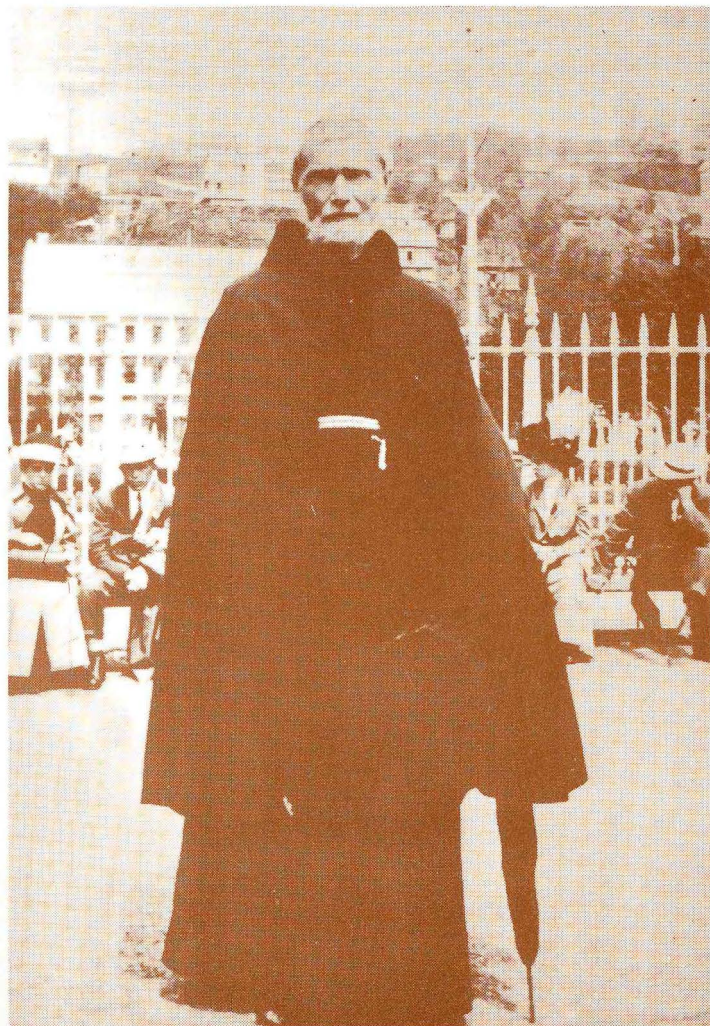


# Good Father Frederick

A FRANCISCAN APOSTLE

1838 - 1916



1988

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A FRANCISCAN APOSTLE

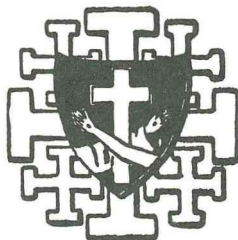
1838 - 1916

by

KEVIN KIDD, O.F.M.

*from a French text prepared by*

Léandre Poirier, O.F.M.



1988

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*Photos:* Courtesy of the Vice-Postulation at Trois-Rivières, and of the Éditions de Notre-Dame-du-Cap.

Imprimerie Maxime, Montréal, 1988.

*Cover picture:* Fr. Frederick at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, 1915.

## FOREWORD

*For many years, little has been published in English about GOOD FATHER FREDERICK. The recent biography put out in French by fr. Constantin Baillargeon, on the occasion of the beatification last September 25 in Rome, could not be easily and rapidly edited in English to satisfy fr. Frederick's friends at this moment. So we thought of a condensation of this most recent work, which is a recast of the preceeding one by fr. Romain Légaré, translated into English by our Third Order Franciscan brother in the United States, Mr. Raphaël Brown, in 1959 (380 pp.)*

*The present booklet has no other pretension except helping people to know better this Franciscan friar, devoutly remembered for a hundred years in Northern France, in Canada as in the United States. I thank fr. Léandre Poirier for his effort towards this popular presentation which has served as a basis for fr. Kevin Kidd's work in English. I am proud of this fraternal cooperation, corresponding to the Church's actual interest in one of her humble and active Franciscan apostle, really ahead of his time at the beginning of our century, as Commissary of the Holy Land, promoter of the Third Order, and co-founder of the Sanctuary of our Lady of Cap-de-la-Madeleine.*

*Now that fr. Frederick's tomb is raised from the crypt-museum under St. Anthony's Franciscan chapel in Trois-Rivières to the chapel itself, the Marian pilgrims coming to the Cape will also be happy to pay their homage to the faithful servant of Mary who worked for Her during fourteen years, from the very beginning in 1888 to the coming of the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate in 1902.*

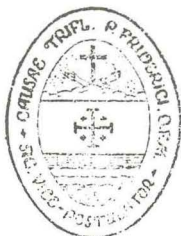


*This is also a good preparation for the celebration of the centenary of the return of the Franciscan family to Canada (1890-1990). Fr. Frederick was the forerunner of this event by his popular apostolate in Canada (1881-1916). May he bring to St. Francis more brothers and sisters in his threefold Order, so that what our Pope John Paul II calls "the spirit of Assisi" spread around its good effects for peace and help give new opportunities to the Catholic Church in America.*

