remains of Brother André lie in a black marble sepulcher in the back of the Oratory, the shrine he dedicated his life to erecting for St. Joseph that he had first envisioned in his youth. In front of the Basilica towers a statue of St. Joseph holding the child Jesus. The millions who filed past it every year see on its stone pedestal the words which the saintly old guardian calls out from heaven: ITE AS JOSEPH — GO TO JOSEPH!

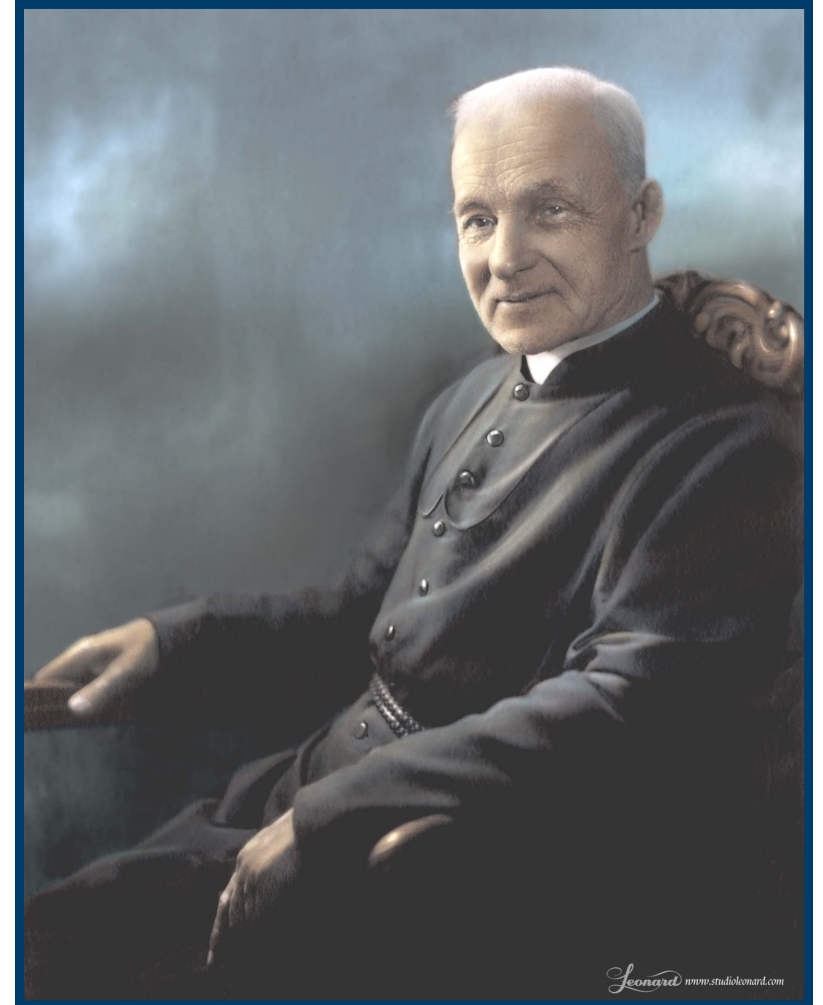
The miracle worker of Montreal was canonized on October 17, 2010. In the city of Montreal, Province of Quebec, Canada, on a rise of earth known as Mount Royal, there stands a religious edifice of staggering proportions. It is the Oratory of Saint Joseph, a worthy tribute to him who is the head of the Holy Family and the Patron of the Universal Church. Within its walls is the testimony of the many miracles that occurred there though the intercession of Brother André.

\*(excerpted from: //Catholicism.org; www.uscatholic.org)

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# **Saint André Bessette**

**Feast Day January 6**



**ITE AS JOSEPH —  
GO TO JOSEPH**

## Saint André Bessette

\*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 Bessette's were a poor French-Canadian family who lived in the farming village of St. Gregoire, thirty miles from Montréal, and about the same distance from the border of the United States. The parents were devote Catholics who, by their own example, taught their children the virtuous habits of prayer and hard work, habits which were to become for little 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.

