

The making of the film ‘God’s Doorkeeper: St. André of Montreal’

[Charles Lewis](#) Dec 22, 2010 – 2:48 PM ET

[Salt + Light Television](#) just released a documentary called *God’s Doorkeeper: St. André of Montreal*. The film is a mix of archival footage, interviews and reenactments. The story of St. André Bessette would be fascinating in its own right. But as senior editor Marc Boudignon explained, it was seeing how people today carry on St. André’s work of hospitality that really lifted the story and gave it its power. Mr. Boudignon joined Salt + Light five years ago after a career in the world of advertising. He spoke recently about the making of the film.

Q. What are the challenges of making a film about religion and especially one about a Catholic saint?

A. The best films touch on Catholic themes but aren’t necessarily overtly Catholic. The piousness should not be at the forefront. You can’t be heavy handed. If you’re telling your audience what to believe and the characters are one dimensional it’s not going to work. The whole point of making a film about André was to make him relevant to today’s audience.

My biggest problem with artistic depictions of saints is they over idealize. Saints are real people, yet the artist portrays them as something they are clearly not. You see that so much with [St. Therese of Lisieux](#), who is often made to look like a China doll. The beauty should be in the realism.

Q. But André is a saint — so what was the balance you tried to find?

A. If you overly dwell on a saint’s human quirks or bad traits it doesn’t show them to be the saint they are and doesn’t lift them up the way they should be. However, you can’t go to the other end of the spectrum and over idealize them because that puts sainthood out of our human reach.

Q. What was the major decision you had to make about this film?

A. The big question was whether it going to be purely a biopic with his life from start to finish, or were we also going to draw on those in the religious order today carrying on the work he did. We chose the latter.

Q. Tell me about the scenes from the Downtown Chapel in Portland, Ore.?

A. It’s a Catholic parish that is run by priests of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, André’s order. You find there homeless people with drug addictions and other problems. They are invited in and they conduct healing masses, feed them — and this is not a surprise to people who know

the Church because this is what the Church does. They also wash the feet of the homeless people, which is sign of Christ's humility.

Q. But what does this have to do with André?

A. The priest there is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. A big part of the symbolism is the red doors on the church. Not the fact that the doors are the colour red but as an overt sign of a place to come to; the door became the symbol and a way of communicating to people that they are welcome.

Brother André lived by the door [in Montreal] and opened the door and he invited people through the door. But it wasn't just the physical door but a spiritual door where people went from the material realm to the spiritual realm.

Q. Tell us more about the washing of the feet? It's such a beautiful moment in the film.

A. The washing of the feet was important to me because Andre's would use physical touch to draw people closer. That physical contact was so important because it was an expression love. Brother André may have only seen people for a few minutes each time but there's something to be said for that physical contact that creates a connection. We live today in our own little bubbles and if somebody gets too close it makes us uncomfortable.

Q. Probably the most dramatic and surprising part of the film was the scene in which a brother of the Congregation of the Holy Cross in Quebec counsels sex offenders. Why include the scene knowing it might make viewers uncomfortable?

A. One of the main reasons we put it in is because the man, [Brother Fernand Bessette](#), is a descendant of Brother André. I watched the raw footage of him and I was transfixed. There's a humanity and a beauty that I was completely attracted to. The way he spoke about his own life the lives of the people he was dealing with. I was worried that people might get the wrong impression. We're not putting the pain of the perpetrators over the victims. But in Matthew Jesus says, "I was in prison and you came to visit me." And so Brother Fernand's ministry is also the Church's ministry. On one hand, was it controversial, yes; but in another way, no. There are people on the ground doing this work with the lowest of the low.

Q. What was the power of that scene for you?

A. That Brother Fernand could feel the pain of the victims and that pain of the perpetrators. These are people and regardless of what they've done they need help. Brother Fernand broke down in tears as he spoke about the men he was ministering to. It showed his love for humanity. He was able to feel passion for them and that's a tough thing to do. If people respond negatively to it it's because these people are difficult to love and it takes a great love to be able to love them and that's the love Brother André had for everyone.

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