*Jean-Louis Rodrigue OFM*

fr. Jean-Louis Rodrigue OFM  
vice-postulator of the cause

Trois-Rivières, October 22, 1988

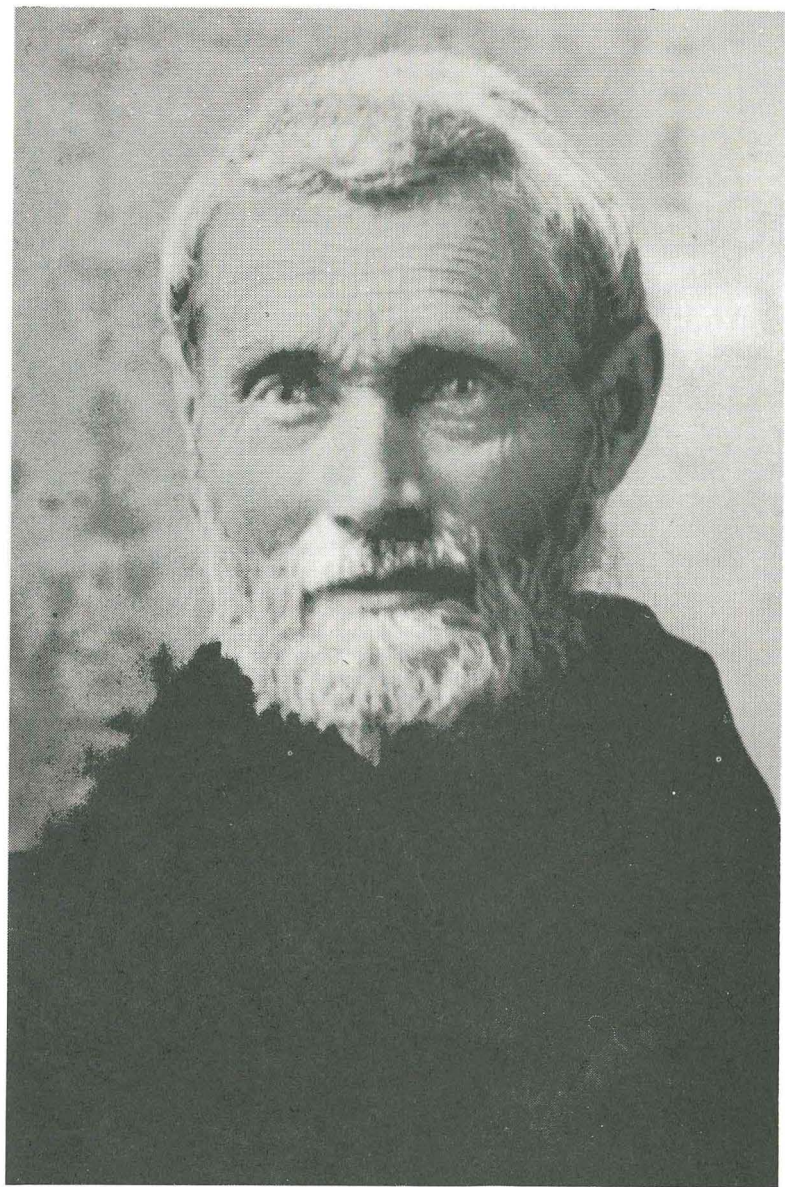


With ecclesiastical approval

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*Chapter One*

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*FROM GHYVELDE TO JERUSALEM*  
*1838 - 1876*





*Ghyvelde at the beginning of our century.*

## Happy Boyhood

On the Northern coast of France, between Dunkirk and the Belgian frontier, thirteen kilometers of sand dunes protect the land from the onslaughts of the sea: it is the country of *polders* or *moers* as the local people call their fields. A small village called Ghyvelde is the home of Flemish French people, such as the Jansoones, whose name corresponds to the English Johnson.

Fifteen minutes walk from the village lay the Jansoone farm; a house and barn of red brick with a roof of gray tiles: a chicken-coop, a vegetable garden, and a well. A niche above the door contained a small statue of the Virgin. On entering the central hall, one could not miss an inscription on the wall in bright, florid letters against a dark background: *Jesus Christus in een wigheid! Amen.* "Praised be Jesus Christ forever! Amen."

Frederick was born there on March 19, 1838, a present, one said, from his mother's patron saint, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, on her feast day. His mother's name was Isabel, the Spanish form of Elizabeth. St. Elizabeth is patron of the

Sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order. The Jansoone-Bollangier family had four children from a previous marriage of the mother. Four more will be added with the years: Pierre, Annette, Henri and Frederick-Cornil. Frederick's second name, that of a Flemish saint, will not be used. A count of all births, including children who had died, made Frederick the eleventh child of Pierre-Antoine Jansoone and the thirteenth of Mary-Isabel Bollangier.

Frederick lost his father when he was nine; his childhood memories will be mainly those of his mother, a strong woman who almost never sat still between her household, the chicken-coop, the garden, and the weaving loom. Her faith went far beyond the Jansenism of the time; she was to offer to God 28 years of illness to ask that her sons become priests. Of her three boys, Pierre, a member of the "Missions étrangères", worked out a career as a missionary in India, and Frederick as a Franciscan. Henri was about to enter the Franciscans when he was drowned, still a seminarian at Cambrai. Her daughter Annette became an Augustinian nun. A strict upbringing did not mar a very happy family life, which Frederick would always fondly remember. This blend of discipline and affection in his childhood would remain a feature of his temperament all his life long.

Not long after the death of his father on January 13, 1848, he received his First Communion at the end of his elementary schooling. Despite the hardships of the time — food shortages and losses to plunder after the overthrow of King Louis-Philippe — his mother accepted his departure for a school at Hazebrouck, while his older brother began his studies in philosophy at Cambrai. From his first year in Grade 8, Frederick ranked high among the students, and was able to advance rapidly and be transferred to the College of

Our Lady of the Dunes at Dunkirk. This academic success foreshadowed the future preacher and writer.



*Frederick the salesmen at Estaire.*



## Learning to Serve

A great trial was to interrupt this progress before the end of the academic year of 1855-56: the financial ruin of his family. Frederick had no choice but to go to work. In addition, Pierre had to interrupt his studies because of ill health. Frederick quickly won the confidence of his employer in the textile trade, Albert Ledieu at Estaires, and was soon sent from the shop counter to sales in the field. He was able to fit quite well into his work as a salesman, not only by dressing with true elegance, but also by improving his social graces: moderating his natural vehemence, practising an engaging patience with customers, and developing resourceful initiatives.

