

St. André Bessette and the Year of St. Joseph



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ON DECEMBER 8, 2020, the 150th Anniversary of Pope Blessed Pius IX proclaiming St. Joseph the Universal Patron of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis announced a Year of St. Joseph and gave the Church a beautiful Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

I encourage you to read and pray with Pope Francis' reflection on devotion to St. Joseph which is available on the Vatican Website, and I encourage you to read and pray with our own Pastoral Letter *Go to Joseph* which is available on the diocesan website: [drvc.org](#).¹

As we embark on this year dedicated to St. Joseph, one of the best ways to begin is by celebrating the life, charisms and ecclesial mission of Canadian Holy Cross Brother St.

André Bessette, CSC.

Born in 1845, St. André was known as “the Miracle Worker of Montreal.” He was instrumental in the construction of the Basilica of St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal, Canada and promoted an efficacious love for and devotion to St. Joseph in his practical deeds of daily charity as a doorkeeper.² Through this humble service, not long after his passing in 1937, he was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in 1982 and canonized in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI.

As a doorkeeper at a Holy Cross Catholic school in Montreal, Brother André opened the door to Jesus Christ every time he opened the door physically for the students, families and Cross-carriers he encountered.

The Sacred Scriptures are filled with references to doors and gates. For example, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says “I am the door” (10:7), and in Luke, “And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (11:9-10).

We have a number of Doorkeeper Saints in the history of our Catholic Church that meditated, prayed, contemplated and lived these biblical passages on doors.

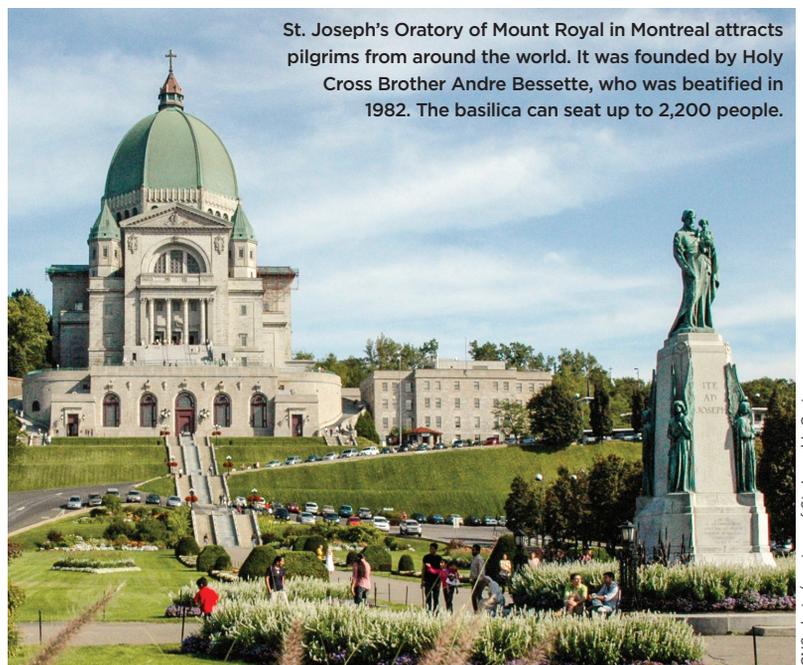
They include the Jesuit brother St. Alphonsus Rodriguez (1532-1617), the Dominican brother St. Martin de Porres (1579-1639), and the simplex Capuchin priest Blessed Solanus Casey (1870-1957).

These Doorkeeper Saints, who opened the door to



A relatively new sculpture of St. Joseph at the entrance to St. Peter’s Roman Catholic Church, 22 Barclay St., New York. St Peter’s, the first Roman Catholic parish in New York, was established in 1789. The current church on the site was completed in 1840 and was declared a landmark.

Photo by Bishop John O. Barres



St. Joseph’s Oratory of Mount Royal in Montreal attracts pilgrims from around the world. It was founded by Holy Cross Brother Andre Bessette, who was beatified in 1982. The basilica can seat up to 2,200 people.

CNS photo/courtesy of St. Joseph’s Oratory

Christ and greeted Christ as they listened to and served suffering humanity, encourage us to reflect on the doors in our own lives and how we open them to others.

As these Doorkeeper Saints opened physical doors to Catholic schools, monasteries and residences, they did so with exquisite reverence for the people which the opened door revealed, though the crowds and long lines often led to exhaustion.

