

Encounter in Detroit

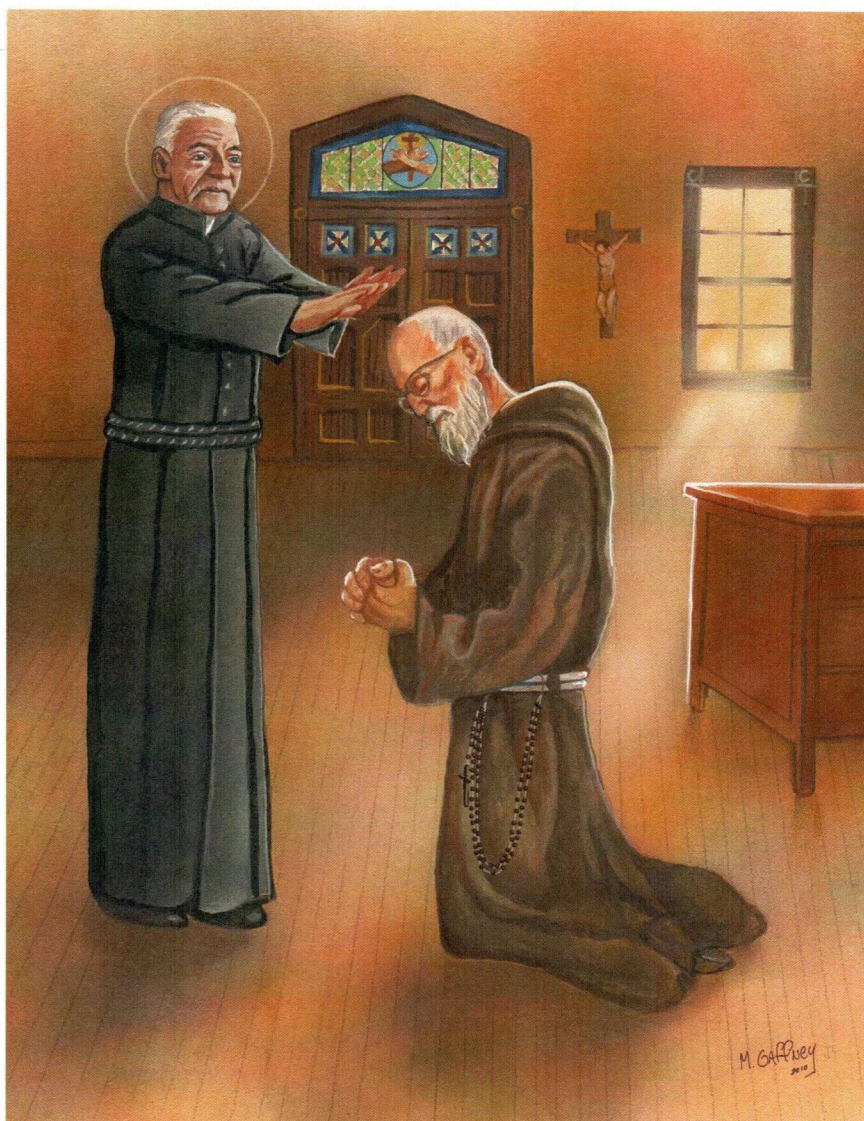
"A meeting of two friends" is how the visit of the Major Reliquary of Saint Brother André to the Solanus Casey Center in Detroit was presented last October. This event echoed the encounter of the two religious, one a Brother of Holy Cross, the other a Capuchin priest, which took place in the thirties. A painting by Brother Michael Gaffney evokes this cherished memory of the Capuchins in Michigan.

By Pauline Cantin

Saint André Bessette visited Venerable Solanus Casey. At the end of their visit, Saint André knelt before Venerable Solanus and asked for a blessing. After blessing him, Blessed Solanus knelt before Saint André and received a blessing from him in return.

These words are written describing the monumental visit of these two holy men in the year 1935 while Brother André visited St. Bonaventure Monastery on Mt. Elliott in Detroit. His relatives from the area no doubt heard of the miraculous events happening because of the Capuchin priest and saw the parallels of the two men.

Both Father Solanus Casey and Brother André were men of great faith. They were both granted the humble job of doorkeeper at their respective church and school. This task was transformed into a commitment to care for the sick and the afflicted. These two holy men shared one mission: opening the door to God's love!



"The Encounter", artwork by Br. Michael Gaffney, OFM Cap., 2010 – Reproduced with the authorization of the artist and of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph, Detroit, Michigan.

HUMILITY. HOPE. HEALING.

Solanus Casey was ordained what they termed at the time, a simplex priest. He was allowed to serve the people, but not by presiding over Mass, or preaching the homily. Instead, Brother Solanus greeted the faithful, listened to their trials and prayed with them. Often called upon to visit the sick, he became known as "The Holy Priest".

