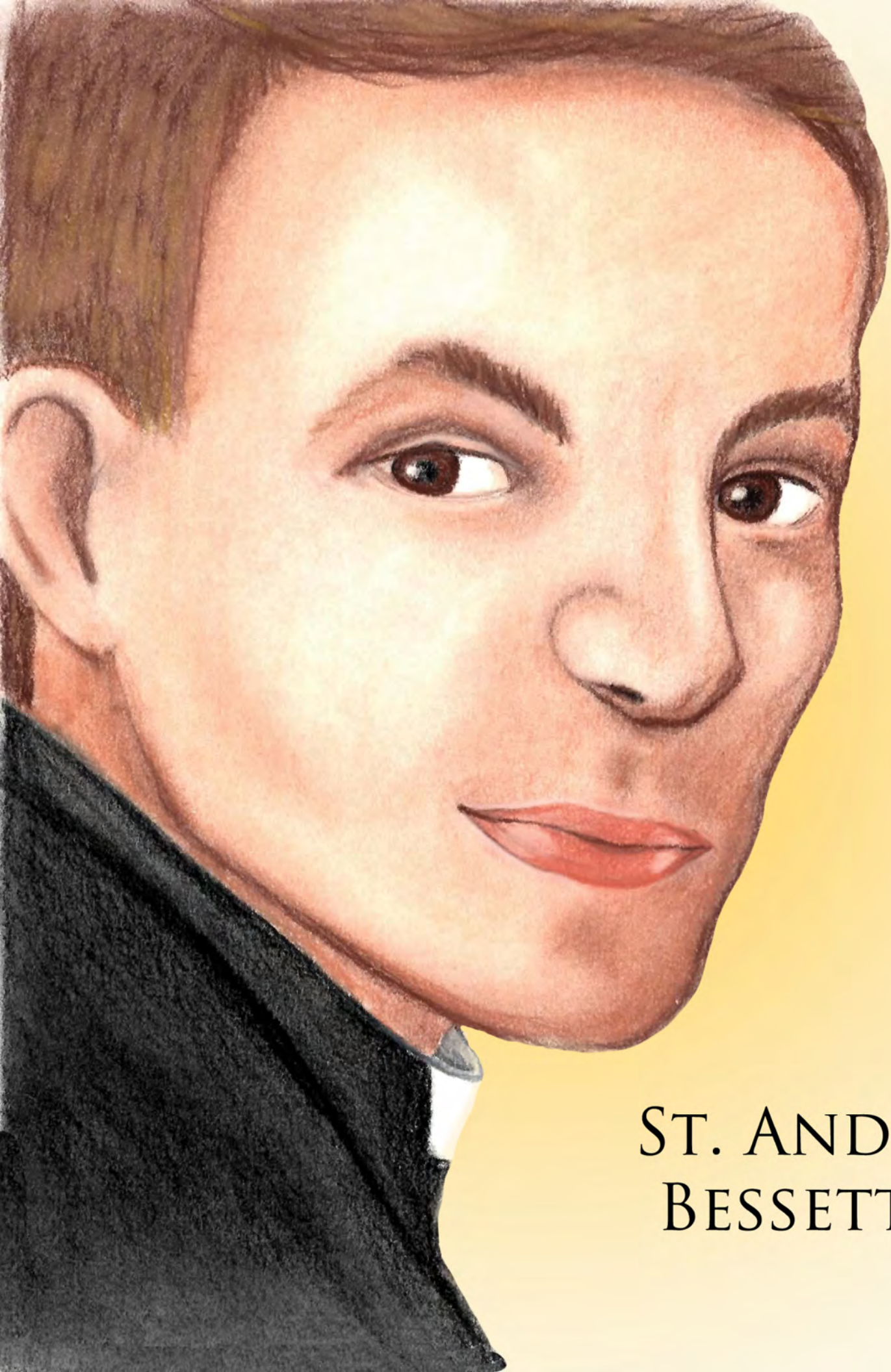




ST. ANDRÉ
BESSETTE

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Saint André
Bessette



Saint André was born Alfred Bessette in 1845 in Quebec, Canada. Alfred was orphaned by the time he was 12 years old. He was passed from family member to family member to care for him. Alfred received very little formal education, but he had a lively faith and a deep devotion to Saint Joseph.

