

SON OF ISAAC AND CLOTHILDE

Alfred Bessette was born on August 9, 1845, in Saint-Grégoire d'Iberville, Quebec. The son of Isaac Bessette and Clothilde Foisy, he was baptized the day after his birth in the large stone house that served as the rectory and chapel in the heart of the village. The child grew up with his brothers and sisters in a modest home.



In 1850, the family moved to Farnham, where the sawmill industry was booming. But in the winter of 1855, Isaac died in a tragic accident, crushed under a tree. Alfred was only nine years old. Two years later, his mother passed away from tuberculosis. Recalling his childhood, he would say about her: "My mother was always smiling—such a lovely smile."

Léocadie, Isaïe, Napoléon, Joseph, Claude, Marie-Rosalie, Alfred, Alphonsine, Joséphine and Éliisa were now orphans. Twelve-year-old Alfred went to live in Saint-Césaire, at first with his uncle and aunt, the Nadeaus and then with the Ouimet family.

The young man seemed rather ill-equipped to face life: his health was frail, and he had little education. But there was one thing he seemed sure of: "How good the good Lord is! He always dotes on us!" he would say. This certainty would remain with him for the rest of his life.



In 1945, a monument was erected on the site where Alfred Bessette was born, on Rang du Grand-Bois in Mont-Saint-Grégoire. A small stone marker indicates the former location of the home and evokes his family origins. This commemorative site located at a crossroads has become a pilgrimage destination.



FROM LABOURER TO BROTHER

Alfred was a hard worker, but his fragile health often prevailed over his good intentions. He tried his hand working on a farm and also—not without difficulty—at various jobs such as apprentice shoemaker, blacksmith, tinsmith and baker. Thirty-six trades, thirty-six trials!

Then, like many of his fellow countrymen, he set out for the United States, where the textile mills in New England were hiring. He stayed there for four years, picking up a bit of English during that time.



Upon returning to his native land in 1867, Alfred went back to Saint-Césaire, where he tried to make a place for himself and find a way to live that was in line with his heartfelt aspirations. Through prayer, he cultivated a strong inner life that soon caught the eye of the parish priest, André Provençal. He guided Alfred toward his

destiny by recommending him to the Congregation of Holy Cross. "I am sending you a saint," he wrote about this exceptional young man who would enter the novitiate of the Congregation in Montréal in the fall of 1870.

The Congregation of Holy Cross was founded by Basile Antoine Moreau, CSC in Le Mans, France, in 1837. This large religious family is composed of priests, brothers and three communities of sisters.

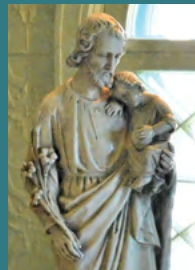


DOORKEEPER

After receiving the religious habit, Alfred was given a new name: **Brother André**. He became the doorkeeper at Collège Notre-Dame in the Côte-des-Neiges neighborhood, but was also assigned other duties. He would be a gardener, lamp tender, nurse, barber and factotum. He would jokingly say, "When I came to the college, they showed me the door... but I stuck around there for 40 years!"



The brother who watched the door was in charge of receiving visitors and students' parents. The daily flow of people soon started to include the sick, who



had heard of healings occurring through the prayers of the humble brother. "Brother André, if you want to, you can cure me," they would say. "No, not I, but Saint Joseph can cure you if you put your trust in him," he always insisted to those who came to him.

It was his acceptance of others that led him to this ministry to tend to the suffering and the downtrodden. He would pray to Saint Joseph with them, asking them to have confidence in this saint to whom he had been deeply devoted since childhood.



And it was to honour Saint Joseph that in 1904 Brother André and his friends built an oratory—a tiny chapel—on the mountainside, across the street from the college. More and more of the faithful started going to this new prayer space in a rustic setting.