Reflect for a moment on the door of the home you grew up in and all the traffic that went in and out of it. Reflect on the door of where you live now. Reflect on your room door or your office door. Reflect, in these Covid-19 times, on the door or portal of the computer you use every day.

How do we answer the doors of life? As we open these doors, do we greet Christ and the person representing Christ with warmth, openness, steadfast charity, humility and magnanimity?

As we answer the doors of life, are we accompanied by St. Joseph and the Holy Family, striving to greet Jesus Christ in every providential dimension of humanity that the Holy Spirit sends to us?

In every door-opening moment, St. André Bessette opened the door to Jesus Christ with the help, assistance and intercession of his friend St. Joseph.

He sought the intercession of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Guardian of the Holy Family, and model for all husbands, fathers and family members.

St. André sought the intercession of St. Joseph, the Dreamer and Contemplative, and asked St. Joseph to intercede for his prayer life and the prayer lives of those he served.

He sought the intercession of St. Joseph, the Worker, who teaches us to give Glory to God in the sanctification of every detail of daily work.

St. André sought the intercession of St. Joseph, the Just Man – faith-filled, rock-solid, mature, reliable, constant, hardworking, contemplative and prayerful, always trusting in God as he faced the most difficult and perplexing situations and curve balls of life.

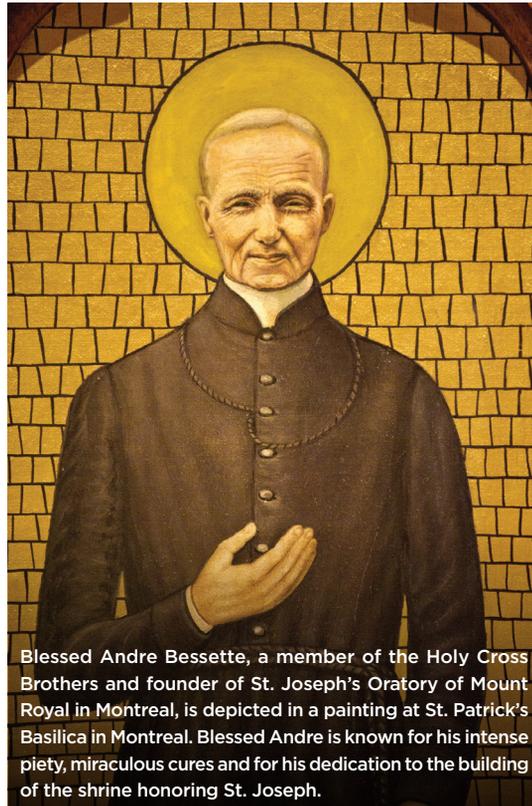
As we remember and celebrate the stories and vast panorama of spiritual, physical and emotional healings of which St. André Bessette and St. Joseph together were God’s humble instruments, we “go to Joseph” in the Year of St. Joseph.

We ask their intercession to help us pray, deepen our daily charity and open every door in life to Jesus Christ and the neighbors he sends to us.

Pope Francis’ words in *Patris Corde* can be read as a commentary on St. André Bessette’s life:

Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. †

“As we answer the doors of life, are we accompanied by St. Joseph and the Holy Family, striving to greet Jesus Christ in every providential dimension of humanity that the Holy Spirit sends to us?”



Blessed Andre Bessette, a member of the Holy Cross Brothers and founder of St. Joseph’s Oratory of Mount Royal in Montreal, is depicted in a painting at St. Patrick’s Basilica in Montreal. Blessed Andre is known for his intense piety, miraculous cures and for his dedication to the building of the shrine honoring St. Joseph.

CNS photo/Bob Mullen

- 1 Special thanks to Co-Chancellor Fr. John McCartney for researching and writing this Pastoral Letter.
- 2 I am indebted in this column to: 1) Notre Dame University Theology Professor Fr. Kevin Grove, CSC in his YouTube entitled “Saturdays with the Saints 2017: Venerable Solanus Casey (1870-1957) and St. André Bessette (1845-1937)”; and 2) Notre Dame University Theology Professor Lawrence Cunningham in his YouTube entitled “The Humility of the Door Keeper: The Case of Brother André Bessette, CSC.” I strongly recommend these YouTube videos which are deeply theological, biblical and inspirational.

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