Alfred Bessette, because of his poor health, no longer hoped to become a religious but was finally admitted to the Congregation of Holy Cross thanks to the commendation of his parish priest, Father André Provençal. "He cannot do much, but he can pray." Brother André was given the humble job of doorkeeper at Collège Notre-Dame, but also took care of giving the students haircuts, delivering their laundry, and other menial jobs. After many cures happened because of him and his prayer, the little brother became known as "The Miracle Man".

Solanus and André had in common a great humility, a life marked by simplicity, a hopeful prayer, a deep compassion, an openness towards people of all faith and an unbounded trust in God. There is certainly a spiritual kinship between Saint André and Blessed Solanus. Three words sum up their life: Humility, Hope, Healing.

THE TRAVEL MEMOIR

Fast forward to the spring of 2022. Marc and I were driving through a neighbourhood of Detroit with Marc's brother and his wife, Jared and Mary Cantin and happened upon the Solanus Casey Center. Upon entry, we could both feel

"Two men, one mission:
opening the door to God's love!"



The two holy men together again! The Major Reliquary of Saint André Bessette, CSC, stopped at the Solanus Casey Center, in Detroit. After Mass, there was time for prayer and public veneration in the Chapel of the Capuchin Monastery.



The Capuchins of Detroit, Brother Peter Chinnappan and Brother Steven Kropp, welcome a beautiful small reliquary containing the first class relic of Saint Brother André, CSC, delivered by Marc and Pauline Cantin. – Photos: The Cantins

the presence of Saint André in the Center, and immediately felt called to bring the Major Reliquary of Saint André to Detroit, for a reunion of these two friends.

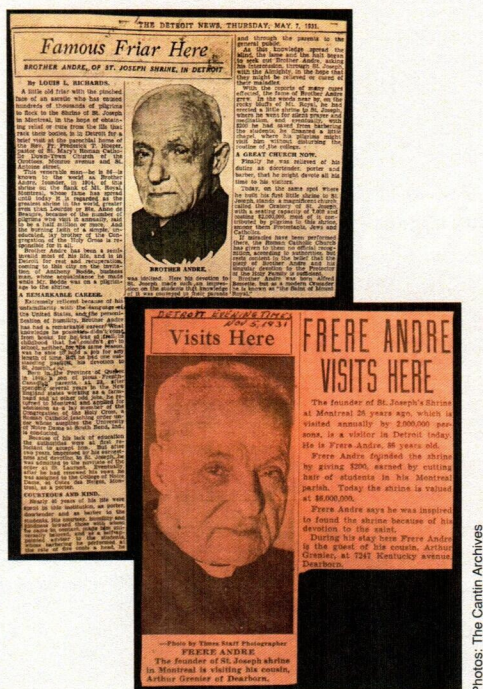
We were able to bring this idea to fruition on October 27, 2022, with the cooperation of Father Jomon Kalladanthiyil, CSC, of Saint Joseph's Oratory, Brother Steven Kropp and Brother Peter Chinnappan of the Solanus Casey Center. Father Patrick Beneteau celebrated Mass. There was time for personal prayer to the holy men and blessing of the faithful with Saint Joseph's Oil.

Saint André's visit was well received, with the respect shown by the Knights of Columbus holding honour guard. We had the opportunity to meet the artist of the painting *The Encounter*, Brother Michael Gaffney, OFM Cap., and expressed how grateful we felt to be able to bring his painting to life.

But our story does not end there. When we got home, we talked to Father Jomon about acquiring a First Class Relic of Saint André to present to the Solanus Casey Center. Marc created a Reliquary fit for a saint and we presented it to them on Saint André's Feast Day, January 7, 2023.

They are honoured to have another humble man in their midst and are grateful for the opportunity to celebrate and share with the community.

Saint Brother André, Blessed Solanus Casey, Pray for Us! ✱



Photos: The Cantin Archives

Frère André in Detroit

The memory of Brother André remains alive in the city of Detroit through his spiritual friendship with Blessed Solanus Casey. Since 2012, he is also present through the parish community of Ecorse which bears his name. "Founded in our faith to Jesus Christ, the parish of St. André Bessette builds a community of love, healing and holiness," as stated on the parish website.

Finally, it should be noted that the founder of Saint Joseph's Oratory had cousins in Detroit with whom he had stayed during his visits. As reported in *The Detroit Evening Times* of November 5, 1931, "During his stay here Frere Andre is the guest of his cousin, Arthur Grenier, at 7247 Kentucky Avenue, Dearborn." One can imagine the line-up in front of the house or the curiosity of the neighbours! Mr. Grenier is the grandson of Joséphine Bessette-Saint-Denis, first cousin of Brother André.

THE SAINT OF MOUNT ROYAL

The Detroit News also talks about a visit of Brother André in the area in May 1931. The last two paragraphs are saying, "If miracles have been performed there [the Oratory], the Roman Catholic Church has given to them no official recognition, according to authorities, but rests content in the belief that the piety of Brother Andre and his singular devotion to the Protector of the Holy Family is sufficient. Brother Andre was born Alfred Bessette, but as a modern Crusader he is known as "the Saint of Mount Royal". That's him! (N. Dumas)