Once his brother Pierre was back in the Seminary, Frederick sought to find his way. The Lord intervened in the death of his dear mother at the age of 64, on May 5, 1861. He consulted the assistant priest of his parish, Father Barzin, who worked with young people. He agreed that Frederick should enter a religious community. Which one? At the suggestion of a friend who had been a Trappist, he went for some days of retreat to the Trappist monastery of Mont-des-Cats, on a high hill in Flanders. The stories of the Fathers of the Desert, which his mother had read to the family, came back to his mind and called to a life of prayer and penance, rather than of ministry. He had enjoyed happy hours with his sister Annette and his brother Henri when they “played hermits,” hiding in haystacks for their contemplations. The interview with the Abbot was brief and curt; he was not impressed by this fashionable young man with a cane; Frederick must seek his way elsewhere.







St. Francis of Assisi was waiting for him. A meeting with a Mrs. Vomerice of his boarding house, as she was returning from a gathering of the Franciscan Third Order wearing the full habit of that Order, had been the occasion of an informative conversation. Frederick took more questions to the director of his old school of Hazebrouck, also a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. The life of St. Francis and the charm of the Fioretti did the rest. Before applying to the Franciscans, Frederick wisely decided to finish his studies, in the same college where his brother Henri was now teaching before entering the missionary society called “Les Missions Étrangères”.

One day in June 1864, after a holiday not far from Ghyvelde with his brother-in-law Deswartes and the remainder of his family, following a hearty Flemish dinner, came the time to say good-bye. His niece Léonie walked with him to the highway, and the young man of 26 left on foot to take a train to Dunkirk and Amiens and the Franciscan Novitiate.

## **A Turning-Point**

The Master of Novices was the well-known Fr. Léon de Clary, who was then engaged in publishing a collection of short biographies of the Saints and Blessed of his Order, entitled *The Seraphic Aureole*, a book admired and loved by the young people in his care and many others. All during this period of initiation, Frederick suffered days of discouragement and doubt. The novices' cells were small, hot as ovens in the summer, cold as refrigerators in winter. Silence and fasting, long spiritual conferences were trials with all the stern imperatives of the religious concepts of the times. Frederick had been used to an austere life at home, but here he faced anxieties over his own profound uncertainties and personal infidelity. In July 1865, he reported to a friend: “Endless



struggle and hesitation.” Fr. Léon insisted on patience: “God will bring His work to a happy end.” Finally, on July 18, 1865, Frederick pronounced his first vows, and went on to studies: philosophy at Limoges, theology at Bourges. He was a methodical student. While completing the mandatory courses, he compiled encyclopedic notes, classified in 14 neat and orderly note-books, to be available for future use: archaeology, astronomy, botany, mysticism... This was no mere curiosity on his part; the future preacher was storing in his quiver arrows of knowledge that he could possibly use later. He still had anxious doubts, but his superiors resolved all his hesitations with their full confidence. His ordination to the priesthood was even advanced to an earlier date, because the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was going to need chaplains.

His first field of ministry was a hospital improvised by some nuns of Bourges. Then he was called to the front. Everywhere his charity and bravery were considered marvellous. He showed heroism in many difficult situations. Once the armistice was signed in January 1871, Frederick was asked to help with the training of novices in Branda; he began then a direct service of his Order, which he would continue in later years, as in Montreal in 1898. Meanwhile, he will be co-founder and superior of the Friary of Bordeaux, where he will learn the ways of mission preaching from Fr. Bernard of Orleans, once a missionary in the Holy Land. This fact is significant; through him Frederick heard the call of the land of Jesus.

He was not happy in charge of a community: too many uncertainties, too many minute responsibilities. What suited him, what he was good at doing, was working with people: preaching retreats to groups, leading pilgrimages, communicating in sermons and writings in newspapers and periodicals.

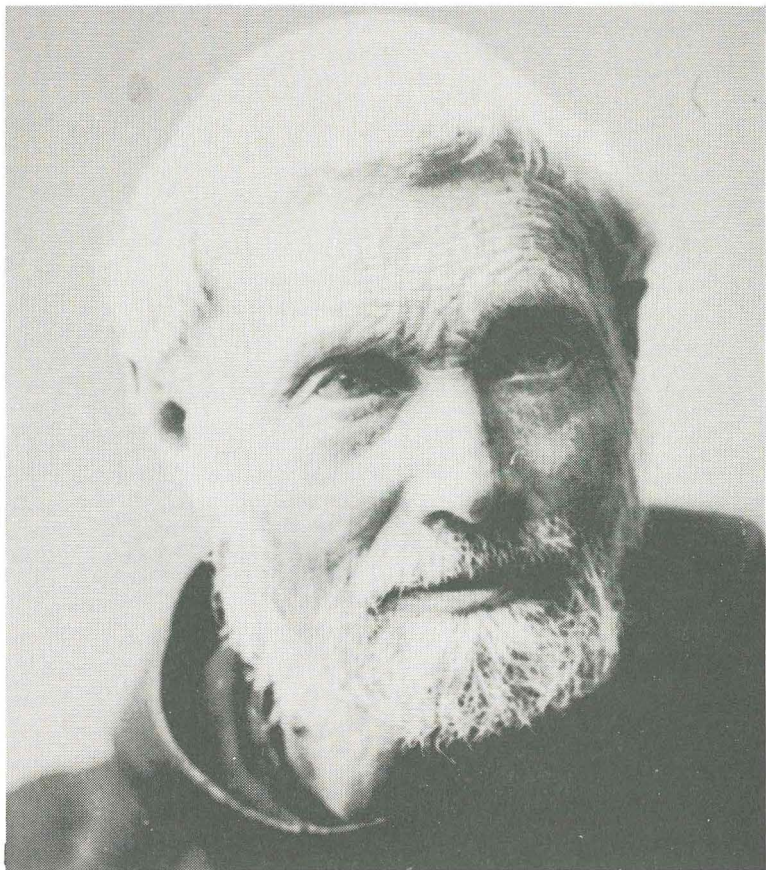
## The Land of Jesus Calls

One experience was still lacking to the Franciscan soul of Frederick: Contact with the land where Jesus lived. It was in the plans of Providence. First, however, a curious presage of his future work in Canada came with some research in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris. He accompanied Fr. Marcellino de Civezza who was documenting his monumental *History of the Franciscan Missions*. Frederick was amazed and profoundly moved by the story of the Récollet Franciscans, first missionaries in Canada in 1615. He shed tears over the accounts of the heroic labours of Fathers LeClercq, Sagard, Hennepin and Crespel. He would follow them later.

