

ST. ANDRÉ BESSETTE

MAY 9, 2022

Mondays

WITH THE

Mystics

SAINT ANDRÉ BESSETTE, CSC (1845 - 1937)

Born on August 9, 1845, Alfred Bessette was the 8th of 12 children of Issac Bessette, a carpenter, and Clothilde Foisy, a homemaker. From his birth, Alfred had poor health; in particular, chronic stomach and digestive problems. His mother took special care of him; otherwise, he probably would not have survived.



In 1855, his father died, crushed by a falling tree. Alfred was 9 years old. His mother tried to keep the 10 remaining children together, but she contracted tuberculosis and died in 1857. Alfred took up several chores – driving horse-drawn coaches, shoe making, and other works – all of which proved to be more than his physical capabilities could handle.

The mayor and his wife adopted Alfred. He tried other jobs: baker, blacksmith, working in the mills in Connecticut. He learned to speak English well enough, but none of his employments were successful. When he returned from the United States, the local pastor, Father André Provençal introduced him to the Brothers of Holy Cross. Though his admission was delayed, he entered in 1870 and professed vows in 1872. He took the name André.

He was assigned as the doorkeeper at the Brothers' school in Montréal. Later in life he said, "When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door, and I stayed there for 40 years." All the tasks he was assigned were non-academic and he delighted in that. André's spiritual life involved three devotions that were important to him. 1) Mary which he learned from his mother; 2) St. Joseph which he learned from his father who was a carpenter; 3) and the Passion of Jesus which he developed on his own.

As doorkeeper, he came to know the students and parents. People began to ask him for prayers, including for healing. André was 27 or 28 years old when the first healings occurred. His reputation grew rapidly and there was a steady increase of those who came to the school requesting prayers. Parents were concerned about sick people coming to the school since it could mean exposure for their children. He moved across the street at a trolley station to greet people. Eventually, the Congregation of Holy Cross bought property on the hill across from the school known as Mount Royal. André was permitted to have a small chapel built; gradually it was expanded. The healings continued; André always insisted that God and St. Joseph were the ones who healed.

Brother André continued to work tirelessly until his final illness. Shortly after New Year's in 1937 he had a stroke. He continued to pray in the midst of severe pain, then went into a coma. He died on January 6, 1937 in his 92nd year. During seven days, over one million people stood in line through the freezing rain and snow to pass his coffin. André was beatified in 1982 and canonized on October 17, 2010. His feast is celebrated on January 6 in the universal church, but on January 7 within the Congregation of Holy Cross because of the conflict with the Feast of the Epiphany.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM BROTHER ANDRÉ?

Brother André's entire life speaks to us of following Jesus, of being holy. A regular instruction he gave to people was simple: "Be saints." Saint André shows us a pathway to holiness, through his life but also through simple sayings that he regularly used to encourage and teach those he encountered. This can be summed up in four recommendations and in some sayings associated with them.



First, believe. Brother André often said, "God never forgets us." Do we believe that? Such a belief is challenged when we encounter experiences in which we find nothing of God. We are called to believe without evidence. He never lost that faith even when it was not so clear that a vocation to religious life would become a reality for him. The same was true as the Oratory of St. Joseph developed. André's faith never wavered. He said of those times, "I have always left the work of the Oratory in the hands of the good God. Sometimes things did not always go as we wanted, but I always kept confidence that God would arrange things."

André's second recommendation: pray. André often recommended the Lord's Prayer. "When you say in a whisper: 'Our Father who is in heaven,' God's ear is glued to your mouth." It is not surprising to hear Brother André say, "In prayer, one speaks to God as one speaks to a friend." At the beginning of his religious life, there were concerns about whether André would be able to profess vows because of his weak health. When the director of the novices presented to the superiors André's petition to take vows, the novice director added, "If this young man becomes incapable of working, at least he will know how to pray very well."

The third recommendation is serve. Brother André's sense of service echoes the gospel. He says: "We cannot love God without loving our neighbor." For him, service flows from prayer; prayer expresses our love for God, service is our love and care for others. André told people: "The door of heaven is the heart of Jesus and the key to that door is prayer and love." He recognized that the financial support for his ministry was a blessing, but he also knew that more was needed. As witnesses stated: "In speaking of charity, Brother André would repeat that it was not enough to give money, we should give compassion and from the heart." Though he was close to St. Joseph throughout his life, the priority in André's life was to do what Jesus did, to live as Jesus lived.

The fourth recommendation that Brother André gives to us is trust. We must trust that the abilities we have, and the efforts we make, can be and will be used by God for good. Trust also includes the conviction that God will support us in what we do. We do what we can for that is all we can do. The spiritual life is always possible. Trust is the conviction that God will remain faithful. Those who knew him well would say: "His principal devotion was to the Passion of Our Lord." André trusted that God was at work through every experience. There is grace even in experiences of the cross.

Before he went in a coma and died Brother André's last words were: "This is the seed." He offered

no commentary; it is assumed that he was referring to one of the gospel texts in which Jesus talks about the seed. Brother André was a seed that became a saint and so it can be for all of us. As he instructed: "Be saints."

FROM THE SAYINGS OF SAINT ANDRÉ BESSETTE

"When you say in a whisper: 'Our Father who is in heaven,' God's ear is glued to your mouth."

"Pray to obtain a true love for God."

"The door of heaven is the heart of Jesus and the key to that door is prayer and love."

"I have asked to be always in God's presence."

"Love Jesus as he has loved us, effectively and openly."

"God does not ask the impossible. God asks that we offer our good intentions to God and accept all the aggravations which come during the day; offer our daily work; and during the day offer prayers that will not disrupt our work."

"If you do not believe in God, you will get nothing."

"We must not be attached to earthly things, otherwise we cannot be attached to God."

"We must pray that God does not abandon us in our trials and pray to accept with confidence the trials that the good God judges appropriate for us to carry."

"It is surprising that people often ask me for healing, but very rarely for humility, the spirit of faith. Nevertheless, it is so important."

"If people knew how to pray better, they would obtain everything from St. Joseph."

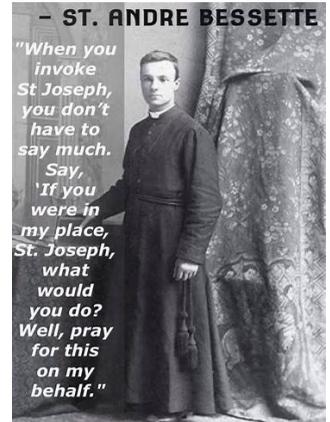
"If we prayed more, things would go better in the world."

"In prayer, one speaks to God as one speaks to a friend."

"You must submit yourself to God's will; it is the teacher of everything."

Contemporaries said that André's principal devotion was to the Passion of Christ. He spoke of the Passion as if he lived it.

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