St. André Bessette

January 6

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1845–1937 • Canada

From his childhood, André suffered terrible and constant stomach pains, making him unable to hold down a job. He would jump from shop to farm, trying out different employments. He was fired every time because he was too weak to perform his duties.

When André was twenty-five, his pastor sent him to the Brothers of the Holy Cross. He knew that André was special, and he told the brothers that he was sending them a saint. But the brothers saw that André was too sickly to work and couldn't read or write. They didn't know how he would be able to fulfill the duties of the monastery. They tried to send him away, but André knew he was where God wanted him to be. He begged a visiting bishop for help, and the bishop promised André that he would be able to stay on and take his vows as a brother. And that is how André Bessette became Br. André.

The brothers searched for work that André would be strong enough to do. They sent him to Notre Dame College in Montreal (a school for boys ages seven to twelve) to be the porter. André greeted guests, ran errands, woke up the boys for school, and even delivered mail. He always found time to pray and had a special love for St. Joseph. He would visit the sick and anoint them with oil while praying to St. Joseph. When a terrible epidemic spread throughout the area, André cared for the sick, and many said that he healed them. But André insisted that it wasn't him; rather, it was St. Joseph who had healed them.

Br. André asked the bishop for permission to build a chapel to St. Joseph. The bishop agreed as long as André did not have to borrow money to build it. André had very little money, but he knew that if St. Joseph wanted his chapel built, he would make it happen. First, André built a tiny wooden structure, and then he raised enough money for the roof. Many pilgrims visited the chapel and donated money. André used it to expand the chapel until it was a magnificent church. Br. André became its full-time caretaker, greeting all the pilgrims who visited. Many experienced the healing of St. Joseph.

When Br. André died at the age of ninety-one, over a million people attended his funeral. The church he built is called St. Joseph's Oratory and is the largest church in Canada. Millions of pilgrims visit it every year. St. André Bessette, ask God to heal my body and soul!