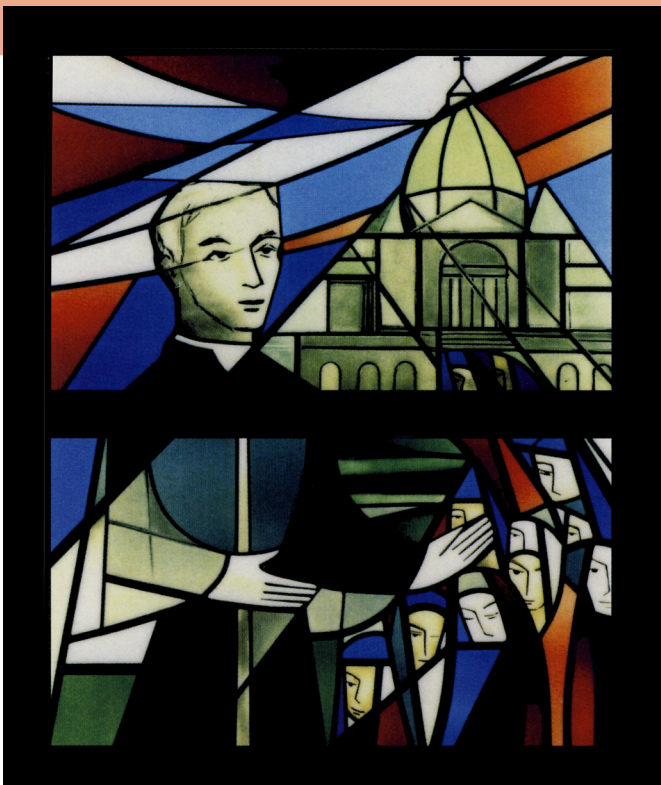


CATECHESIS
intended for
Adolescents

Oeuvre du maître verrier **Olivier Ferland**, église Bon-Pasteur, Matane, QC.



*Brother
André*

*Witness to
the Gospel*

by **Annie Beauchemin**

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OCQ
Office de catéchèse du Québec


L'ORATOIRE
Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal

INTRODUCTION

In our world where technology offers possibilities not yet explored, answering machines and other machines are used as the infinite number which regularly replaces the «Hello» and the smiles of the person who would welcome us. «Your call is important to us. Stay on the line to maintain your priority». Does this phrase sound familiar to you? Who, today, can claim to feel welcomed under these conditions? However, there are still places where welcoming others is central to their work. We think especially of community organizations who work with the oppressed, the poor, the homeless, women in crisis, etc. The Gospel of Matthew speaks of this unconditional welcome in the following way: *«Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me!»* (Mt 25, 34-36)

The giving of self is an extension of welcoming others. Brother André (Alfred Bessette) embodied this unconditional welcoming of others and also the unconditional giving of himself, an inspiration which he derived from the Good News of Jesus Christ. He was a very simple man who welcomed all kinds of people and awakened them to God's love. The occasion of his canonization on October 17th, is an opportune time to introduce Brother André to young people as a witness to the Christian faith, not as a witness from the past but rather as an inspiration for today's faith.

Issues to be discussed

- What are the different qualities necessary for welcoming others? What are the prejudices?
- Who was Brother André? Can he be an example for me today?
- What does the unconditional welcoming of others and the giving of self imply?

Objectives :

- To discuss the different qualities necessary for welcoming others and the prejudices that may exist.
- To draw forth, beginning with the account of the life of Brother André and a Scripture passage, some points for reflection on what welcoming others and the unconditional giving of self means.

Scripture reference : Mt 25, 31-40

Animation Summary

Brother André. Witness to the Gospel

This animation leaflet, with its logical sequence, has been planned to take place during one meeting. However, in keeping with the needs of the group or the circumstances of the animation, other arrangements can be made (ex: add one or two meetings to further explore any aspects of the process).

