

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another” (1 Jn 4:11). Despite many setbacks in life, Alfred Bessette knew he was loved by God. At his birth on August 9, 1845 in Mont-Saint-Grégoire, a small village in Québec, Canada, Alfred was frail and sickly. Being in danger of death, he was immediately baptized. Frail health would be his constant companion throughout much of his life. He was orphaned at the age of 12. Suffering, poverty, and setbacks became a path to God. Alfred turned to God in prayer and felt deep and peaceful love, a love he was able to generously share with others.

Recognizing his innate goodness and his desire to serve God, his parish priest encouraged his desire for a vocation and recommended him to the Congregation of the Holy Cross. The parish priest wrote a note to the religious superior, “I’m sending you a saint.” Alfred was uneducated, unskilled, and still in fragile health. In the eyes of the Holy Cross fathers, Alfred was ill-suited to religious life. They showed him the door and asked him to leave. However, “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”ⁱ

Once he was accepted into the religious order, he was assigned the job of porter. He answered the door and helped whoever came knocking. He later joked, “When I entered the Congregation, they showed me the door. And I stayed there for 40 years.”ⁱⁱ “No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us” (1 Jn 4:12). Brother André saw God in others and they in turn saw God within this humble doorman who greeted them with joy, listened intently to their concerns, and prayed for them without fail. He spoke of his faith in God and his devotion to Saint Joseph.

People came to him with heavy problems and he addressed those needs with a two-pronged approach.

- With his deep devotion to Saint Joseph, he recommended Joseph’s intercession to the afflicted. He often took oil from the lamp burning in the college chapel and used it as a sacramental as he prayed for and with the suffering.
- He also helped people to see the value in offering up their suffering to God. When he was canonized, Pope Benedict noted his counsel to many: “Do not seek to have your trials removed, ask rather for the grace to bear them well.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Brother André witnessed countless cures and conversions. People sought to give credit to him, but he rightly pointed them back to God and profusely credited the intercession of Saint Joseph. His welcoming nature and reputation for healing soon attracted a constant stream of visitors.

On a large hill, across from the college, Brother André dreamed of building a chapel to honor Saint Joseph. In the end, with the help of God and many benefactors, the magnificent Oratory of Saint Joseph was built. Today, pilgrims marvel at the “notes, crutches, slings and other signs of the reported 125,000 healings attributed to André, known as “The Miracle Man of Montreal.”^{iv}

Brother André had a deep faith. He believed that all things were possible with the help of God. “For him, believing meant submitting freely and through love to the divine will. Wholly inhabited by the mystery of Jesus, he lived the beatitude of pure of heart, that of personal rectitude. It is thanks to this simplicity that he enabled many people to see God.”^v

Brother André “died in 1937 at the age of 91. A million people filed past his coffin”^{vi} bearing witness to the teaching of Jesus, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

ⁱ Ibrevariary, Jan 6.

ⁱⁱ magazine.nd.edu/stories/the-doorway-to-sainthood/

ⁱⁱⁱ vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20101017_canonizations.html

^{iv} Ibid, The Doorway to Sainthood.

^v Ibid, Benedict XVI

^{vi} Ibrevariary, Jan 6.