

Canadians celebrate their newest saint with prayer, cheers, symbols

MONTREAL – Olympic Stadium, usually home to football games and trade shows, was converted into the largest place of worship in the country as Canadians celebrated their newest saint.

More than 48,000 people – including religious and political leaders – from across the country and the United States gathered in the stadium Oct. 30 for a more than two-hour Mass packed with elements significant to the life and mission of St. Brother Andre, Alfred Bessette.

Brother Andre, the Holy Cross brother who founded St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in Rome Oct. 17, but Canadians delayed their local celebration.

During the extended entrance procession, the assembly prayed a litany of Canadian-based saints and blessed. The litany closed with Canada's newest saint: Brother Andre. At the mention of his name, the assembly applauded spontaneously and waved white scarves in the air. Young people and people with disabilities – two groups that were dear to the new saint and central to his mission – were seated closest to the altar.

The entrance procession – which included 58 Canadian bishops, more than 100 priests and nearly 200 young people – concluded with the presentation of a new reliquary containing fragments of Brother Andre's heart. The concelebrants venerated the relics before they were placed at the foot of the altar.

The offertory procession included one of Brother Andre's little black suitcases, which he would take on his many trips; large votive candles, representing the many candles lit by pilgrims at the oratory and other sanctuaries around the world; St. Joseph's oil, which the new saint used to bring hope, comfort and healing to the sick and the infirm; flowers, representing the many artists who have brought beauty to the oratory; and crutches, representing all those who were healed at the oratory.

through the intercession of St. Joseph.

Montreal Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte's homily was greeted with applause and the waving of white scarves eight times.

"The church never canonizes someone solely for what they were or lived before, but for what they have to say and to demonstrate to women and men today," the cardinal said. "First of all, (Brother Andre) tells us and demonstrates to us that a life is beautiful and fruitful when it is put to the service of others.

"This is not a small saint that has been canonized, but a great saint, a very great saint," the cardinal said, referring to Brother Andre's height of less than five feet. "This very great saint - Brother Andre - is homegrown."

"Pray for us," he petitioned Brother Andre on behalf of the assembly at the end of the homily. "Pray that we may become women and men of compassion, attentive to the needs of others, women and men who love God with a great love because they know they are very loved by him."

Among government officials present at the Mass were Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Quebec Premier Jean Charest and Quebec Lt. Gov. Pierre Duchesne. The prime minister paid a short visit to the oratory before the Mass.