1. Getting started: The Merry Castaways
2. Welcoming and prejudices
3. Brother André, an inspiration?
4. Come, you blessed of my Father
5. Dialogue relating experiences to the Scripture passage
6. Reflection

Suggestions

To deepen our knowledge about Brother André:

- Visit Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal
- View a film followed by a period of discussion *Brother André still with us*, Le Centre Saint-Pierre — Convergence audiovidéo et l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 2004, 62 minutes.
- Intergenerational dialogue about Brother André

Welcoming others and the unconditional giving of self

Detailed procedure for the meeting

D'un cœur simple, Puisse toujours à la joie d'être aimés Où
Dieu nous comble Pour n'être plus que charité,
N'ayant pour unique passion Que de brûler de compassion
Pour sa gloire... et la joie du monde! Dieu nous aime,
Robert Lebel

1. Getting Started: The Merry Castaways

At the beginning of the meeting, the young people are welcomed (why not in an original and unexpected way?) and are invited to participate in a game about The Merry Castaways. (Hand out the explanation of the game found in Appendix 1). It is not necessary that the young people arrive at a consensus; this game should serve to initiate reflection on welcoming others and some of the prejudices which may exist.

Discussion

- Which people on the list would you bring aboard the life raft? Why?
- Did you encounter difficulties during the game?
If yes, what were they? If not, how do you explain this?
- What criteria did you use in making your choices during the game?

2. Welcoming and prejudice

Relationships with others, as necessary as they are, are often coloured by the opinions which each of us has about other people. In the game of The Merry Castaways, the criteria used to choose the people who will get onto the life raft are related to prejudices. Whether favorable or unfavorable, prejudices often influence the quality of the welcome which we extend to others in our relationships.

Discussion

- Name some situations, circumstances or people who, to you, seem to be unwelcomed? What are the prejudices behind this lack of extending a warm welcoming?
(As needed, the animator can either break the ice or conclude by listing several of the following: answering machines, pre-recorded messages, call forwarding numbers, people being treated like numbers and not like people, people who are rejected because they are different, etc.) Prejudices behind this type of welcome: the person on the phone is a client (the financial aspect is a priority), the working order consists of respecting the order of the priority of the call losing track of respect for the person, etc.)
- Name some situations or circumstances where everyone is welcomed unconditionally or where, to you, the quality of the welcome seems remarkable. What are the criteria behind this type of warm welcome? (As needed, the animator can either break the ice or conclude by listing several of the following: community organizations, sometimes friends, families, etc.)...the criteria for a warm welcome, the unconditional welcoming of another, because whomever it may be, he/she is a human being and merits being welcomed as he/she is.

3. Brother André, an inspiration?

Throughout the history of Christian faith, many people have been an inspiration for others by becoming in their own milieu true witnesses of God's love. Brother André, canonized on October 17th, 2010 in Rome, had a great impact on Quebec from the beginning of the last century and is still called upon today. A man of faith, he unconditionally welcomed those who came to see him, and also gave unconditionally of himself.

Ideas to introduce Brother André to the young people:

- Play the part of Brother André (with costume) and tell his story
- Watch a film about Brother André (Ex. : *Brother André still with us*, Le Centre Saint-Pierre — Convergence audiovisuel et l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 2004, 62 minutes)
- Look at the archives from Radio-Canada on the life of Brother André (Ex. : RADIO-CANADA, *L'oratoire Saint-Joseph : le miracle du frère André*, http://archives.radio-canada.ca/societe/religion_spiritualite/dossiers/1431/)
- Present witnesses who have met Brother André or have been impacted by the life of Brother André
- Read the story of the life of Brother André (summarized in Appendix 2)

Discussion

- What do you remember about Brother André's story? What touched you in this story?
- Why do you think the people of that era came to Brother André? What attracted them?
- If you had the chance to meet Brother André on Mount Royal, what would you say to him? What type of welcome would you expect to receive?

The presentation of Brother André's story provides an opportunity to ask questions about miracles. Do miracles really exist? Or are they a kind of placebo effect brought about by meeting someone who is truly inspiring? When the question of miracles arises in the group, the animator can encourage discussion on the topic by adopting an attitude of listening as it concerns the young people's faith. It is important that the adult does not impose his/her own beliefs on the topic. According to need, the animator can provide information on the process leading to canonization in which miracles are attributed to the intercession of the saint.

For personal preparation on this subject, the animator can find some suggestions for reflection on miracles in Christian faith in Appendix 3.

