

Saint Joseph's Oratory: Montreal, Canada

Located on the northern slope of Mount Royal overlooking the city of Montreal, Saint Joseph's Oratory is the world's largest shrine dedicated to Saint Joseph, the patron saint of Canada as well as the Universal Church. Each year the shrine, which is staffed by more than thirty Holy Cross priests, brothers, and sisters, is visited by more than two million people.

Designed in the Italian Renaissance style, the Oratory consists of a lower crypt church with a large basilica towering above. Its massive copper dome, one of the largest in the world, reaches 341 feet making it the highest point in Montreal. Construction on the Oratory began in 1914 and was completed in 1967.

The main basilica, which can seat almost 3,000 people, has walls covered with gigantic blocks of Canadian Granite with Corinthian columns that rise sixty feet tall. It can be reached from street level by climbing 283 steps. A separate flight of 99 wooden stairs is reserved for pilgrims ascending in prayer on their knees.

In addition to the crypt church which seats 1,000, the ground level also includes a chapel featuring 10,000 votive candles surrounding a number of bas-relief sculptures extolling the virtues of Saint Joseph. On several walls hang hundreds of crutches, braces, and canes discarded by those said to have been healed through the intercession of Brother André and Saint Joseph.



Interior of upper basilica



Brother André's early chapel still stands next to the great Oratory atop Mount Royal.

Also on the ground floor is a small memorial chapel housing the simple tomb of Brother André, above which is inscribed: "Poor, Obedient, Humble Servant of God." His preserved heart is displayed in a glass reliquary case elsewhere in the Oratory.

There are several museums on the premises, one of which is dedicated to the life of Brother André while another contains a fascinating collection of more than 300 nativity crèches from around the world.

Outside on the west side of the Oratory is Brother André's original chapel with its simple wooden altar and walls and ceilings made of pressed tin. Here more crutches, canes and plaques are hung as testaments to the healing power of God. Above is a simple loft where Brother André lived in very spartan conditions.

On the east side is a beautiful garden commemorating the Passion of Christ with life-size statues representing the Stations of the Cross.

The Oratory is currently completing a massive \$75 million restoration project to mark its centennial in 2004 and now the canonization of its favorite son. In addition to all the updates and functional improvements, the Oratory has also announced it will open an observation center atop of the massive dome in 2013.



The Oratory

- At 341 feet, Saint Joseph's Oratory is the tallest church in the Americas. Its dome, meanwhile, is one of the largest in the world.
- Consisting of 56 bells, the Oratory's carillon is one of the largest in North America. Originally created for the Eiffel Tower in Paris, it was installed at the Oratory during its 50th anniversary celebration in 1954.
- The Oratory's Grand Organ, with 5,811 pipes, is ranked among the ten most prestigious organs in the world. Built in Hamburg, Germany in 1958-59, it was installed at the Oratory in 1960.
- Over the years, the Oratory has been visited by many famous dignitaries, including Pope John Paul II in 1984; Mother Teresa in 1988, and the Dalai Lama in 1993. The relics of Saint Therese of Lisieux were displayed at the Oratory in 2001.



Top: The Oratory from street level. Lower: Pope John Paul II prays at tomb of Brother André during 1984 Oratory visit; and statue of the humble brother.

The Tradition of Saint Joseph Oil



Saint Joseph's Oil

The tradition of anointing with sacred oil is as old as our faith itself. While seeking the intercession of Saint Joseph, Brother André used to invite the sick to apply oil on the part of their body that was in need of healing. Though only God has the power to heal, he understood that prayer and a gesture of faith, like applying oil, are important ways for us to express our belief in God's power.

As it has been done since Brother André's time, the oil at Saint Joseph's Oratory is burnt in front of a statue of Saint Joseph before it is bottled and offered to pilgrims. According to the Oratory's rector, Father Claude Grou, C.S.C., more than 100,000 bottles of the oil are distributed at the Oratory each year.