

Homily

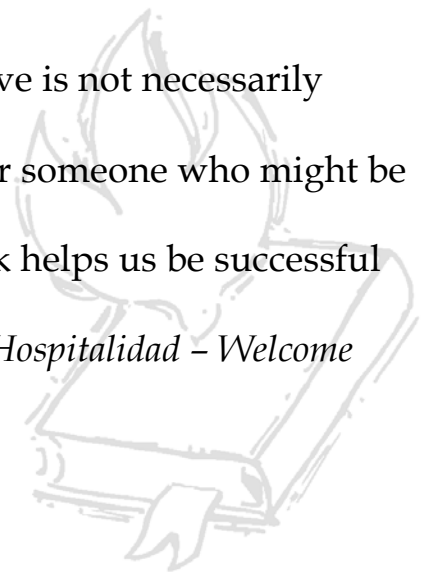
Ash Wednesday - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 18, 2026

Jl 2: 12-18
Ps 51: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17
2 Cor 5: 20 - 6:2
Mt 6: 1-6, 16-20

One of the things that amuses me in the diocese is whenever I come to a parish, and we are able to accomplish the impossible with no financial resources available to us, the bishop's office tries to figure out how we are able to accomplish as much as we have. In these situations (and I have been asked this on numerous occasions), that the key to fundraising, the key *to anything*, is the basic lesson to love your God, love your neighbor and "do unto others" (the three words found in the writings of most every major religion). If we treat people with hospitality, welcome, respect, Christian charity, and all kinds of wonderful things can happen.

I would like to think that one of the gifts I have is not necessarily someone who's the best preacher in the world or someone who might be considered the holiest in the world. What I think helps us be successful are two words I teach in Spanish: *Bienvenidos y Hospitalidad* – *Welcome*



and Hospitality, always in God's name. When people walk through our doors and they want to be accepted and loved by God, to invest their time with God without condemnation or persecution, that open door is the key to saving their souls and ours in the process. If we welcome our brothers and sisters into God's house, if we tell them that they are in, we tell them they are welcomed, and they are loved, and then once the parishioners start to believe this in their bones (*en los huesos*, as I say in Spanish), and pass that welcome down to each successive generation, it is then we are living the way God intends and the Church begins to grow).



The beauty of
praying in the Border
Town Community is
that, in the last seven
years that we have lived

this way, including these last five years of Online Masses and over nine hundred YouTube Videos, look at all the wonderful things that have happened. Look at all the people who have come through our doors and

look at what we have accomplished so much in so little time. St.

Patrick's rid herself of our \$330,000 debt. Through the time, talent and financial gifts from others, we have built bathrooms and kitchens in our gymnasium, we have renovated the gymnasium, we have upgraded roofs and interiors at both churches and we have upgraded our parish hall kitchens. We have installed security cameras and security systems, we have installed key card systems at both parishes, we have repaired and upgraded our rectories and churches and we have found volunteers to maintain our buildings, all for the glory of God.

I mention all of this because it dawned on me that, as people questioned our motives at the beginning of what we were doing six years ago and questioned whether these things could even be done, as people questioned my person intentions (which was evident when the Personnel Director of the Diocese called me about my generosity at the parishes I served with the tens of thousands of dollars I donated annually), I was thinking in the past on how many saints, how many good, holy people had been reviled, a marginalized and dismissed by the same kind of people, including our Lord (whose ministry lasted less

than one year in the gospels of Mt, Mk & Lk and three years in the gospel of Jn).

If we actually opened our eyes to see the goodness that has taken place in our Border Town Parishes, then we would change our disposition altogether. Alas, for whatever the reason, people are people and some people make sport of tearing others down, of tearing me down personally and disparaging those who walk through our doors. This is a way of life that has taken place one generation after another. The bible depicts this attitude, challenging us to live as the “poor in Spirit,” the *be-attitude* of Christian life.

