

As Ordinary Time Begins, Remember Ordinary Things do so much to Bring People to God

Last Monday, January 6th, we celebrated the feast day of a relatively new saint, Andre Bessette, who was canonized in 2010.

He was born in a small town about 25 miles southeast of Montreal, and from the time he came into the world he was a bit sickly. He was even baptized quickly as the priest and others thought he might not make it. He did though, and grew up in a working class family; his dad was a carpenter and a lumberman and his mom helped educate the kids.

Sadly his dad lost his life in an accident, and three years later his mom died of tuberculosis. He was an orphan at just 12 years of age. He wasn't educated that well, so he had a hard time reading and writing even his name. He was often in poor health, and worked in a lot of different jobs, as a tinsmith, a blacksmith, a baker, a shoemaker and a wagon driver. When he was 20, he came to the United States to work in textile mills in New England, and he took pride in his work, saying "Despite my limitations, there is no one who works harder than me." Through it all, he had a deep prayer life too. He would spend a lot of time in prayer, and talking about his faith with his friends.

When he came back a couple of years later to Canada, his parish priest thought he might have a vocation, and so he was sent to the Congregation of the Holy Cross, telling them "I am sending you a saint." He was initially rejected, but the archbishop went to bat for him, and he was admitted and became a brother at the age of 28. He was given the task of being the doorman at a college in Quebec, and he filled that role for more than 40 years and he spent that time working hard at various jobs, and he joked saying when he came he was shown the door and stayed for 40 years. His jobs included answering the door, cleaning floors, windows and lamps and carrying messages.

He loved Saint Joseph, and recommended people have a devotion to him who were afflicted with illnesses. He visited the sick a lot, and prayed for them, and anointed them with oil from a lamp which burned before Saint Joseph. People claimed they were cured because of his prayers, but Brother Andre wanted no credit for anything. His fame grew and some were critical but he always had the support of the Church. He was incredibly compassionate, and wanted to be with people in their suffering.

What his life shows us is that in ordinary things we can do something extraordinary. Who knows how many people had their lives changed for the better because of him. In the Gospel, Jesus is baptized, and both He and John are people of service. Neither one did things for their own glory; rather they pointed people to Christ. And a big way we do that is through our work.

Today we begin a relatively short stretch of Ordinary Time that will take us through the start of Lent in just over a month. Over the Christmas holidays, you may have had a lot going on, and certainly there were new memories made with family and friends. But as we take down the tree and go back into the grind of school, work and daily life, what we

also need to remember is that our seemingly ordinary things we do every day do so many extraordinary things to help people learn what matters most.

When I think of my own parents, I think of two hard working people who provided for our family, but also went the extra mile at home in caring for the home, making meals, helping with homework, taking me to my sports games, and I'd see how they would do so much for their own parents. For Saint Andre, how many moments there must have been like this over 40 years he worked at the door and cleaning at the college and interacting with people in prayer and conversations. In these encounters, he was evangelizing.

He's a great saint to take a page from and remind ourselves that when we do things with a good attitude, when we help others, when we do our fair share for our families and help out around the house, when we have conversations and pray with people, these simple actions really do leave a lasting impact and teach others so much.

As Saint Mother Teresa said, not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love. For Saint Andre Besette it was a way of life, and may it also be something we think about remembering those little things we do with great love can ultimately lead people to heaven.

God bless,

Fr. Paul