In search of work, Alfred left Canada and went to New England in the United States. After a few years working at different farms, factories, and trades, he eventually returned to Quebec. His local pastor supported Alfred in his desire to enter religious life. The priest sent Alfred to a nearby community of Holy Cross brothers with a letter telling the superior, "I am sending you a saint."



Despite the letter from Alfred's pastor, the Congregation of Holy Cross did not accept him at first because of his poor health. He had been baptized right after birth because his family had been afraid that he might not live more than a few days. He was sickly all his life.

Alfred, however, was not discouraged, and with the assistance of the Archbishop of Montreal, he eventually received entrance into the Holy Cross Novitiate on December 27, 1870, where he took the name André. Religious brothers and religious sisters often take a new name when they enter religious life as a sign they are leaving their former way of life behind to live in a new way. The new way they are trying to live is in closer imitation of Jesus who was poor, never married, and was always obedient to the will of God. To do that, religious men and women take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows not only help them live more like Jesus, but they also help them serve those in need. Because they do not have their own families, they are free to make all people, especially those in need, their families!

Brother André professed his first vows on August 22, 1872. They are called "first vows" because it is the first time he professed

vows, and they were temporary. This is a time to see if religious life is a good fit for the person, almost like an engagement before marriage. Then on February 2, 1874, Brother André professed those vows forever.

In 1871, Brother André was assigned as the doorkeeper at Notre Dame College in Montreal, a post he held until 1909. He answered the door and did numerous other manual tasks in a spirit of humility, obedience, and love. Brother André often prayed with the poor and sick who he met at the door, usually instructing them to pray to Saint Joseph. Soon many miraculous healings were attributed to his prayers, and large crowds came to see him.

Brother André always had a strong devotion to Saint Joseph. He presented many sick visitors with medals of the saint and anointed them with oil that came from an oil lamp burning in the College's chapel next to a Saint Joseph statue. In giving this oil to the sick, Saint André always insisted that the desired healing was the work of Saint Joseph and not himself. He also encouraged those who came to deepen their relationship with God, loving and serving Him more.

In 1900 he received permission to raise money for a shrine to Saint Joseph. This shrine became Saint Joseph's Oratory. The first shelter was constructed in 1904, and was enlarged in 1912. In 1909, he was assigned full-time as the caretaker of the Oratory. He spent his days seeing sick people who came to the Oratory, and he spent his evenings visiting the sick that could not make it to the Oratory.

By the 1920's, the Oratory hosted over one million pilgrims every year, and hundreds of cures were attributed to Brother André's prayers. Brother André always insisted, "I am nothing ... only a tool in the hands of Providence, a lowly instrument at the service of Saint Joseph."

Brother André died on January 6, 1937, at the age of 91. During

the week that his body lay in state outside of Saint Joseph's Oratory, an estimated one million people braved the bitter Montreal winter to pay their respects. The basilica was eventually completed and remains a major pilgrimage site, attracting over two million visitors a year. The side chapels are filled with the crutches of people healed through Brother André's prayers.

On October 17, 2010, Saint André Bessette became first saint of the Congregation of Holy Cross when he was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI. On this day, the Church recognized that God chose a very simple man for a remarkable life of service. He had previously been beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 23, 1982.



"When you invoke St Joseph, you don't have to say much. Say, 'If you were in my place, St Joseph, what would you do? Well, pray for this on my behalf.'"