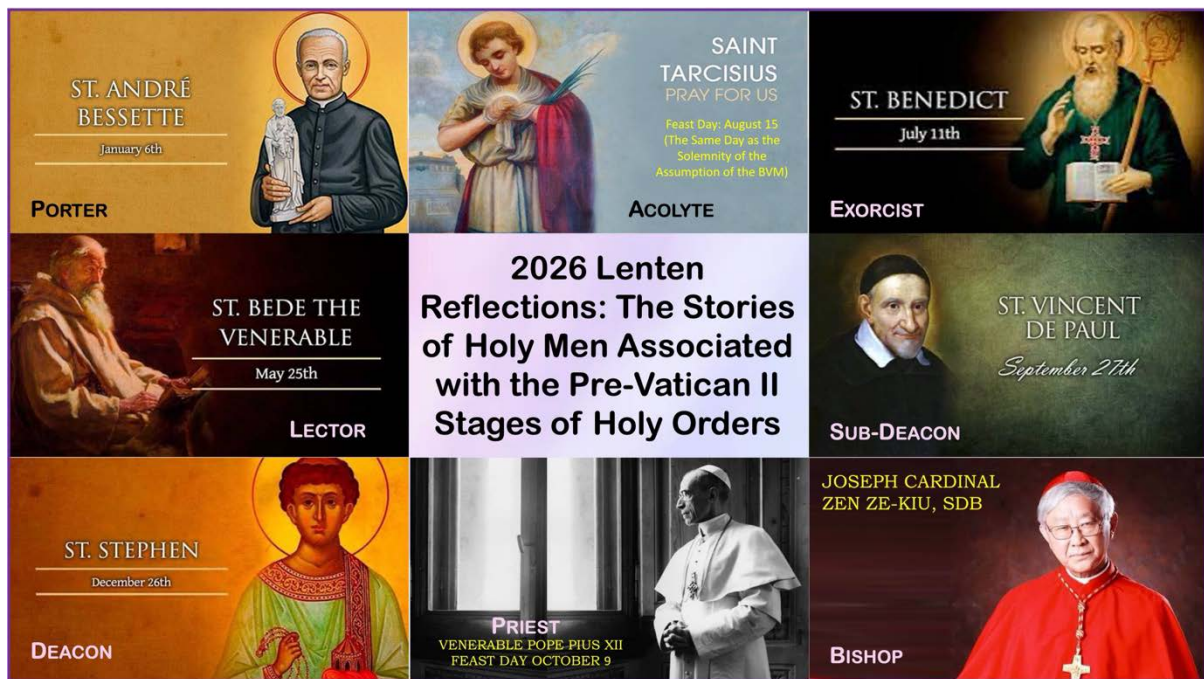
What gives me hope and gives me pause in all of this is that there are so many saints that have endured these sufferings far worse than any of us, starting with our Lord (who suffered infinitely worse than all of us put together) to each martyr who died for the sake of our faith. In my person reflections, I reflect on the life of the discalced Carmelite Thérèse of Lisieux as well as St. Bernadette from the Daughters of Charity of Nevers to St. Teresia of Cascia to the Augustinian sister St. Teresa of Casia to St. Pio of Pietrelcina. St. Francis of Assisi was reviled by his

family in the 13th Century for giving away all his possessions and then living that kind of life of poverty, in harmony with nature, and that he is now honored so much by so many Franciscans and poor Clares throughout the world. I often have preached about St. John Vianney, a French Diocesan priest of the 19th Century who in the seminary was reviled by his peers, and yet, who ordained a priest, and because of his dedication to the poor souls that came to him in ours, France, became the patron saint of all of us parish priests.

I have preached about all of these good souls previously, who suffered terribly from the hands of their superiors, only to be recognized later in their lives by the Church for their sacrifice and love for the faith,. Through their holiness, these saints of the Church all proved their superiors wrong from their initial suspicion and skepticism towards hearts burning for the love of God. These saints help me learn to keep my own faith, regardless how those with worldly desires act towards me and certainly towards God and the Church.

