

JANUARY 30, 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

Brother Andre didn't go to school, so he never learned how to read or write. On top of that, he was very short and frail. That's why he was turned away by every congregation he applied to join. When the Congregation of the Holy Cross finally reluctantly accepted him to the order, they had little to no use for him. When they did accept him, they assigned him a task of being a porter, opening and closing the gate, and greeting people at Notre-Dame College, in Montreal. That's all. He was never ordained as a priest, and remained as a brother. He did a simple task that anyone could do, with great devotion, with great faith and love. He was often seen having conversations with people, praying for them, encouraging them to pray and to go to church. He was sometimes seen crying with them. He was compassionate, and patient.

As a result, Brother Andre had turned a simple task of being a porter and a greeter into God's extraordinary healing ministry. There are at least 10,000 verified and documented healing cases attributed to Brother Andre during his life. Of course, he never took any credit for what God did through him. He always attributed the miraculous healings to Saint Joseph, to whom he had great devotion. When Brother Andre died on January 6th of 1937, according a news report, they had to extend the wake to a full week instead of the usual one or two days. And still, people had to wait four hours in the cold winter weather outside in order to pay their last respect and farewell to their beloved Brother Andre, which, would've been literally just a split second before they were told to move along and make way for the next person in line. A total of one million people came to attend Brother Andre's funeral.

All that Brother Andre ever did was to show others God's love and bring them closer to God. And that made all the difference in their lives.

Brother Andre was the beacon of light that helped to dispel the darkness of their suffering during their struggles and moments of doubt, and filled--fill them with the light of Christ's love and healing in their lives. I was assigned almost 12 years ago to build a church in honour of Brother Andre, who was canonized as a saint back in October of 2010. So, almost 12 years in the making, God willing, my parishioners and I will be able to begin construction later this year.

Just before I was assigned to the parish to build a church in honour of Saint Andre Bessette, I visited a priest friend of mine, Father Andrew, from Melbourne, Australia. He introduced me to his priest friend, Monsignor Portelli, who had a wealth of knowledge and plenty of experience in building and renovating churches. He had built two churches and helped renovate many other churches in Melbourne. When I met Monsignor Portelli, he looked right into my eyes and asked me this question. "What does it take to build a church?" I didn't quite understand what he meant, so I asked, "I'm sorry. What was the question again?" He repeated, "What does it take to build a church?" I still didn't understand what he meant. So, I began babbling, "Well, you know, we have this land over five acres." He replied, "That's not what I'm asking." I asked, "What does it take to build a church?" This time I thought to myself, "Hm, maybe he's talking about the fund needed to build a church." So, I answered him, "Well, I was told by the bishop that it would take about 12 to 15 million dollars to build this church." "Again," he replied, "that's not what I asked. What does it take to build a church?" I had to eat humble pie and say, "Father, I don't know what...what the answer is. So, what does it take to build a church?" This time he answered. "Faith. It takes faith to build a church. If you believe, it will happen, but if you don't, it will never happen."

Once he said it, it all made sense, and I've always treasured that conversation and pondered on those words, "It takes faith to build a church," many times. Especially when the going got tough and I was discouraged, and when the task of building a church seemed like an impossible challenge. It takes faith to do great things. It takes faith to do what seems impossible by our own efforts and our strength alone. But we don't have to do it on our own. We just need to learn to trust, make the leap of faith by abandoning ourselves into the arms of God. I learned in the circus there's an act known as "the flying trapeze," where one person holding onto a bar tied to a long rope flies, and another person holding onto a bar hanging from a long rope, on the other side, catches the person flying. They're known as "the flyer" and "the catcher." The flyer doesn't have to worry about anything else other than simply letting go. However, it takes a huge leap of faith in order to do that. Once the flyer lets go, the catcher is right there to catch the flyer. It is a synchronized motion and perfectly timed act.

In the same way, we all know that God is right there to catch us, but the act of letting go is often the most difficult thing to do in our life. I often catch myself wanting to hold onto the bar of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, unwilling to let go. But in order to achieve what God is capable of, what is beyond what you and I can ever achieve on our own, or apart from Him, we have to learn the art of letting go. Of our fears, and lack of trust, and pretty much everything that prevents us from trusting God completely. Our faith is like a lamp. Once we place it on the lampstand, the light can shine, dispelling the darkness. If you're baptized as a baby, you probably don't remember that a baptismal candle was given to us at our baptismal ceremony, which signifies the light of Christ. The light of Christ was given to us for us to conquer darkness in our lives and in the world. Brother Andre did that very well, became a beacon of light simply by allowing the light of Christ to enter into his

own life. He allowed God to transform the darkness of his insecurities, rejection, and doubt he experienced in his own life, into God's compassionate and healing presence. And he was able to share that with so many others as indicated by one million people that attended his funeral. If you allow God into our hearts and into our lives, and allow Him to dispel the darkness in our lives, we, too, can become a beacon of light for God to shine through.