

# Homily

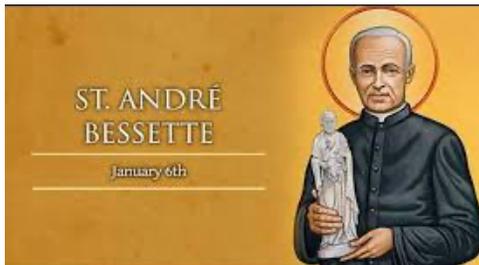
## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
February 21-22, 2026

Gn 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7  
Ps 51: 3-6, 12-13, 17  
Rom 5: 12, 17-19  
Mt 4: 4-1

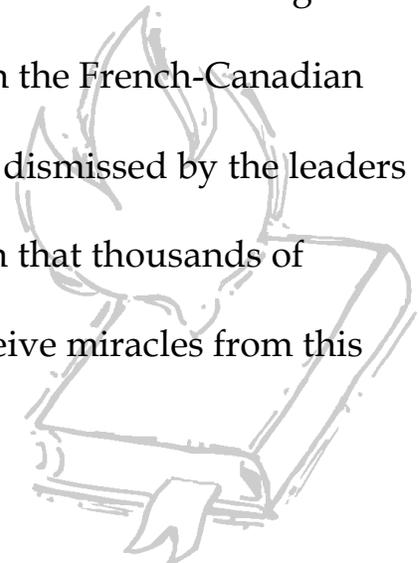
---

As I have mentioned previously during the season of Lent I am focusing on nine individuals who tried to avoid the life of sin, who tried to live a humbled life and who were trying to get pulled from that humbled life by the ways of the world. This year, I focus on nine individuals who, despite the temptations and evils of the world, held strong to the teachings of God despite all the negative repercussions that took place because of their faith.

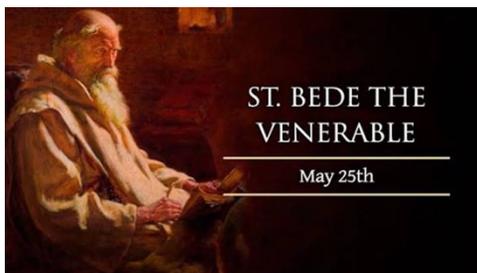


I had just preached on Ash  
Wednesday about St. André Bessette  
(1845-1937), a French Canadian religious

brother that very easily could be associated with the French-Canadian Heritage of St. Anne's Church, an illiterate man dismissed by the leaders of his own religious order but had so much faith that thousands of people would come to his door each year to receive miracles from this



illiterate brother. History tells us that this “Porter,” this “Doorkeeper of God” held the door to his house open each year to offer healings, blessings and praises from God to what was reported was over 80,000 visitors a year at the peak of his ministry. We are told that so many people came to the house of a man dismissed by his own religious community for being so “stooped,” yet to this day still draws thousands of people from Montreal and beyond those that are in need.



Today, our homily focuses on St. Bede the Venerable (c. 672–735), who is known as “The Father of British History.” What I did is for this particular feast was research this man’s life and came up with various stories concerning this saint that really affected my own prayer life. At this Mass, I would like to share these stories with you about one of the great biblical scholars of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century.

Within a century after his death, St. Bede’s work spread throughout all of Europe and his reputation in his Anglo-Saxon monastery in northeast England was one of the most important religious sites in all of Europe. Bede lived from around 673 until 735 AD. It is said that between

Pope Gregory the Great and Charlemagne (the Emperor in West Europe at the time), there was no greater theologian than this particular individual. St. Bede wrote around sixty books within his monastery concerning the faith in all kinds of different categories, from art and science to biblical criticism and the world of the faith.

St. Bede was raised in a wealthy family background. There was a person named Benedict Biscop, who in 674 AD founded the monastery of St. Peter at Wearmouth. Brother Biscop was a Northumbrian nobleman who later became Bede's abbot, and was given the land at Jarrow by King Ecgrith of Northumbria. Biscop sent Bede with twelve other monks and twelve novices from St. Peter's monastery in Wearmouth to establish the new St Paul's monastery in Jarrow, England, about three miles west of the country's east coast..