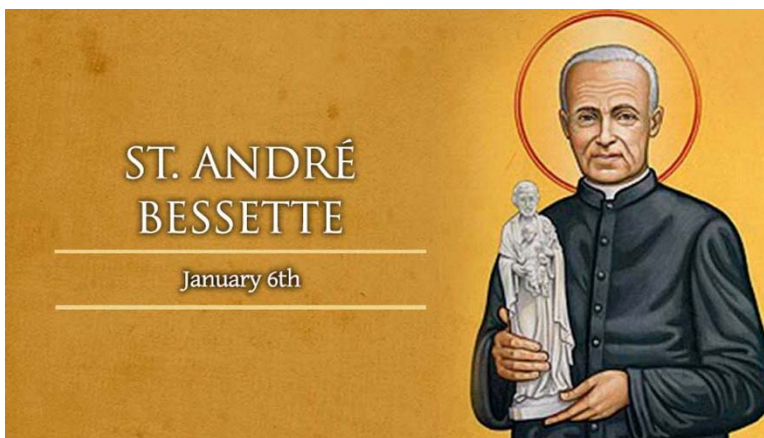
What I thought I would do for this Lenten season, starting here with Ash Wednesday, was focus on eight individuals who very much were

“poor in Spirit,” eight men that I associated with each level of Holy Orders an individual would take on the way to being ordained a Catholic priest and then bishop. Towards this cause, I am referencing eight individuals who were dismissed and mocked by the leaders of their respective eras, pushed aside and marginalized, who in the end revealed the holiness that shined within their hearts, so much that serve as role models of how to live the faith and allow God to strengthen us to persevere in our hardships as God strengthened them.



What I am going to do is I am going to associate eight men of faith with eight levels of Holy Orders, eight steps to get being ordained a

deacon, priest and bishop. Prior to Vatican II, the sacrament of Holy Orders consisted in eight “levels” or “steps” in the process: the four “MINOR ORDERS” of the PORTER, the LECTOR, the ACOLYTE, and the EXORCIST, the four major orders if the SUB-DEACON, the DEACON, the PRIEST and the BISHOP.



On this first day of the Lenten Season and Ash Wednesday, I would like to focus on the life of “The Miracle

Man of Montreal,” St. André Bessette (1845-1937), “God’s Doorkeeper” from the Congregation of Holy Cross and THE MINOR HOLY ORDER OF THE PORTER. I have preached about the minor order of the Porter before, an extremely dismissive ministry for some, because holding a door open to welcome people is not considered necessarily the most exciting job in the world, especially when you have to do it over and over again.

Since I serve a French-Canadian parish in St. Anne, I was thinking of “Brother André,” In his youth, André was a sickly young man. He was

not educated very well – he could not read or write – but early in his life, André felt he had a calling to God.

In his pursuit of making a living, André went to look for jobs, but realized he was not very good at him. Because of his faith, André sought admission into a religious order, but being illiterate, no order would take him in. When I read these type of stories, I remind myself of Jesus' apostles were not educated men, either; they came from fishing communities, they were tax collectors and they served in ways that would not bring much distinction in today's age.

André was not literate; he was not the smartest person in the world, not the brightest bulb or the sharpest crayon in the box. We were told, though, that he was a man that was filled with God's spirit. Every superior to whom he went rejected him, even though they received a note from André's pastor, who wrote the following: "I am sending you a saint."

After being rejected by one religious order after another, the Superior of the Brothers of the Holy Cross did not initially accept André at first, but out of pity decided to take him in and give him the most menial of

jobs, that of the porter, the person that held open the door for everyone else. He called himself, “Brother André,” taking on this name given to him at birth.

His community did not think about him. Like many others in the world, they just dismissed him and gave him a menial job. Yet, as Brother André served in this capacity, all of a city the sick began coming to him and miraculously, André was healing those who sought out the presence of God in their lives. As time passed, so many individuals were getting healed one after another by Brother André and his menial role as “God’s Doorkeeper”

Even then, despite all these miracles that drew the faithful to this community, those within André’s religious order continued to disparage him, treating him as insignificant, dismissing all the wonderful things that he was able to do in God’s name, because they were not able to accomplish anything near to this illiterate, insignificant Brother of the Holy Cross.