- *St. André Bessette*



Supplemental Materials on Sainly Models

St. André Bessette



St. André Bessette

Born: August 9, 1845

Died: January 6, 1937

Canonized by
Pope Benedict XVI
October 17, 2010

Interesting Facts

- St. André did not know how to read or write until he was twenty five years old, but even though he had little formal education, he became a “great educator in the faith” as he was able to teach many people how to pray.
- After he learned to read, he read the lives of the saints and also memorized the Passion of Our Lord in all four Gospels.

Likely Student Questions:

What happened to his parents?

When St. André was six years old, his father was killed in a “lumbering accident.” Four years later, his mother contracted tuberculosis and had to give all of her twelve children (except for the sickly St. André) up for adoption. She went to live with her sister and died two years later. St. André was twelve years old when he became an orphan.

If he was born in Canada, why did he spend time working in New England? How did he end up down there and why did he go back to Canada?

St. André was never very strong and was seemingly always sick. He had trouble holding down a job because of his health. When he was eighteen years old, he went to the United States in search of a milder climate and better employment. He also had extended family in the area.

Why did the priest think that “Alfred” was a saint? What did he do?

Fr. André Provencal, the parish priest of St. André’s childhood parish, was the one who prepared St. André for his first communion and was witness to St. André’s desire for prayer and his closeness to Jesus. He knew that despite his frailty, St. André with his great love for God could do many things to make God known, loved, and served.

Why did the college need a full-time doorkeeper?

Much like we have greeters or front office secretaries to direct concerns in our school, St. André was able to take care of the smaller tasks at the college so that the other individuals on the school staff could teach.

Where does his connection to St. Joseph come in? Why was he so attached to St. Joseph?

Fr. André, St. André’s childhood priest and the one for whom St. André chose his religious name, is the one who instilled in St. André a love of St. Joseph. Having St. Joseph as a second father helped St. André after he had lost his own father at an early age. It is similar to how Pope John Paul II took Mary as his mother after his own mother died.

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Interesting Facts Continued

- St. Joseph's Oratory is taller than the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and can hold inside of it St. Paul's in London (which is the biggest church in England). It is also the largest shrine dedicated to St. Joseph in the world.
- Not only was St. André the first canonized saint in the Congregation of Holy Cross, but he was also the first male Canadian-born canonized saint in the Church.

Likely Student Questions Continued:

Was St. André popular because of his healing powers?

Over a million people came to St. André's funeral, and so it is clear that many people knew about him. Yet, from the beginning of the healings, St. André did not always find acceptance, both in his own religious congregation and in the wider community. Some people thought he was a fake and dangerous; others thought he was prideful. It was not easy for St. André to be the instrument of God's miraculous healing power.

What is an oratory?

An oratory is a special chapel that is set aside for Mass and prayer. Often it is a site of pilgrimage, to which people travel to offer prayers.

Discussion Questions:

Even from simple beginnings, St. André became a widely known person. What do you think drew people to him? What made them want to bring their problems to him?

Certainly, some people were drawn to St. André because God had chosen him as an instrument of his miraculous healing power, but not everyone who came to St. André experienced a miraculous physical healing. Those people still came to St. André because they found in him a humble, prayerful religious brother who would listen to their problems and ills and help them discover God's love for them. For many, coming to know God's love for them was a miracle itself!

St. André was a very humble person. How do you think God was able to use Saint André's humility to help serve in God's plan for us?

If St. André were an ambitious man, he would have been too focused on personal achievement and getting into "bigger" positions, instead of really living his own vocation to the best of his ability. Instead of constantly looking to be someone else, he was able to be who God made him to be, with his strengths and his weaknesses. In this way, he was able to achieve far more than most "ambitious" people could.

Why did God choose St. André to be such a miraculous healer?

St. André was always the first to say he was not the one who was healing the people who came to him. He said it was St. Joseph and God who was healing them.

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Discussion Questions Continued:

Certainly, St. André's humility was part of the reason God was able to work through him, but God probably also chose St. André to make Himself known, loved, and served in this way because St. André himself had suffered so much from his birth. From his own sufferings, he could really relate to those who suffered. Sharing in their pain, he could help give that pain to God so that God could transform it.