His own travels were soon to be described in lines across the globe: Paris, Jerusalem, Quebec, Trois-Rivières, Jerusalem, and back to Trois-Rivières. He became aware of the particular problems of the mission of the Holy Land, the greatest of all the Franciscan missions, as it is often called. While staying at the Commissariate of the Holy Land on the Rue des Fourneaux in Paris, Frederick wrote his official request to go to Palestine on April 26, 1876. Without knowing it, he was responding to a desire of several administrators who saw him as a future Assistant Custos in the Holy Land. Thus the Minister General, disappointing the Provincial Minister, Fr. Raphael Delarbre, who wished to keep him as provincial secretary, answered affirmatively from Rome, and Frederick was on his way!

From May 6 to June 19, 1876, with his companion Fr. Martin Andrieu, he enjoyed all the multiple associations of the journey which took them to Nice, Milan, Florence, Assisi, La Verna, Rome, Naples; then to Alexandria, Port Saïd, Jaffa, and finally Jerusalem. A sermon given at Port Saïd, which he himself considered "too vehement" drew the encouragement of the Franciscan bishop, Msgr. Cirucio. He



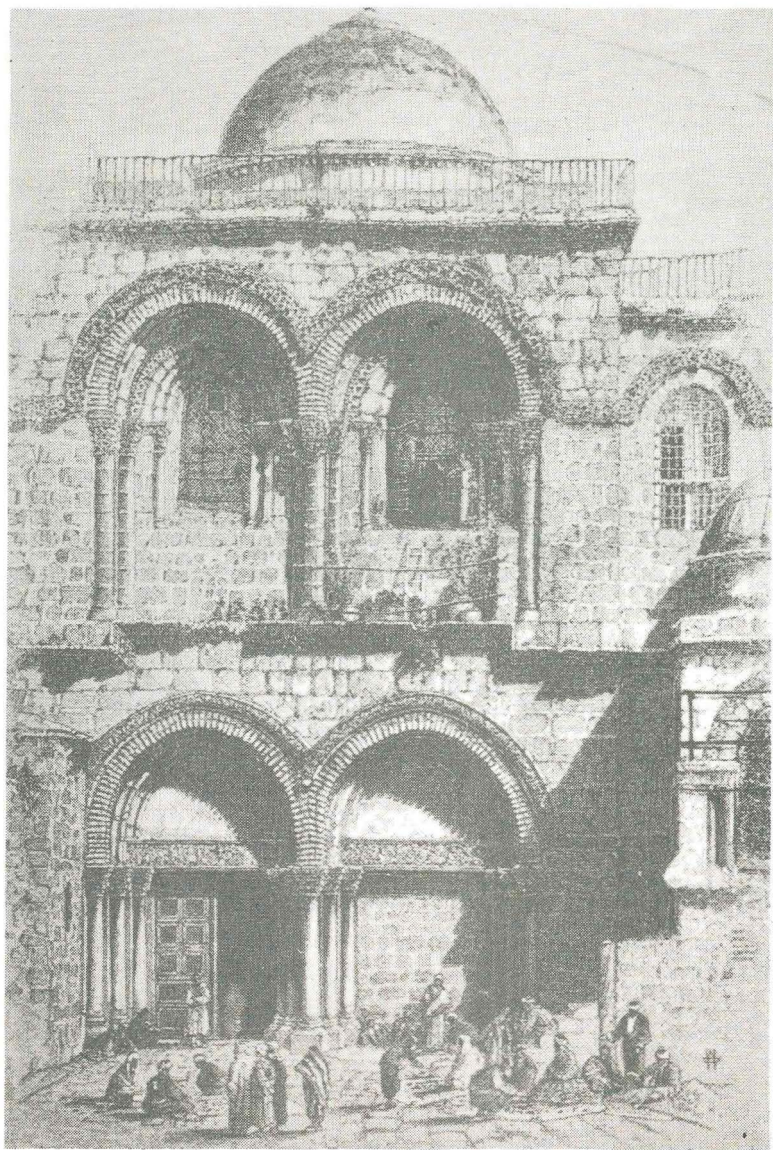


plunged into a series of exhausting preaching engagements, in the hot sub-tropical climate of Egypt, quite foreign to a nordic Fleming! He presented himself to the Custos, the head of the Holy Land Franciscans, in Jerusalem, then returned to Egypt for a series of ten successive retreat-preachings, that were interrupted — understandably — by a grave illness. It was humanly imprudent, of course, — but he soon earned the appellation of “the holy father”.

*Chapter Two*

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*FROM JERUSALEM TO TROIS-RIVIÈRES*  
*1876 - 1888*



*Entrance to the church of the Holy Sepulchre.*





## The Assistant Custos

Frederick served the four months of service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre required of all newcomers to the Holy Land, in the constricted and awkward living quarters that made the Franciscans serving the venerable basilica virtually prisoners. There he first became acquainted with the complex situation where the rights and duties of five groups of Christians were interlocked and demanding: Those of Greeks, “Latins” or Roman Catholics, Armenians, Copts, and Abyssinians. He piously saw in it all a symbol of the divided garments of Christ, but began to draw up and codify regulations that would help prevent disgraceful frictions and promote a peaceful coexistence. His work is still embodied in the so-called *status quo*, regulating services in the Basilica the Holy Sepulchre and in that of the Nativity in Bethlehem.