4. Come, you blessed of my Father (Mt 25, 31-40)

After this discussion, the group gathers around the Word of God to deepen the meaning of welcoming others and the unconditional giving of self. To promote an environment for reflection, the young people can light a candle and sit on cushions in a circle around it.

Suggestions for carefully preparing the narration of the Bible passage (Appendix 4):

- The text is read aloud by a young person who has taken time to prepare it in advance.
- The text is read aloud by the group.
- The text is read silently by each one, while soft music is played in the background.

The passage from the Gospel of Matthew can be handed out to the young people.

It can be found in Appendix 4.

5. Dialogue about experience and the the Scripture passage

In this extract from the Gospel of Matthew, welcoming others is an extension of the giving of self, an invitation that Brother André lived out every day.

Discussion

- In this text, what does Jesus say about acting compassionately? (Jesus invites us to welcome others as if it were God himself. A human being, wherever he/she comes from, whatever he/she has done in the past, has great worth.)
- Are there situations in which Jesus' invitation to welcome others as they are and to give of oneself seems impossible? Can you name them?
- In Brother André's life and in the Bible passage, we spoke about the gift of self. For you, what does the gift of self mean? What meaning does this bring to the lives of those who give of themselves for others? What does this gift bring to the person who receives it? (The gift of oneself means giving the best of ourselves and is not just a charade. It is to give in absolute truth. How is the giving of self different from forgetting oneself? The gift of self does not imply forgetting oneself. Rather, it is consistent with the relational dimension of all humanity. I need other people and other people need me.)

6. Meditation

The young people are invited to take their places on a life raft (this can simply be a blanket with a mat in the middle of it or cushions set out to form a raft) because with Jesus, everyone is on board and is welcomed unconditionally. The young people spend a short time in silence to continue their personal reflection.

Personal reflection

- The life of Brother André and the suggested Bible passage present a perfect example for loving others through welcoming them and giving of self. How will you say yes to this invitation?

During this time of mediation, inspired by Jean-Guy Dubuc's prayer to Brother André (Appendix 5), the four themes are read and the young people are invited to complete the prayer in their own words. Jean-Guy Dubuc's prayer can be handed out to the young people at the end of the meeting.

André my brother

You knew how to pray...
You knew how to welcome...
You knew how to suffer...
You knew how to live...

Appendix 1. The Merry Castaways

After a terrible storm, the boat El Titanico II, which was carrying 20 passengers, ran aground on the shore of a deserted island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Life was barren on this desert island and the castaways faced the following reality quickly: they could not survive for very long. There was only one possibility offered to them: a makeshift raft which would only hold six passengers.

According to you,
which of these twenty people
should get on the raft and survive?

?

? ?

A plumber
An Arabian nurse
A two-year old girl
The girl's mother
A singer
An astronaut
A soldier
A woman doctor
A teacher
A black inventor

? ?

A comedian
An architect
An astrologer
A pregnant lawyer
A cook
A priest
A paraplegic psychologist
A mechanic
A prime minister
A historian

Appendix 2. Brother André, a welcoming and compassionate man

Born August 9, 1845, the eighth child in the family, he was baptized Alfred Bessette. Nothing could predict, at this time, that a child so frail and so often sick would become the best-known holy man of Quebec. Like most families of that era, Alfred Bessette's family was poor. When he was four years old, his family settled in Farnham where his father exercised his trade as a lumberjack. When Alfred was nine years old, his father died, killed by a tree which he was cutting down. His mother found herself alone to take care of ten children. Two and a half years later she too died, from tuberculosis.

Orphaned, uneducated and separated from his brothers and sisters, the young Alfred faced up to life trying to find work. «Then began thirteen years of life as a wanderer, with little knowledge and not much hope, one who was hardly capable of writing his name and of reading a prayer book¹». During these years and in spite of his fragile health, he worked as an apprentice and an unskilled labourer on construction sites, as a farmhand, a tinsmith, a blacksmith, a baker, a shoemaker and a coach driver. Like numerous other Canadians, he tried his luck in the United States as a worker in the spinning mills for four years. Then, in 1867, he returned to his own country.

