April - St. Brother Andre

Alfred Bessette was born in 1895, in a small town southeast of Montreal. He was the eighth of twelve children and frail of health from birth. Orphaned at the age of 12 years, he developed a deep devotion to St. Joseph and the Passion of Christ, when in foster care. At 14 years, he was put in school, but never did well, besides reading and signing his own name. At 18 years he moved to Connecticut to work with his relatives in the textile mills on Rhode Island.

After Confederation, in 1867, he returned to Canada. His pastor noticed his deep faith, devotion and generosity. So, he presented Alfred to the Congregation of the Holy Cross, in Montreal, that were dedicated to St. Joseph, saying,' I am sending you a Saint'. Alfred was rejected because of his poor health. However, the Archbishop intervened and at 28 years of age Alfred became a novitiate of the Congregation, taking the name of Brother André, in honour of his parish priest, for the rest of his life.

As a professed brother, his duties were to greet people, tend to their needs, do porter work, laundry duty, be a sacristan, and messenger. He showed due diligence in all his work and said, 'When I joined this community, the Superiors showed me the door, I remained 40 years".

He prayed with the statue of St. Joseph facing Mt. Royal, saying,' Someday St. Joseph will be honoured in a special way on Mt. Royal'. In his care of the sick he would massage them with a medal of St. Joseph that was wrapped in a cloth, dipped in the oil lamp burning in front of St. Joseph's statue. People were cured and his claim as a healer spread fast. When an epidemic occurred at the college, he volunteered to nurse the sick. It is said that no one under his care died.

People flocked to Brother Andre. However, tensions also grew. Doctors called him a quack; parents were suspicious of his practice and his supervisors were uneasy. So, they moved his practice to a tram station. As Brother Andre's fame spread, he received thousands of letters and needed four secretaries. The doorway to his practice was cluttered with crutches, braces and canes as proof of his cures.

In 1904, Brother Andre decided to build a chapel to St. Joseph. He made $200 cutting hair and built a small chapel across from the college, claiming St. Joseph was curing the sick. Soon the Holy Cross authorities decided to buy land on Mt Royal, but the owner refused their offer.

Brother Andre and a few followers climbed the slope and dug medals of St. Joseph there. Their request was granted. In 1924 a Basilica was built near Bassette's chapel, and the cornerstone laid. However, completion of St. Joseph's Oratory only occurred in 1967, 30 years after Bessette's death. Brother Andre died at age 91 years in 1937, and 1 million people paid their respects. His body is in a tomb in the main chapel, his heart is present in a reliquary.

He was beatified by Pope John Paul in May 1982, and canonized by Pope Benedict XV1 in December 2009. Bassette is the first Saint of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, frequently called God's Doorkeeper, Miracle Man of Montreal. His feast day is on January 07 ' I am nothing, only a tool in the hands of Providence.