When he was six years old, his father was killed in a lumbering accident near the town of Farnham. Four years later, his mother, trying to raise twelve children single-handedly, contracted tuberculosis and was forced to put the children up for adoption. Keeping with her only the feeblest one, Alfred, she went to live with her sister, Mrs. Timothée Nadeau, in St Cesaire. Two years later, in 1857, his mother died. Her parting words "my dear little ones, it has been six years since your papa left us to go to Heaven. The good God is coming to look for me in my turn. Pray for me. Do not forget the tomb of your father. My body will repose beside his in the cemetery at Farnham. From the height of Heaven I will watch over you." These parting words from his devout mother left a lasting impression on the frail youth. Years later, he would say of her, "I rarely pray for her, but very often I pray to her."

Even in his youth, Brother André practiced severe penances. These penances continued throughout his lifetime, making him a truly mortified religious. Yet penance is nothing without prayer. Here was the true sign of his Holiness: he relished being united with God in prayer. It was during these early years that he started what was to be his lifelong habit – long, deep conversations with St. Joseph. In his Epistle to the Philippians (3:20), St. Paul said, "our conversation is in Heaven." The Brother André, these words were not a pious platitude, but a beautiful reality.

About the year 1863, when he was eighteen years old, he emigrated to the United States, thinking that the milder climate of New England and the opportunities for better employment would benefit his frail health. He settled in Connecticut and worked in various towns including Hartford. Not much is known about this period in his life. One day, while working in a field, he relates, that he asked St. Joseph where he would die. At that moment, he had not exactly a vision, but a vivid daydream in which he saw a large stone building with a cross on top. You never seen this building before, but received a definite mental impression of its size, proportion, color and windows, all of which suggested a barracks. Years later, the vision was confirmed when he became the brother Porter of that very building – the College of Notre Dame in Côte-des-Neiges.

Returning to Canada, Alfred went to see his spiritual father with whom he had kept in constant contact during his travels, Father Provençal. He guided Alfred to a new building that was being built during the time he was in the United States. The building was in school for some eighty pupils who were taught by six brothers, members of the fledgling religious congregation known as the Congregation of the Holy Cross. Because of ill health, the members of the Holy Cross did not initially want André as a member of the congregation. His novice master begged the community to allow him to stay because of his intense prayer. He professed vows and was assigned as Porter of Notre Dame College in Montréal, the only formal ministry he held his entire life. He began to welcome the sick and the fragile, and ill and the outcast. His duo became his entry into people's deep suffering and isolation. André's formally educated confreres quickly became displeased with so many sick people congregating around the schoolyard.

Brother André persevered in his devotions. He told people who were ill to pray to St. Joseph, to rub oil on their wounds, to believe in the miracles of Christ Jesus. He experienced God's healing of thousands of people. He became known as the "miracle worker of Mount Royal." Though Brother André was given the grace to heal others, he was constantly sick himself. He suffered from stomach illness all of his life. As a result, he could eat little more than a mixture of flour and watered-down milk, or sometimes bread soaked in the same. To him, the sufferings were an opportunity for reaching greatest sanctity.

Because he could not read, André memorized the Beatitudes and other passages of Scripture that offer hope to people in pain. He believed that faith alone was the answer to real human suffering. Confronted with hundreds of people each day waiting to speak with him, André often lost his patience. He was often rude and curt with people who did not want to pray. His curmudgeonly style did not deter people from wanting to be physically touched and emotionally affirmed by God.

His final sickness provided Brother André with the opportunity for reaching the greatest sanctity that he desired. When asked if he was in great pain, he said, "indeed I am, but I thank God for giving me the grace to suffer; I need it so much!" on January 6, 1937, Brother André died. More than a million pilgrims streamed to Montréal for his funeral. In those days before jet planes, the Internet, and cell phones, the real communication of faith and gratitude spread rapidly among believers. Like our Blessed Lord on the cross, he spoke many words of piety and holy resignation to God's will during his final agony: "my God how I suffer... Heaven it 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... St. Joseph..." The name of his holy patron St. Joseph was the last intelligible words issued from his holy lips.