Bede was twelve years old at the time and attended the consecration of the new St. Paul's monastery on April 23, 685. In that monastery, Bede chose to live and remain there without the distractions of the earthly life until his death in 735 AD (in the faith, we call this a "higher calling," removing oneself further from the world to focus their energy

exclusively on God). St Paul's Monastery was noted for its impressive library boasting some 700 volumes of books, which Bede put to scholarly use. As the saint once was quoted to say,

"I was entrusted by my family first to the reverend Abbot Benedict and later to Abbot Ceolfrith for my education. I have spent all the remainder of my life in this monastery and devoted myself entirely to the study of scriptures."

By the time he was 30 years old, Bede was ordained a priest. He survived a plague in 686 AD when disease was rampant in the area. During his lifetime, he found time to study and wrote and/or translated some forty books on the topics of natural history, astronomy and poetry. Bede studied theology extensively and wrote the first martyrology, a chronicle of the lives of the saints.

Bede's capacity to write in early medieval period was a feat in itself because literacy was not very prominent during that time. As we learned with St. André, a good number of people prior to the invention of the Printing Press in 1440 did not have access to books so many not have the ability to read and write. As a result, Bede resigned himself to

read the scrolls from the writings of scholars and his own writings and translations would have to be written by his own hand.

Bede's most famous work was "The Ecclesiastical History of the English People." His major work started Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain in 55 BC and covers some 800 years of British history, exploring political and social life. His account also documents the rise of the early Christian Church, touching on the martyrdom of St Alban, the coming of the Saxons and St Augustine's arrival in Canterbury. In this work, Bede popularized the use of the AD dating system; this became the first work of history to use the AD system of dating to measure time based on the birth of Christ. AD stands for *Anno Domini*, or "In the Year of Our Lord."

As Bede was engrossed by the study of computers, the science of calculating calendar dates. Bede's efforts to decipher the original date of Easter, central to the Christian calendar, was at the time met with skepticism and controversy. He wanted to find a calendar date for Easter at that time that was later settled by the bishops of the Church to

become the Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of Spring (March 21).

Bede the venerable never traveled further than York, about eighty miles northeast of Yarrow. At that time, he travelled this journey to visit the bishop of York. This visit to York would be the furthest Bede ventured from his monastic home in Jarrow during his lifetime.

Bede continued working right up until the end of his life and his final work was a translation of the Gospel of St John, which he dictated to his assistant. After his death, Bede was declared 'venerable' by the Church in 836 and canonized and declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1899.

The title 'Venerable Bede' comes from the Latin inscription on his tomb at Durham Cathedral, reading: HIC SUNT IN FOSSA BEDAE VENERABILIS OSSA, meaning, "Here are buried the bones of the Venerable Bede." His bones have been kept at Durham since 1022 when they were brought from Jarrow by a monk called Alfred who had them buried alongside Cuthbert's relics. They were later moved to the Cathedral's Galilee Chapel in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

Bede is noted as one of the most prolific and influential Catholic writers of the Middle Ages. a man who devoted himself to the study and the translating and the interpretation of sacred scriptures which he devoted his entire life. Although Church leaders of the time such as Pope Sergius (860-911) wanted him to leave his monastery to become an advisor to the popes and to the important people of the world, Bede realized that to keep his faith and not be tempted by sin, he needed to stay grounded in his monastery.

During this era, so many people who were illiterate and so many people who had lost their faith and their way after the emperor Constantine moved the Roman Empire to the city of Constantinople in the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century (modern day Istanbul, Turkey), so many turned to monks like Bede for advice and guidance in their faith lives. Because of their loss of faith, many souls would travel to these monasteries to seek out people like Bede for instruction, including the popes and bishops of the time (a reason why the cloistered Poor Clares in Minooka are so close to my heart).

Bede realized that if he was going to stay holy, if he was going to stay faithful, he needed to stay within the walls of the monastery, not to be tempted by the metaphorical tree in the middle of the garden, not to be tempted by Satan, but to stay rooted in God's love and kept focused on his own purpose in life. Unfortunately, this temptation by Satan is the core root of the world's problems today. Our world wants to condition us to be in worldly ways and when that happens, look what happens to the world; look at how corrupt the world gets. Look at how things fall apart even in the Church when the temptations of sin have caused so many anger and dissention, even with members of the Church and those who have fallen away.