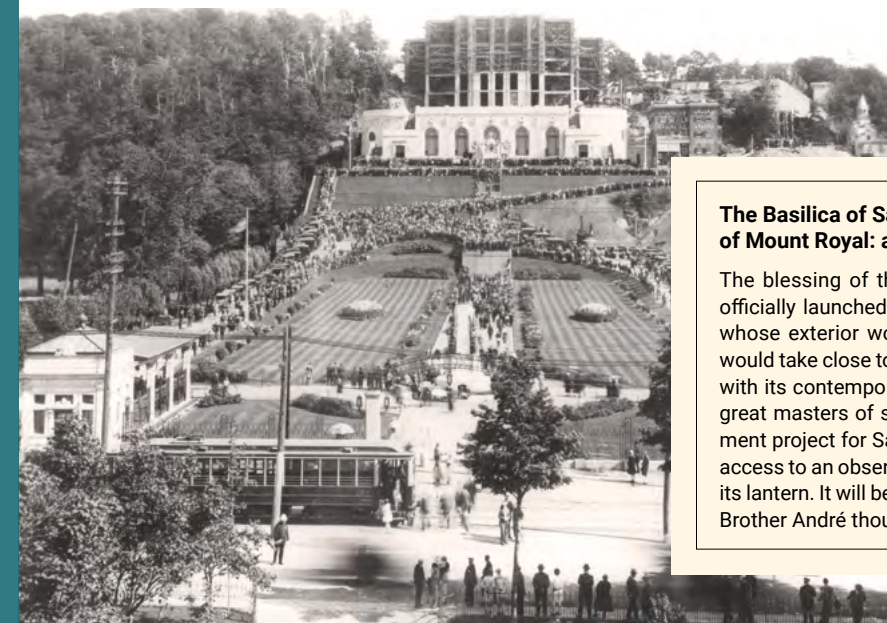
BUILDER AND UNIFIER

Brother André's reputation spread among the sick, who saw him as their last hope for a healing.

The Chapel quickly became too small to accommodate the crowds coming to see Brother André and, at his advice, entrusting themselves to Saint Joseph. Work was carried out in 1908 and 1910 to expand the building, but the place was still too cramped. In 1917, the Crypt Church large enough to hold 1,000 people was opened. It was a solid building with an exceptional location: a crown on Mount Royal. This church was part of a vast architectural complex that would be towered over by a majestic Basilica.

Through their offerings, pilgrims contributed significantly to the Basilica's construction, but the entire business community was also called upon; Brother André had made many friends among notable individuals in Montréal and elsewhere.

The concrete structure that rises behind the Crypt Church gives pilgrims a glimpse of the scale of the future Basilica. Labour Day, September 4, 1927.



The Great Depression in the 1930s caused construction of the Basilica to grind to a halt, to the point that in 1936 snow and ice were threatening to damage the unfinished edifice.

Short of funds, the superiors of the Congregation of Holy Cross consulted with Brother André to find a solution. "It's not my work; it's Saint Joseph's. Put his statue in the middle of the construction; if Saint Joseph wants a roof over his head, he'll see to it." That answer became famous.



The Basilica of Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal: a visionary project.

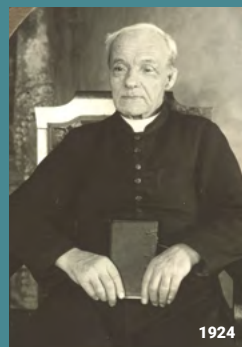
The blessing of the cornerstone on August 31, 1924, officially launched the construction of the new church, whose exterior would not be completed until 1942. It would take close to another 25 years to finish the interior with its contemporary design and works created by the great masters of sacred art. The recent major development project for Saint Joseph's Oratory will give visitors access to an observation centre located in the dome and its lantern. It will be the highest point in the Montréal sky! Brother André thought big!

MAN OF GOD

Brother André was admired by those who knew him. His simplicity and sense of humour made him so attractive. And yet from this humble man came a strength and faith that could move mountains.

A sense of welcome, listening and compassion were his main spiritual hallmarks. He opened his door to the sick, those wounded by life and the needy, and led them to God by praying with them. To them, he expressed his joy and his hope. And he was moved when listening to how they suffered.


His message always led back to God: to speak about God's love and to ignite hope in the hearts of the people he met was the mission he gave himself over to. One of the people who knew him well confirmed this: "I never brought a sick person to Brother André without that person returning home enriched. Some were cured. Others not; but Brother André had consoled them."



A SAINT FOR TODAY

On the morning of January 6, 1937, Brother André died at the age of 91, surrounded by his Holy Cross confreres and faithful friends. The public received the news with grief and dismay. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that this man who had done so much good was a saint. The esteem that people had for him burst forth. Over a million mourners converged on the Oratory to pay their final respects.

The brother's sanctity would be officially recognized and celebrated 73 years after his death. On Sunday, October 17, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI canonized the founder of Saint Joseph's Oratory. **Saint André Bessette** became the first man born in Canada and the first member of Holy Cross to be canonized. Celebrations were held in Rome and in Montréal, but the festivities took place throughout the Canadian Church as well as in other countries where he was known and loved. He was warmly acclaimed: "A friend. A brother. A saint."

