

# André Bessette

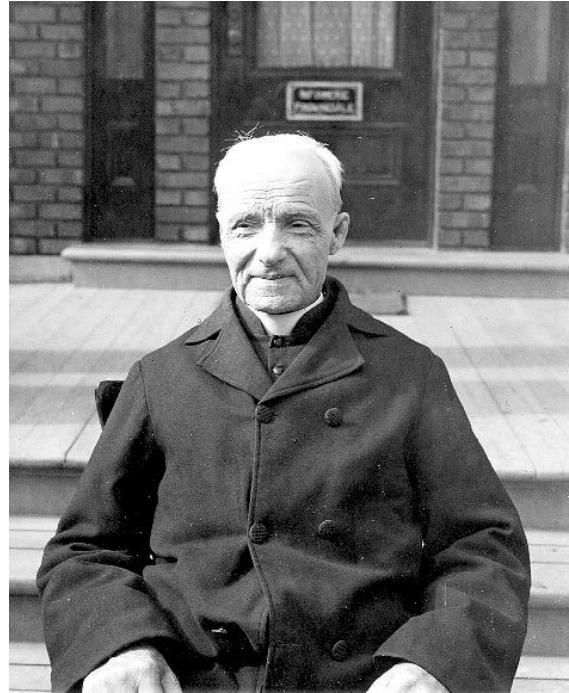
**André Bessette, C.S.C.** (9 August 1845 – 6 January 1937), more commonly known as **Brother André** (French: *Frère André*), and since his canonization as **St. André of Montreal**, was a lay brother of the Congregation of Holy Cross and a significant figure of the Roman Catholic Church among French-Canadians, credited with thousands of reported miraculous healings.<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[4]</sup> He was declared venerable in 1978 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982.<sup>[5]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI approved the decree of sainthood for Blessed André on February 19, 2010, with the formal canonization taking place on October 17, 2010.<sup>[5]</sup><sup>[6]</sup>

## 1 Early life

He was born **Alfred Bessette** in Mont-Saint-Grégoire, Quebec, a small town situated 40 kilometres (25 mi) southeast of Montreal.<sup>[7]</sup> Bessette was the eighth of 12 children (four of whom died in infancy). He was so frail when he was born that the curé baptized him “conditionally” the following day, completing an emergency ritual performed at his birth. He was from a working-class family; his father, Isaac Bessette, was a carpenter and lumberman, and his mother, Clothilde Foisy Bessette, saw to the education of her children. In 1849, with employment scarce and his family living in poverty, Alfred’s father decided to move to Farnham (in Quebec) where he hoped to earn a living as a lumberman. Tragically, he lost his life in an accident, crushed by a falling tree, when Alfred was only nine years old. His mother found herself widowed at the age of forty with ten children in her care. She died of tuberculosis within three years, and Alfred found himself orphaned at the age of twelve.<sup>[8]</sup>

## 2 Call to devotion

The pastor of his parish, the Rev. André Provençal, noticed the devotion and generosity of the young man. He decided to present Alfred to the Congregation of Holy Cross in Montreal, writing a note to the superior, “I’m sending you a saint.”<sup>[8]</sup> Although he was initially rejected by the order because of frail health, Archbishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal intervened on his behalf, and in 1872, Alfred was accepted, and entered the novitiate of the congregation, receiving the religious name of Brother André, by which he was known for the rest of his life. He made his final vows on February 2, 1874, at the age of



*Brother André (ca. 1920)*

28.

André was given the task of porter at Notre Dame College in Côte-des-Neiges, Quebec, with additional duties as sacristan, laundry worker and messenger. “When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door, and I remained 40 years,” he said.<sup>[9]</sup>

His great confidence in Saint Joseph inspired him to recommend this saint’s devotion to all those who were afflicted in various ways. On his many visits to the sick in their homes, he would rub the sick person lightly with oil taken from a lamp burning in the college chapel and recommend them in prayer to St. Joseph.<sup>[9]</sup> People claimed that they had been cured through the prayers of the good Brother and Saint Joseph, and they were grateful their prayers had been heard. Brother André steadfastly refused to take any credit for these cures. Because he wanted St. Joseph to be honored, in 1904 Bessette began the campaign to erect a chapel to honor the saint.<sup>[8]</sup>