In 1870, Alfred entered the Novitiate of the Congregation of Holy Cross in Montreal. His superiors doubted his vocation because of the state of his health. Finally upon being accepted, he took the name of Brother André and became the porter at Collège Notre-Dame. He also carried out other tasks: «washing floors, cleaning lamps, bringing in firewood, serving as messenger²».

The miracle worker of Mount Royal


Initially as a simple porter, Brother André acquired, little by little, the reputation of having a gift for healing. The people around Collège Notre-Dame came to Brother André to be healed. A man of welcome, of listening and of advice, he took special care to welcome all those who knocked at his door. The people who came to him sought consolation more often than healing, and hope for the future. Brother André invited them to look into themselves and to draw hope from within. Rarely are there people who, like Brother André, can reconcile within themselves what they think, what they say, what they do and what they desire. Encountering such a person, even if only for a few minutes, brings peace.

Despite the large crowds of people who came to meet Brother André, support for him was not unanimous. The students from Collège Notre-Dame really liked him, the people appreciated him because he was like them, but he was equally treated as a charlatan by the local doctors. Within his community, doubts could be heard, and questions arose. Is this God's way?



1. L'oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, Brother André : un homme de chez nous, http://www.saint-joseph.org/fr_1078_index.php

2. *Ibid*



Brother André denied having a gift for healing. Instead, he suggested that the people whom he met perform acts of faith by making a novena to Saint Joseph, and rubbing themselves with oil or a medal of the saint.

Generally speaking, he would encourage the people to see a doctor to be taken care of. He would say to the doctors: «Your work is noble. It is the Good Lord who has given you your knowledge. You must thank him and pray to him». God is love and he loves us: this is central to Christian faith. Brother André knew how to speak so well of God's love that he instilled hope in the hearts of those whom he encountered. One of his friends reported: «I never brought anyone who was sick to Brother André who did not come away enriched. Some were healed, others died some time afterwards, but Brother André had comforted ...³»

Devotion to Saint Joseph

Brother André was a manual worker, had worked with his hands and had also suffered during his life. Because of this he could easily identify with Saint Joseph. He was a model for him and he recognized himself in Saint Joseph the worker. Throughout his life, Brother André had a dream to build a temple for Saint Joseph on Mount Royal, a dream which he worked towards all his life and which he saw realized, little by little.

In 1904, the first little chapel was built on Mount Royal. Expanded in 1908 and in 1910, it remained inadequate to welcome all the pilgrims who came there. At that time, it was difficult to believe that this first chapel would become the largest sanctuary in the world dedicated to Saint Joseph. Brother André lived under the bell-tower of the chapel. He led an ascetic life, ate little and prayed a lot. He continued his mission of welcoming others in an office near the little chapel through requesting acts of faith from the sick and by encouraging them in expressions of faith, hope and love.

In 1917, the crypt which could hold a thousand people was inaugurated. Even though he was ill, Brother André was determined to realize his dream of building a temple for Saint Joseph. In 1922, excavation for the foundation commenced and the construction of the basilica began in 1924. In 1931, at the time when the basilica was being built, the economic crisis which was raging forced a work stoppage. This work would only resume in 1936.

Brother André died on the 6th of January 1937 at the age 91. «He spent his life speaking to the Good Lord about others and to others about the Good Lord.” This witnessing by a friend gives us a good sense of what permeated his life of faith and love. It would be difficult to say where, in his life, work began or prayer ended since one was so intermingled with the other in the same vein⁴». A builder, a man of faith and perseverance, Brother André was a settler, a pioneer. His life's work, Saint Joseph's Oratory, as we know it today was finished in 1966.

3. L'oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, *Op.cit.*

4. *Ibid*

Appendix 3. Suggestions for reflection on miracles in Christian faith

- Can we still speak of miracles today?
- Is there a question of superstition or magic when facing sickness, suffering and death?
- How can God intervene to soothe or eliminate the suffering of some while remaining deaf to those of others?
- How do I, personally, understand miracles? And what questions do they raise regarding my faith?