The title of the Franciscan superior of the Holy Land, the *Custos*, means simply "Guardian". The friars there "guard" the holy places, and form a sort of international province of their Order, officially representing the Catholic Church in the sanctuaries of the Christian Middle East since the year 1342, serving pilgrims and the spiritual interests of local populations. The *Custos* is helped in his functions by an *Assistant Custos*, a financial Procurator, and five councillors drawn from the various nations and language groups involved in the work of the Holy Land.

Frederick had already been designated as a candidate for Assistant Custos, by Franciscan and diplomatic authorities. He was soon elected to replace the resigning Fr. Andrieu. Of course he disliked being a superior, but this latest function did not make him responsible for communities as much as for public relations in administrative and pastoral fields of action. And he was Assistant, after all, second in command.

He served ten years in this capacity, not without trials and misunderstandings. After five years, he was reelected. An official report to Rome stated: "Fr. Frederick, excellent religious, honours France, and serves well the Holy Land." As a flexible and shrewd diplomat, he won the esteem of all authorities on all sides by his integrity and courtesy. A complete account of his work cannot be given here. One instance was the success of his efforts to provide for the Latin Christians of Bethlehem a suitable parish church beside the Basilica of the Nativity, which required endless precautions not to arouse the jealousy of the Greek Orthodox who have rights to the venerable 5th-century basilica and the only access to the Grotto of the Nativity. At the same time, he had to stay in the good graces of a principal benefactor, the Emperor of Austria!

In 1887, Fr. Frederick devoted seven months of work to the complex rules governing the relationships between the three principal groups in the basilicas, Greeks, Roman Catholics, and Armenians. The full import of those rules can only be appreciated on the spot. Sacristans needed them to abide by their responsibilities and find their ways through all the privileges frozen through centuries of pious rivalry, for the benefit of pilgrims to the sanctuaries. They became law in 1900. He continued to write extensively; only part of his work can be seen in the many articles and books he published in Canada. One is not surprised to read of his long talks to pilgrims in the Holy Land, and to groups of Christians in Canada eager to hear about the holy places.

A personal triumph must be mentioned: the reestablishment of the public Way of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa on Good Friday. Later it came to be a weekly devotion, every Friday of the year, as it continues to this day. The Assumptionist Fr. Paul Bailly, organizer in France of the great pilgrimages of penance in 1882, gave eloquent testimony of the efficacy of Fr. Frederick's preaching on Good Friday. He helped immensely in different ways to smooth out the hardships of pilgrimages in the days when transport on donkeys and camels was very different from traveling on the tourist busses of today. Always, he planned above all for the religious and spiritual welfare of pilgrims, and saw to the provision of quiet times for prayer and reflection. He loved to receive pilgrims into the Franciscan Third Order (as it was called then,) at the very shrine of Calvary itself, to ensure perseverance in the spirit of the holy Cross. He was involved in the planning and founding of the pilgrim hostelry of Notre Dame de France.

## The Fund-Raising Preacher

Another of his practical activities should be examined in detail: Raising funds for the Holy Places; for this is what first brought him to Canada in 1881. The construction of the parish church of Bethlehem, begun under the auspices of the Emperor of Austria, now lacked funds. The Custos, Fr. Gaudenzio de Matelica, sent his French Assistant, Fr. Frederick, and his Spanish Procurator to solicit contributions in their respective countries. The court of Spain responded immediately, but France had other concerns; religion was being systematically removed from its spheres of influence. Happily, there was a New France to which Fr. Frederick will be providentially directed in an unexpected way. A chance meeting in Paris with Fr. Léon Provancher from Cap-Rouge near Québec was to transform his quest into success not only for the Holy Land, but for the Franciscan Order itself.

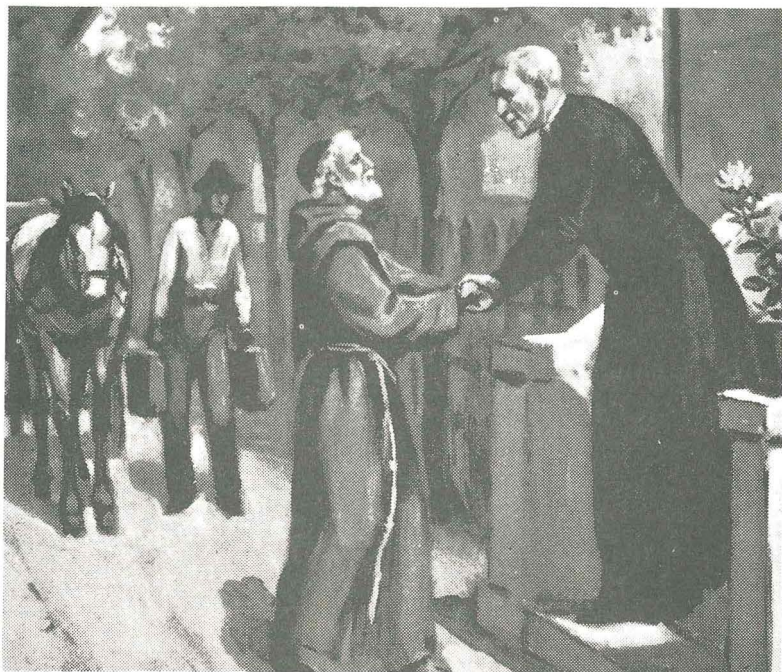
The two friends agreed immediately: Fr. Frederick was to establish in Canada the Good Friday collection for the Holy Places requested by the Popes, with the founding of a Commissariate of the Holy Land, while reviving the Franciscan Third Order, largely abandoned since the suppression of the Recollet Franciscans in 1796. He would clear the way for the return of the Franciscans themselves. Letters were soon traveling between the Minister General in Rome and the Custos in Jerusalem. Fr. Provancher had hardly returned to his home in Cap-Rouge when Fr. Frederick received official orders for his Canadian mission. A new world was to open for him and his role of pioneer suited him perfectly.

