



Br. André to be canonized Oct. 17

MONTREAL -- Pope Benedict XVI will canonize Montreal's beloved Br. André in Rome Oct. 17, making him the first Canadian-born male saint.

The pope made the announcement in Rome Feb. 19, following the consistory vote.

"Br. André's canonization is the best news the Church of Montreal could receive this year," said Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, archbishop of Montreal.

"I have always been impressed by this man, who was both humble and visionary -- a man of profound faith. His is an example of tenacity and his witness is just as relevant in 2010," he continued.

Fr. Jean-Pierre Aumont, the superior of the Canadian province of the Congregation of Holy Cross, described the news as "a precious gift, welcomed with great joy" by those who have benefited from Br. André's intercession over the decades.

Br. André also serves as "a source of inspiration" for the Congregation of Holy Cross, of which he was a member, said Fr. Aumont. He will be the first saint of this religious congregation founded by Blessed Basile-Antoine Moreau in Le Mans, France, in 1837. "It encourages us to dream big and to believe in the future," stated Fr. Aumont.

The diminutive Holy Cross brother, who founded the world's largest shrine to St. Joseph -- St. Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal -- was reputed during his lifetime for his holiness, humility and unwavering trust in God. Still, he strived each day for continual conversion of heart.

Many people sought him out for his words of wisdom and hope. In many instances, his visitors would receive healing from various physical ills through the intercession of St. Joseph. However, he would not accept any accolades. Rather, he would point his visitors toward Jesus. His extraordinary story of faith would eventually garner him international renown and admiration.

FROM PORTER TO SAINT

Br. André was born Alfred Bessette in the small town of Saint-Grégoire, south of Montreal, in 1845. He was orphaned at the age of 12 and was taken in by his aunt. At 18, he moved to the United States to work in the textile industry. He returned to Quebec in 1867 and entered the Congregation of Holy Cross in Montreal in 1870. He took the name André and made perpetual vows four years later.

He was appointed to serve as a porter at Collège Notre-Dame in Montreal, a school situated at the foot of Mount Royal, from 1874 to 1900. It was during this time that his reputation for holiness spread. It was also during these years that he dreamed of building an oratory for St. Joseph atop Mount Royal.

In 1904, the first chapel built on the mount was blessed. Construction for the larger church began soon after. The crypt church was blessed in 1917 and construction of the basilica began in 1924. Br. André died in 1937, prior to the completion of the basilica, at the age of 91. One million people are said to have attended his funeral.

The Archdiocese of Montreal officially began to gather evidence of Br. André's model Christian life in 1940. He was declared venerable by Pope Paul VI in 1978 and beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982. Pope Benedict XVI cleared the way for canonization on Dec. 19, 2009, when he recognized a second miracle attributable to the intercession of Br. André.

11th CANADIAN SAINT

Fr. Hugh Cleary, superior general of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Fr. Claude Grou, the rector of St. Joseph's Oratory, and Anne Leahy, Canadian ambassador to the Holy See, were in Rome for the big announcement Feb. 19.

"Br. André's canonization is a great honour for Canada. Brother André is a well-known figure not only in the Catholic Church," said Leahy. "He has touched people all around him in Montreal, in Canada and beyond. The Church wishes to recognize his merits that are a particularly shining expression of the contribution of Catholics to our country and its spiritual tradition."

Once canonized, Br. André will become the 11th Canadian saint, though only the second born in Canada. The eight Jesuit martyrs and St. Marguerite Bourgeoys were natives of France. St. Marguerite d'Youville, who founded the Sisters of Charity of Montreal (Grey Nuns) in 1737, was the first Canadian-born female saint.

The program of local events in celebration of this major historic event for the Church in Canada will be announced shortly.

A pilgrimage from Montreal to Rome for the canonization is being organized. For more information on the pilgrimage, go to www.spiritours.com or call Louise Pesant at 514-733-8211, ext. 2102.

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