To encourage reflection and discussion, here are a few suggestions :

The miracles in the New Testament

- « ... in Jesus' preaching, miracles are inseparable from the theme of establishing the Kingdom: they are presented as signs which manifest the coming and the realization of the Kingdom proclaimed by the prophets. They are a part of the Kingdom which is not something static, but a dynamic reality which effectively changes the human condition, and which establishes Christ's dominion over all things both in heaven and on earth.
- « If Christ is God among us, how then can we be surprised that his presence is «signified» in powerful works such as the resurrection and miracles? The opposite would be more surprising. A God who would give no sign of his divine nature would elude all human understanding and would contribute nothing to our freedom. On the contrary, if God intervenes through Jesus Christ, in history and in our world, all is as it should be: to be, to say and to act. All is in the same grand order, an order truly divine. The reason for this is the reality of the Father's Son, who is present among us with the power, the knowledge and the love of God, because God is «Dunamis» (Power), «Agapè» (Love) and «Logos» (Word).
- «Even though they entailed extraordinary or marvellous traits, the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels are first and foremost «signs» which were carried out with very specific goals:
- Firstly, to attest that the messianic age has arrived and that the Kingdom of God is very near to us (cf Luke 4, 16-21).
 - Secondly, to give evidence to the people about the One who was proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom, Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 10, 37-38).⁵»

5. Extrait de Jean-Marc Robillard, « Les miracles opérés par Jésus : authenticité et historicité ? »



Miracles and the saints

God alone is holy: this is what our Christian faith affirms, «And if a man or woman is declared a saint, it is because he/she is a reflection of God's holiness⁶. » This call to holiness is addressed to all believers, who follow Christ.

Miracles are considered by the Church as signs that certain people are already participating in the divine life and can be considered as intercessors with God. In the process for canonization of a man or woman, miracles occupy an important place⁷.

Can we still speak of miracles today?

Today, with the staggering evolution of scientific discoveries, some people question the importance of miracles in officially recognizing the saintliness of a person. In a culture where everything can be explained by science and reason, miracles are given a hard time...

Certain people might undergo a psychological or spiritual healing which has physical repercussions. Other people have a strong spiritual experience following an illness and recovery. Many researchers have shown certain links between psychological health and physical health. But current science cannot explain it all: the spiritual dimension still eludes them...

The Church remains very wise regarding miracles. It intensifies the investigation and remains silent when a healing can't be explained by current science. Certain acts from the past that were considered miracles can be explained scientifically today. Others are still being reviewed.

One thing is certain, miracles are never looked at for themselves. They always reflect back to faith and spiritual life. They are like the finger pointing to the moon: What should I look at? The finger or what it is pointing to? Christian faith is not based on a triumphant and extraordinary image of God. Christ dying on the cross is the true face of God: «Truly this man was God's son » said the centurion who witnessed his death (Mark 15, 39).

Miracles can be a path to God who calls us to new Life. The calls and the signs which the Lord sends to us are many and may be found in an experience of healing or of freedom, as well as in encountering a person or a community committed to justice or the fight for others who are faced with suffering and who are unheard...It is up to us to follow the direction in which the finger is pointing!

6. Théo L'encyclopédie catholique pour tous, Paris, Droguet-Ardant/Fayard, 1989, p. 21.



Appendix 4. Come, you blessed of my Father

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Matthew 25, 31-40

Appendix 5. André my brother

André my brother - Jean-Guy Dubuc

You knew how to pray...

At work and at night
In the midst of daily life, facing problems,
alone or with many friends,
teach me words that lift the spirit

You knew how to welcome...

The powerful and the oppressed,
The educated and the destitute,
above all, the little ones, often the wounded,
teach me to love everyone.

You knew how to suffer...

To hope in the future
Without fear or trembling,
To walk without ever running away,
Teach me to suffer in silence.

You knew how to live...

For a God whom you served,
For a Son, a Father and a Mother,
To recover what was lost,
Teach me to love everyone.



André my brother

André my brother by Jean-Guy Dubuc

You knew how to pray...

At work and at night

In the midst of daily life, facing problems,
alone or with many friends,
teach me words that lift the spirit

You knew how to welcome...

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To walk without ever running away,

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You knew how to live...

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For a Son, a Father and a Mother,

To recover what was lost,

Teach me to love everyone.

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