On August 24, 1881, a little brown friar got off the train from New York in Lévis, Québec. He was overwhelmed by the sight of Québec and Cape Diamond across the river. From the deck of the ferry taking him toward it, Fr. Frederick fondly recalled the arrival of the Récollet Friars in



1615, and thought of how they must have felt before the great rock before them, and the tasks awaiting them. On the dock, a carriage, sent by Fr. Provancher, was waiting to take him to Cap-Rouge.

The very next day, both priests went to call on the Archbishop of Québec, Msgr. Taschereau; he had to receive an official document from Rome before he could authorize the Good Friday collection, but he allowed Fr. Frederick to respond to the desires of the faithful. Without delay, Frederick made himself known through the newspapers *Le Canadien* and *Courrier du Canada*. In the meantime, he enjoyed the hospitality and the splendid garden of Fr. Provancher, the retired Pastor of Portneuf.



*Fr. Léon Provancher welcomes fr. Frederick at his home in Cap-Rouge.*



His first week-long retreat for the Tertiaries of St. Roch's Parish in Québec in the present-day church of Notre Dame de Jacques Cartier had an enthusiastic response which was reported around the city. Journalists spread the word in print and soon all the lower town of Québec knew about him. The following Monday, September 12, in answer to his invitation to venerate relics of the Holy Land, an estimated 30,000 people filed before him for five hours. The Fraternity of the Third Order received a hundred new members, and a hundred chosen novices were admitted to profession.

Other meetings followed, with similar results. On September 17, feast of the Stigmata (or wounds) of St. Francis of Assisi, at the convent of the Sisters of Jésus-Marie in Sillery, and on Sunday, September 18, at St. Augustin de Portneuf, on the Solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows, there were a Holy Mass, Way of the Cross, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and, of course, long talks which never tired the large numbers of people present. Journalists continued to be amazed by the listening crowds and their preacher, whom they called the "holy man", and wrote about his austere diet and life-style. But suddenly one of them added tersely, without comment: "Today the holy missionary is leaving our city for Trois-Rivières."

Behind the scenes, a grave misunderstanding had clouded public opinion. In his sermons at St. Roch's church, Frederick had forcefully inveighed against *liberalism*, which, he said, "has caused such harm in France and must be combatted here." He was unaware that the word *liberal* had a very different and special connotation in Québec! Liberals and conservatives were sharply divided along party lines; even the Catholic bishops were known to have differing political allegiances. They had written a conciliatory joint pastoral letter, which, however, had done nothing to ease the

the distance the Laurentian mountains showed blue on this fair summer morning. Fr. Frederick was delighted and proceeded, in a solemn voice, to recall the old Récollet Franciscans whose little chapel, now an Anglican church, could just be descried near the dome of the Ursuline convent. From that spot they had gone out to parishes in many directions. What a joy for him to be following them! The parish priest, Luc, was waiting for the early travelers on a sandy point, surrounded by his parishioners, gathered for a special Mass on the very day that the bells for their new church were being cast in Lyon, France. Msgr. Louis-Eugène Duguay, then the assistant priest, wrote much later:

Never will I forget the first sight I had of Fr. Frederick stepping out of that canoe and walking toward Fr. Désilets. His calm, thin face fitted exactly my idea of St. Francis formed in reading Frédérick Ozanam's *Franciscan Poets*. I know that the parishioners around me were filled with the same feelings of reverence and awe.

From the priest's house at Cap-de-la-Madeleine, he went to work throughout the diocese. Three months later, the parish priest, Fr. Désilets, wrote to the Minister General of the Franciscans in Rome:

You have sent us a holy man; a saintly religious of extraordinary influence... It is a fact that many surprising cures have occurred; but no one is surprised when one considers his life.

He now set himself to produce a new *Manual of the Third Order*, based largely on the manual written by his Master of Novices, Fr. Léon de Clary, and more complete than the manual written by his friend, Fr. Provancher in 1867. Crowds of sick and afflicted people broke into his solitude. Just as he planned to finish his work and bring it to his printer, he fell seriously ill, after a trip to Nicolet in bitter

January cold. Fever, inflammations, extreme weakness brought him to death's door. A month later, however, he was back on his feet, and getting to work again.

The people of Trois-Rivières could almost make him forget that he was, after all, Assistant Custos of the Holy Land with corresponding duties. A shocking telegram rudely made it real for him. War was breaking out in Egypt; he must return immediately! With mixed emotions, despite his failing health, he set out on May 1, 1882, hoping, as he said, "to see once more this little people blessed by God."

He stopped briefly at the Franciscan Chapter Meeting being held in Marseille, France, to plead for a return of friars to Canada. In Alexandria, three days before his arrival, there had been a wholesale massacre of Europeans; he was obliged to hide to save his life. He reached Jerusalem only on July 18, in a poor state of health. He had thought to return to Canada in August; he would get back there only six years later; he was reelected Assistant Custos in 1884.

During that year, he would be frequently confined to the infirmary of Holy Saviour Monastery in Jerusalem, with painful digestive problems. A memorable joy was the visit of his brother Pierre, a missionary in India, whom he had not seen for 20 years. Pierre wrote a striking account of the visit to his half-sister Victoire, Madame Deswarte, who had said good-bye to Frederick in June, 1864: "My very dear brother Frederick is a real saint, a great and lovable saint, like those we read about with admiration, a saint who works miracles. The sight of him so struck me that the memory of his face haunts my mind continually." Another important visit in April was that of his friend Fr. Provancher with eleven Canadian pilgrims, among whom was the artist Adolphe Rho of Bécancour, who painted the remarkable tableau of St. John the Baptist as a tribute from Canada for his sanctuary of Ein

Karem. At Emmaus-Kubeibeh, they spent five days in conversations that presaged good results of meetings soon to come with the Custos in Jerusalem and later with the Bishop of Trois-Rivières.