When an epidemic broke out at a nearby college, André volunteered to nurse. Not one person died. The trickle of sick people to his door became a flood. His superiors were uneasy; diocesan authorities were suspicious; doctors called him a quack. “I do not cure,” he said again and again. “St. Joseph cures.” In the end he needed four

secretaries to handle the 80,000 letters he received each year.<sup>[9]</sup>

As tensions increased at the College with so many of the sick coming to see the porter, the school officials decided that Brother André could no longer continue with his ministry. He was permitted to receive the sick in the nearby tramway station rather than the College. As his reputation spread, Brother André became quite a controversial figure. There were many religious in the Congregation of Holy Cross, teachers and parents of students at the College who supported him but many others opposed him and even considered him dangerous to the well-being of the school's reputation because they regarded him as a charlatan. Others were concerned for the good health of the children, fearing the possibility of contagion in the school spread from diseases carried by the sick who frequented Brother André.<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1924 construction of a basilica named Saint Joseph's Oratory began on the side of the mountain, near Bessette's chapel.<sup>[11]</sup>

### 3 Death and path to canonization

Bessette died in 1937, at the age of 91. A million people filed past his coffin.<sup>[12]</sup>

The remains of Bessette lie in the church he helped build. His body lies in a tomb built below the Oratory's Main Chapel, except for his heart, which is preserved in a reliquary in the same Oratory. The heart was stolen in March 1973, but was recovered in December 1974 with the help of famous criminal attorney, Frank Shoofey.<sup>[13]</sup>

Brother André was beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 23, 1982.<sup>[8]</sup> The miracle cited in support of his beatification was the healing in 1958 of Giuseppe Carlo Audino, who suffered from cancer.<sup>[14]</sup> St. Andre is commemorated in most of the world by an optional memorial on January 6.<sup>[15]</sup> His memorial is celebrated in Canada on January 7.<sup>[16]</sup>

On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI promulgated a decree recognizing a second miracle at Blessed André's intercession.<sup>[17]</sup> and on October 17, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI formally declared sainthood for him.

### 4 Legacy

A Catholic high school in Markham, Ontario, St. Brother André Catholic High School, and Brother Andre High School (Noakhali) in Bangladesh are named in his honor.

There is also a new High School built on Fanshawe Park Rd in northwest London, Ontario Canada called Saint Andre Bessette Secondary School, scheduled to open in 2013.<sup>[18]</sup>



*Statue of Brother André by Joseph-Émile Brunet on the grounds of St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, QC, Canada*

There is also an elementary school "Brother André Catholic School" in Beacon Heights (a suburb of Ottawa), Ontario, Canada. Another elementary school in Brampton, Ontario is called St. Andre Bessette.

The French Catholic mission in York Region - North of Toronto - is named "Mission Catholique St-Frère-André". Services are held at the region's only French Catholic High School: ÉSC Renaissance.<sup>[19]</sup>

### 5 References

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## 7 Media

- *Brother André still with us*: Le Centre Saint-Pierre and Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal, 2004 (1 DVD - 62 minutes)
- *The Greatness and Beauty of Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal*: Montreal, Les Productions de la Montagne and Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, 1995 (1 DVD, color, 26 minutes)
- By Jean-Claude Labrecque: *Brother André*: Montreal, Les Productions de la Montagne, 1985 (Movie, on 1 DVD, color, 88 minutes)
- *God's Doorkeeper: St. André of Montreal*, 2010

## 8 External links

- St. Andre Bessette: Benedict XVI's Canonization Homily
- Saint André Bessette: Montreal's Miracle Worker by Brother André Marie, M.I.C.M. — Popular hagiography at Catholicism.org.
- "Saint Andre", Canadian Encyclopedia
- Blessed Brother André Bessette, C.S.C. — Short Biography on the Holy Cross Brothers site.
- Ancestors of Brother André (in French)
- Building a shrine to St. Joseph (Radio clip: Sept. 12, 1972 — 4:16)
- A pilgrim's tour (Radio clip: March 28, 1957 — 6:10)
- The miracle man (Television clip - the audio only now available: Aug. 8, 1967 — 10:45)

- The case for sainthood (Television clip: Sept. 12, 1978 — 18:21); Reporter: Adrienne Clarkson
- The beatification of Brother André (Television clip: May 23, 1982 — 2:21)
- Long road to canonization (Radio clip: April 18, 1958 — 5:47)
- Remembering the man behind the miracles (Television clip: May 23, 1982 — 2:40)  
“A priest [Bill McGinnis] who worked with Brother André shares his memories.”
- Millennium on the mountain (Television clip: Dec. 17, 1999 — 3:06); Reporter: Patty Kim;  
“St. Joseph’s Oratory hosts a multicultural celebration for the year 2000.”
- A century at the Oratory (Television clip: Oct. 19, 2004 — 2:32)

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