 *The spiritual figure of Saint André Bessette became the standard-bearer for numerous apostolates throughout the world. On every continent, he became an inspiration and a model. Many parish communities chose him as their patron saint; schools and clinics adopted his name. To this day, he continues to serve as an example of perseverance, receptivity, openness to others, caring about one's neighbour and love for God. Artists have depicted his image in sculptures, stained-glass windows, icons and paintings.*

How and where to encounter Saint André Bessette at Saint Joseph's Oratory:

- Reflect in silence at his tomb.
- Deposit a prayer intention in front of his statue in the Crypt Church.
- Visit the exhibition about his life, which includes the reliquary of his heart.
- Light a votive candle in the Saint André Bessette Chapel located in the Basilica.
- Visit the Original Chapel and climb to the small room where he stayed.
- Take a picture outside in front of the monument of Brother André. A memory to share!

WITNESS TO GOD'S LOVE

When his friends would ask him: "What are we going to do, Brother André, when you're gone?" Brother André would reply: "When I die, I will be in Heaven. I shall be much closer to God that I am now. I'll be all the more able to help you."

Saint André Bessette, the eternal witness to God's love, is ever present in the world today. To those who place their trust in him, he supports them and intercedes on their behalf before God.

Saint Brother André is the patron saint of family caregivers in Canada.

PRAYER TO OBTAIN A SPECIAL FAVOUR

Saint Brother André,
we celebrate your presence among us.
Your loving friendship with Jesus,
Mary and Joseph
makes you a powerful intercessor
with God, our Father.

Compassion carries your words
straight to God's heart,
and your prayers are answered
with comfort and healing.

Through you,
from our lips to God's ear,
our supplications are heard...

We ask to be made a part of
God's work, alongside you,
in a spirit of prayer,
compassion and humility.

Saint Brother André,
pray for us.

Amen



Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal is the custodian of an exceptional religious, historical, architectural and cultural heritage. The location of this must-see Montréal destination on the mountainside and the prominent dome of its Basilica make the Oratory an iconic landmark in the city.

An internationally renowned Catholic shrine, the Oratory is the world's largest pilgrimage site dedicated to Saint Joseph.

Saint André Bessette, its founder, is a brother of the Congregation of Holy Cross, well known as **Brother André** [August 9, 1845 – January 6, 1937]. He is considered one of the great Canadian figures and certainly one of the most popular Quebecers.

Following the example of Saint Brother André, Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal welcomes pilgrims and visitors in a spirit of openness and compassion.

"I have rarely come across anyone who has come to the Oratory and who has left without feeling better."

– Saint André Bessette, CSC



Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal
is a ministry of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

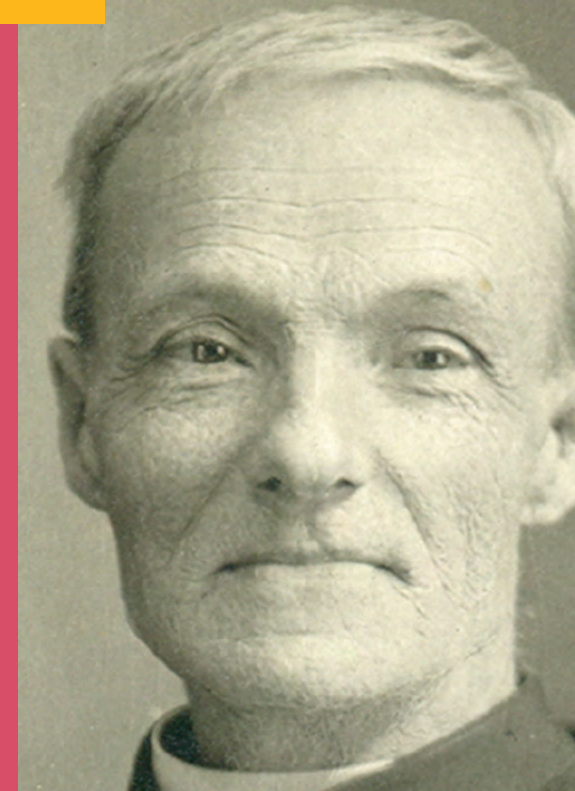


3800 QUEEN MARY ROAD
MONTREAL QC H3V 1H6
514 733-8211
WWW.SAINT-JOSEPH.ORG



© Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, 2020

ENGLISH
Anglais



SAINT
ANDRÉ BESSETTE

A saint for today