In 1887, Fr. Raymond Caisse, Procurator of the Seminary of Trois-Rivières, undertook to write a letter that was the point of departure of important developments for Fr. Frederick and the Franciscans in Canada. On October 6, he wrote to the Franciscan Minister General in Rome:

Last winter, I was in Jerusalem... I returned from that pilgrimage with the eager desire to see your Fathers established in Canada... I have spoken to my beloved Bishop, who appeared to be very pleased with the idea... His objection has been the poverty of his diocese, which has just been divided. But since the Fathers in Jerusalem assured me that they asked only the permission to establish their Order, without any financial assistance from the Bishop, he would now have no objection...

Letters multiplied between the Provincial of France, the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Frederick, the Bishop of Trois Rivières, and the Franciscan General in Rome. Pope Leo XIII had renewed on September 26, 1887 the request of Pope Pius VI in 1775, asking a world-wide collection for the Holy Places on every Good Friday. Official orders on April 4, 1888 sent Fr. Frederick and a companion to Trois-Rivières to found a Commissariate (or "agency") of the Holy Land for all of Canada. The two new missionaries immediately prepared their departure, and bade farewell to Jerusalem on April 18, not without sorrow, according to Fr. Frederick's friend Fr. Godfrey Schilling who wrote of him: "We will always remember him. He was the perfect example of a true son of St. Francis... he has done much here for the good of everyone..."

On the other side of the Atlantic, an unreserved joyous welcome awaited them. The absent Bishop of Trois-Rivières



wrote to Fr. Désilets: “May they both be welcome, and may they bring us the blessings which their previous Fathers brought more than 250 years ago to Canada and the region of Trois-Rivières.”

Fr. Désilets came to Bonaventure Station in Montreal to meet him when he arrived by train from New York, in the evening of June 13, 1888. The next day, an unprecedented reception awaited him, first at the station of Trois-Rivières, where he was met by the Cathedral Pastor, Canon Cloutier, then at the door of the Bishop’s House by the assembled Canons of the Cathedral. It was a “second Spring” for the Franciscan apostolate! Fr. Frederick echoed this fact as he wrote to thank the Bishop:

It is with most profound gratitude that we receive the words of welcome and the kindly encouragements which your fatherly heart has sent us, in the letter you wrote on June 11, to Fr. Luc Désilets, Vicar General of your diocese and our important benefactor.

Yes, Canada and the region of Trois-Rivières received 250 years ago the poor sons of St. Francis, as their first apostles who watered the land with their perspiration and sacrificed their very lives for it.

In the morning of June 15, 1888, the repeat canoe trip on the river between Trois-Rivières and the Cap-de-la-Madeleine had all the marks of a happy return with the Désilets family. The new parish church had come to loom large beside the old chapel that looked so small, yet seemed to await a new destiny, following upon the pious vow of the parish priest, Fr. Désilets, and the story of the miraculous ice-bridge of March 1879.

After the warm welcome of the clergy, could not Fr. Frederick have some premonition of a heavenly welcome? Looking back one hundred years later, it seems clear that the stage was set, so to speak, for the Blessed Virgin Mary to signify her approval and cast her gaze upon the little chapel

and its promising future. The dedication of the shrine to Our Lady was planned for June 22, 1888. Everything was ready, even its destined prophet!



The parish church, the sanctuary and the priest house.