Out of jealousy, André’s community called him a fraud, a danger, something that Brother André could not understand. He told his

provincial, “I pray with those who come through our door. I heal those that come to our house.” So many good souls heard about André’s favor with God that tens of thousands of faithful souls would visit him each year, hoping to be cured of their infirmities. Eventually, André’s superiors asked him to greet people away from the community and receive visitors at a nearby trolley station. Historians state that over 80,000 letters and so many faithful would meet God’s Doorkeeper each year and all this commotion was bothering the religious brother from the Holy Cross.

As the story is told, Brother André had a strong devotion to St. Joseph, a man who took in a wife with child without having relations with her, adopting this woman’s God-child into his family so this God-child could welcome us into his. Because of his strong devotion to St. Joseph, Brother André offered the same kind of welcome to strangers who came to visit, healing those who asked for help. All St. André tried to do was serve whatever person who would walk through his door.

As a religious Brother of the Holy Cross, Brother André tried to earn his keep to provide financial support for his community. As a result, the

good brother began to offer haircuts to those who wanted them for five cents apiece in the 19th Century (you cannot even buy a gumball for five cents nowadays!). After a few years of giving out haircuts and greeting people at the door, André accrued enough money to build a small, roofless hut for himself and a prayer space dedicated to St. Joseph.

Over many years, Brother André was blessed with better living quarters and a serviceable chapel. Each subsequent year came better walls, a roof and food to eat. At the same time, thousands of pilgrims came to visit him in his small hut now with a roof, just like those in France did with St. John Vianney, another man of the 19th Century of no great esteem among his peers yet heard ten to twelve hours of confessions each day to the thousands of faithful who wanted to visit his small church in Ars, France to confess their sins and receive absolution from this very humble priest.

Brother André lived this way up until his 90th Birthday. On his birthday, André asked some of his co-workers to place a statue of St. Joseph in his unfinished church that he was in the process of building. The co-workers carried him, old and sick, up the hill to the church, so he

could see the statue that they had provided for him in the church he had built.

When Brother André died on January 6, 1937, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who had come over the years to visit him, endured the frigid Quebec weather to pray for him in gratitude. That week, over one million people passed by the coffin of this illiterate brother of no great esteem, who had accompanied the sick, the poor and the needy through their sorrows and sufferings, and who had been for them a doorway to heaven.

St. Joseph's Oratory was completed after Brother André's death and still attracts over two million pilgrims a year. The church is filled with crutches, notes of gratitude, prayers of Brother André's friendship then and now.

Brother André was beatified by St. Pope John Pope II on May 23, 1982 and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 17, 2010, holding the honor of being He is the first Canadian living after the Confederation to be canonized (The Canadian Confederation was the process by which three British North American provinces – the Province

of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - were united into one federation, called the Dominion of Canada, on July 1, 1867). St. André offered a ministry that was so important, *is so important*, that he serves as a reminder that the person who you encounter in the front office, the “first line of defense,” in parish minister, if that person is kind, if that person is loving, all in God’s name, then all kinds of wonderful things can happen. If the “porter” of any Church becomes dismissive, if the person marginalizes, if the person discriminates (as with any person), then we are well on our way to losing our soul and losing what a mission of a Church is supposed to be.

What Brother André was able to do in his own way, despite the criticisms of his fellow brothers in his religious community, was and is a testimony of the kind of sacrifice that is necessary for us to get to heaven and to start this season of Lent. So we pray for Brother Andre. We pray for those who have made that sacrifice, and I would like to conclude today’s homily with a prayer associated with this beautiful saint.

FROM THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY CROSS.

Lord, you have chosen Brother André to spread devotion to St Joseph, and to dedicate himself to all those who are poor and afflicted.

Grant through his intercession the favor that we now request
(mention request here...)

Grant us the grace to imitate his piety and charity, so that, with him, we may share the reward promised to all who care for their neighbors out of love for you.

We make this prayer in the Name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

This is our prayer.