The lesson of today's gospel was one that St. Bede the Venerable learned all too well... when the Church stays grounded in faith, when the Church is built on the foundation of Christ crucified, when we "stay home with Christ" and spend time with God in this Church instead of staying out in the world and becoming corrupted by earthly values, then people rekindle that faith in God and possible find their way to heaven, with God's help. When the Church is built on the sand of public

opinion as opposed to God's will, then the people of the world forget about what their purpose is in life and that the beginning and end of all is not here but in heaven.

As I reflected on this life of St. Bede, if we want to get back to heaven then we have to do good and avoid evil; to spend more time with God than with those in the world that try to corrupt us. When we stay rooted in God, not to be consumed by the temptations of the world but stay focused to prayer with God, then and only then do we have a chance to get to the other side. St. Bede learned and taught this lesson well; we have to learn this in our own faith lives.

In today's readings, we have learned that during the time of Adam and Eve, during the time of Moses and the prophets, during the time of the judges and the kings, even with some leaders of the Church and government today, temptation has conditioned us to say it is okay to tear down each other's' reputations and good names. That said, when we do this, we empty ourselves of our Lord's presence.

In most every major religion, from Buddhism to Catholicism and everything in between, the process to see our ultimate reality is the same

- life is full of suffering, suffering comes from the temptations of life, if we focus on our ultimate reality we must rid ourselves from human temptation and the only way that we rid ourselves of that temptation and sin is to keep focused clearly on that singular reality that will get us to the other side, namely the presence of God.

For St. Bede, for Jesus in today's gospel, for us in today's age, the message is a simple one - keep focused on God. Let God lead you. Let God guide you. We realized in today's gospel reading, it was Jesus that was able to fight off Satan on the cross because he was rooted in God's love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was able to conquer sin and death because did not give in to sin, unlike the rest of us (even our popes!). Not us, but him. When we follow him and him alone, when we are carried by him, we have a chance to reach heaven.

Bede knew that lesson well, which is why he chose to remain inside his monastery rather than venture out into the world. In some way, we must do the same.

As for me, when I was reading the biography of this venerable Englishman in my own, limited way, I kept focusing on how St. Bede

remained true to the faith because he remained true to God, to remove himself from the temptations of the world to put his focus on God. In his life, Bede chose to live that “higher calling,” one that a person in a religious order is bound to make with vows of poverty, chastity, obedience (and sometimes cloister and even silence) – the more we remove ourselves from the world’s temptations, the more we focus on the divine. Even in our own limited way, we are called to remove all the attachments of life to keep our focus on God.

With the life of St. Bede the Venerable, his humility and sacrifice, his ability to fight off the temptations of the world with God’s help, made him holier, and, as a result, allowed him to make such a contribution in the world of faith that the Church leaders of today’s era consider him a great doctor of the Church, a holy man in the Church, a man who fought off temptation in a much smaller way than Jesus did in today’s gospel.

As I reflected on St. Bede the lector, the scholar and the writer, I encountered a prayer that is often utilized when we pray to this patron saint of Catholic school teachers, Catholic schools and scholars of the world, for which Bede also serves as a patron saint, to remind me how

to block out the noise of the world, to block out the temptations of sin and the attachments of life and focus on God. Perhaps if I can do that, perhaps if we all can do that, then we can get through the bad things of life to reach the other side, not by thinking I can do it alone, but by allowing God to carry me, lead me, and guide me and guide so as well. Here is the prayer...

Venerable Saint Bede,  
Patron of our Catholic School,

Thank you for being an example of holiness,  
goodness and wisdom.

Thank you for inspiring us to be lifelong learners  
who are always eager to know more.

Inspire us to read and hear the Word,  
which helps us to know Jesus and to follow his ways.

Help us to love God with all our hearts, and to love  
and respect our classmates, teachers, and families.

Guide us to use our words kindly and wisely so  
that we can be effective communicators  
who listen carefully and speak thoughtfully.

Above all, give us courage to live like Jesus lived.

Amen.

This is our prayer.