Saint Andre Besette Reminds us Ordinary Things are often Extraordinary

At home growing up, I had various jobs to do. After a snowstorm, I'd have to shovel. Once a week or so, I'd cut the lawn. I'd also empty the trash, help with dishes, and do dusting and clean out the sinks and the tubs. It wasn't much, but it certainly seemed tedious.

My parents worked very hard too. They both had jobs, but also did other jobs around the house such as vacuuming and mopping the floors, not to mention cooking and laundry. I suppose I'm not alone in that we all have to do jobs, and these days I still do those same jobs now at the rectory to keep it looking nice. But sometimes in little things we can make a big difference.

This past Monday, January 6th, we honored a "newer" saint who was just canonized ten years ago, Andre Bessette. He comes from Montreal, and was a brother who was credited with numerous miraculous healings. But he didn't write a lot of fancy books, but instead throughout his life was a worker.

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 also had a deep prayer life. 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.

Today as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, we mark the Lord beginning His earthly mission. It also begins what we call “ordinary time,” the liturgical season that is so called because the weeks are numbered; the Latin word “ordinalis” referring to numbers in a series, stemming from the Latin word “ordo” from which we get the English word “order.” (An “ordo” is also the book clergy use to give us the order of each Mass of the day). It’s the period of the Church year where we live our lives neither in feasting like we do in Christmas and Easter, or in a penitential way as we do in Lent. Green is an appropriate color too for the season, because green is associated with growth and reflects the seasons of spring and summer. It’s ordinary actions we do that can facilitate that spiritual growth.

While the miracles and words of Jesus are recorded, much of course is not recorded; the many “ordinary” moments He had with Mary and Joseph; the many people He visited; the meals He shared; the conversations he had with others.

I certainly remember many special moments as I look at my life so far. But looking at my life, it’s the “ordinary” moments that have made such a big difference; the conversations over dinner; playing cards with my grandfather or parents; seeing how hard my parents worked for our family and the random acts of kindness people have done for me.

Who knows how many people had their lives changed for the better because of Andre Bessette, in moments just like that that he shared with people. 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 and daily actions of love

As we begin this period of ordinary time and think also of our own baptisms, may we never forget the big impact we have in that our actions are a big part of evangelization. The presents have been opened up for a few weeks now, and they surely created memories. But never forget making a meal and sharing it as a family; talking about the day that was and the day ahead; being a good listener; showing compassion and forgiveness; or taking the time to do a simple action with love. You add all of these “ordinary” actions up and they do so much to help a person see God’s love in their lives.

As Saint Therese of Lisieux would tell us, we don’t all do great things, but we can do simple things with great love.

Saint Andre Bessette, pray for us.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul