

## WONDER 1

### DELIGHT OF SAINTS

I saw heaven opened and St. Joseph sitting upon a magnificent throne. I felt myself wonderfully affected when, each time his name was mentioned, all the saints made a profound inclination toward him, showing by the serenity and sweetness of their looks that they rejoiced with him on account of his exalted dignity.

— St. Gertrude the Great

### Saint Joseph's Oratory

I have only my great devotion to St. Joseph. This it is that guides me and gives me full confidence.<sup>1</sup>

— St. André Bessette

**S**aints are heroes. Every hero deserves a place of honor. This is especially true of St. Joseph. He is the greatest saint, the greatest hero. He deserves a basilica in his honor!

The reality is that there are many shrines around the world dedicated to St. Joseph (see page 283 for a brief list). There is one, however, that stands out above all the rest: St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal, Canada. Saint Joseph's Oratory is a basilica and is widely acclaimed as the preeminent international center of devotion to St. Joseph.

Saint Joseph's Oratory was founded by St. André Bessette. This incredible saint was born near Montréal in 1845. His birth name was Alfred, and his parents were devout Catholics; he was number eight of 12 children. Years later, when he entered religious life, he took the name André.

Alfred's father was a lumberjack by trade. Tragically, his father died after a tree fell on him when little Alfred was only 9 years old. Two years later, Alfred's mother died from tuberculosis, so Alfred became an orphan at age 12. Losing both his father and mother at such an early age, Alfred developed a strong devotion to St. Joseph and entrusted his life entirely to him. Alfred never had good health and never received much of an education either. As a young man, he moved to the United States for work and spent time in Connecticut working in several textile mills.



After a period of time, Alfred entered the Congregation of the Holy Cross and became a lay brother; he never became a priest. Due to his lack of education, Brother André was given the menial task of porter (doorman) of a college run by his religious community in Quebec. He remained in that role for more than 40 years. He was such a humble man that he often referred to himself as "St. Joseph's little dog." God had big plans for him though.

Though a humble doorkeeper, Brother André quickly became known all throughout Canada as a very holy and pious man. He spent countless hours praying with the people who came to the door to see him. He offered everyone devotional oil that he collected from the lamp beside a statue of St. Joseph and recommended that they take all their needs to St. Joseph. Countless miracles were worked through Brother André's intercession, but he always attributed the miracles to the loving intercession of St. Joseph.

Brother André was frequently mocked and ridiculed for his simple love of St. Joseph, piety, and devotion. Sadly, even members of the Church expressed their dislike of him, especially the attention he gave to every sick person who came to see him. Many members of the Church became jealous of Brother André because many people considered him a saint. On average, Brother André received more than 80,000 letters a year from people asking him for prayers. The letters were so numerous that he required four helpers to assist him with all the mail. The wisdom contained in his correspondence was always simple and straightforward: Go to Joseph!

When you invoke St. Joseph, you don't have to speak much. You know your Father in heaven knows what you need; well, so does his friend St. Joseph. Tell him, "If you were in my place, St. Joseph, what would you do?"<sup>2</sup>

— St. André Bessette

In thanksgiving for all the wonders taking place through the intercession of St. Joseph, Brother André desired to establish a shrine in honor of St. Joseph. He was given permission by his religious superiors for the project and, with the help of others, a small chapel dedicated to St. Joseph was erected in 1904. In 1924, construction of a basilica began on the site where he had built his small chapel in 1904. The basilica would be completed in 1967 and come to be known throughout the world as St. Joseph's Oratory, the largest shrine in the world dedicated to St. Joseph.

Unfortunately, St. André did not live to see the completion of the basilica. He died in 1937 at the age of 91. However, for his efforts to spread devotion to St. Joseph, he is known throughout the world as the greatest “Apostle of St. Joseph” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was so loved and respected that more than 1 million people passed by his open coffin before his funeral Mass took place. He was beatified by St. John Paul II in 1982 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. On the universal liturgical calendar, St. André’s feast day is celebrated on January 6, the day he died. In Canada, his feast is celebrated on January 7 because the Solemnity of the Epiphany is always celebrated on January 6, and solemnities take precedence.

Today, more than 2 million people visit St. Joseph’s Oratory annually. People travel on pilgrimage to St. Joseph’s Oratory from all over the world, asking for special graces through the intercession of St. Joseph and St. André Bessette. Whether they pray for health, assistance with difficult marriages, the conversion of wayward children, or other matters that weigh on the human heart, all who visit the basilica find peace, hope, and consolation in St. Joseph.

The earthly remains of St. André are reserved in the basilica, and a special reliquary contains his heart. In 1984, St. John Paul II journeyed to St. Joseph’s Oratory as a pilgrim while on a papal visit to Canada. Before the tomb of St. André, the saintly pope poured out his heart to St. André and St. Joseph. Below is a section from St. John Paul II’s beautiful prayer offered on that occasion:

Blessed [Saint] Brother André Bessette, porter of the college, and custodian of the Oratory of St. Joseph, give hope to all those who continue to seek your help. Teach them confidence in the virtue of prayer, and with it, the path of conversion and the Sacraments. Through you, and through St. Joseph, may God continue to pour out his blessings. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

## Delight of Saints

With the exception of our loving Mother, St. Joseph stands above all the saints.<sup>1</sup>

— St. Maximilian Kolbe

**S**aint Joseph is a unique saint. He is honored and loved as the man closest to Christ. His virtues and holiness are extraordinary.