

Who is St. Andre Bessette?

Alfred (Andre) Bessette was born thirty miles from Montreal, Quebec, in Canada on August 9, 1845, the eighth of twelve children. He was always sickly. His mother instilled in him a great love of prayer and dedication to Christ and a special loyalty to Saint Joseph. Alfred grew up in poverty, especially after his parents died. As an orphan he never finished school. He was illiterate but memorized many passages from Scripture, especially the Passion narratives of Christ. The superiors in the Congregation of Holy Cross did not want to accept Alfred into the community because of his frail health and lack of education. A local pastor, Father Andre Provencal, convinced the Holy Cross superiors to accept Alfred Bessette as a member. He added a note saying, "I am sending you a saint."

His sole assignment within the community was to serve as the Porter at Notre Dame College in Montreal. His ministry at the door of the college became his path toward love and holiness. He never imagined or dreamed how his life would change or how others would respond to him.

Almost immediately, people were drawn to Brother Andre. He told many who were sick to ask Saint Joseph for help, or to attend Mass. He anointed the sick with special oil found in a lamp near the Saint Joseph statue. He rubbed people's wounds with a blessed medal of the saint. People were cured of many ailments, diseases and sufferings. Many people began leaving their crutches, canes and prostheses at the college. Brother Andre believed strongly that God's healing was available for every person surviving poverty. Brother Andre would welcome over 600 people a day, people asking him for prayers and healing.

The Congregation of Holy Cross is best known in the United States for higher education among the privileged. The frail, illiterate doorkeeper and barber, Brother Andre is our community's first official saint. The poor believed in Andre because he too was poor. He did not see his religious life as an opportunity to escape from poverty or from hard work. Andre's hospitality was a lived example of Jesus' desire to run after the one lost sheep even when he was exhausted and afraid. Christ's command to search diligently for the lost coin is seen in Andre's acceptance of people.

Brother Andre died on Epiphany, January 6, 1937. He was canonized on Sunday October 17, 2010. His relic now resides in our new altar at Sacred Heart Church.

<https://www.sacredheartcos.org/who-is-st-andre-bessette.html>