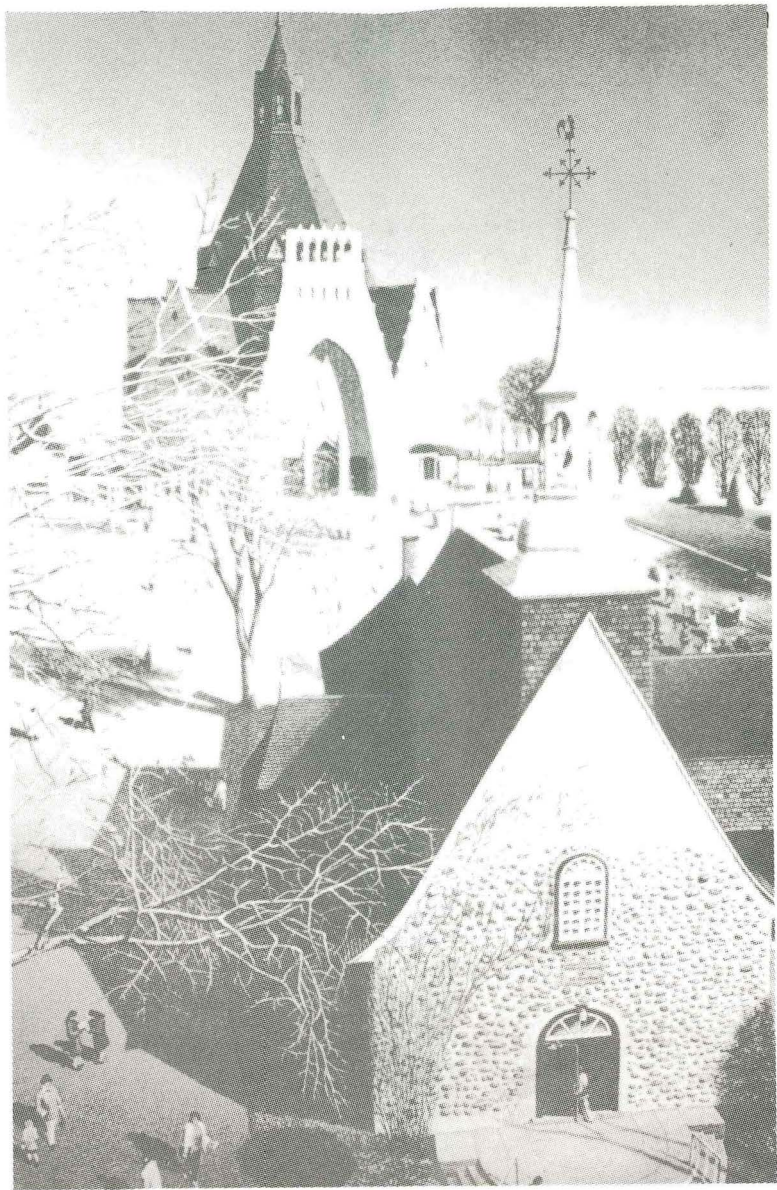




*Chapter Three*

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*TROIS-RIVIÈRES  
AND CAP-DE-LA-MADELEINE  
1888 - 1902*





## Our Lady Comes to Life

Our story now relates a privileged time in Frederick's life, filled with unforeseen events. With his mission of fundraiser for the Holy Land, Providence had brought him to the feet of Our Lady of the Cap-de-la-Madeleine. May we not say that she was waiting for him? She kept him in her special service there for fourteen years.

First, however, the previous history of the shrine is needed for understanding. The Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, an association of the faithful who undertake to make the Rosary of Mary their favourite prayer, had been established in the church dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalen by Fr. Paul Vachon, who succeeded the Récollet Franciscans in 1685. The name of the saint had been given the church by the Jesuits in 1662, as a tribute to the original donor of the *seigniorie*, a Messire Jacques de la Ferté, officially *abbé* of Sainte Marie Madeleine in France, at a spot on the Loire, between Chartres and Orléans. On the front of the little church may be read the date of its last reconstruction: May 13, 1714; it is one of the oldest churches in the country. It had been reduced to a mere



mission church in 1729, but a new parish priest, Fr. Leander Tourigny, revived the Confraternity. The statue now on its main altar, originally on the side altar of the Confraternity, was given by a Mr. Zéphirin Dorval in 1854, the year of the definition by the Church of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Mary is portrayed as on the "Miraculous Medal" of Catherine Labouré in 1830, a Madonna with lowered eyelids and delicate features. Ten years later, the third parish priest was Fr. Luc Désilets, a man very devoted to Mary.

On May 29, 1863, he felt disappointed with his lukewarm parishioners who had not responded to his call for a good Confession on the eve of the Ascension Holiday, when suddenly he noticed that a pig had entered the church, and, right in front of the altar of Our Blessed Lady, was munching away on a rosary! The image was striking: parishioners were dropping the Rosary; pigs were picking it up! He set himself to preaching the Rosary. Six years later, the church of 1714 was too small for its 1300 parishioners! A new building was needed.

The *fabrique*, the governing body of church wardens, decided that the old church would be demolished and its masonry used as part of a new one. Across the river, at Sainte Angèle, the stone needed for a bigger church would be prepared and then transported across the river on the winter ice. In January, 1879, the stone was all ready, but the river was not! Every Sunday, the Rosary was offered specially to ask for an ice-bridge to be formed before the Spring. Once February had gone by, a miracle would be needed to transport safely some 100 sled-loads of more than 3000 pounds of stone! It was then the parish priest, Fr. Désilets, made a solemn vow, promising that, if the ice bridge would form, he would not demolish the old church, but would

rededicate it to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. The new church of Saint Mary Magdalen would also be a lasting memorial of the granting of the favour.

In the evening of March 14, after a week of mild weather, the ice broke upstream on Lac St. Pierre, and enough ice piled up between the “Cap” and Sainte Angèle to permit the leveling of a roadway safe enough for the big sleds and their loads of stone. From thirty to forty men set to work for an entire week, crossing day and night without fear, guiding themselves by a slight shining in a window of the priest’s house. “There’s no danger!” they would say, “The priest’s Hail-Mary’s are carrying us along!”

His Bishop, Msgr. Laflèche playfully wrote to congratulate the good priest on his faith, that “can throw mountains into the sea and 150 loads of stone across the St. Lawrence river. But you have delayed the coming of Spring by at least 15 days! After having thanked the Lord, you must ask him to repair the damages of this delay.”

For three years afterward, people talked about this “Canadian” miracle. It is still recalled in the graceful “Rosary Bridge” that crosses the brook on the grounds of the shrine. The church of St. Mary Magdalen, blessed in 1880, has been replaced by yet another one, but some of the old stones from Sainte Angèle were used in constructing the spacious wing that enlarges the original chapel on its South side. The busy parish priest did not perform yet the official dedication of the shrine; there was so much to do to prepare it worthily! Fr. Frederick published his *Manual of the Third Order*, and fell sick from excessive preaching, then left, as we have seen, for six years in the Holy Land.

He had returned now, just as Fr. Désilets announced that he would proceed on June 22, 1888 to accomplish publicly the vow he had pronounced in 1879. During the Mass, Fr.

Frederick preached in his best manner, and even prophetically;

From now on, this is Mary's shrine. You will come to pray here, parishioners. And people will come from all over the country. It will become too small to hold the crowds that will come to implore the help of the Virgin of the Rosary.

After Mass, the statue of Mary on the side altar was solemnly transferred to the main altar. Prayers continued during the day, asking that Our Lady would somehow signify her acceptance of the little shrine.

An answer came, around seven o'clock in the evening, in a discreet, unexpected, but clear manner. Fr. Frederick had just walked into the chapel with Fr. Désilets and a sick man, Pierre Lacroix, who sat down to pray. Suddenly, the statue came to life; the lowered eyes of the statue opened to gaze far off over the heads of the three men. All three asked each other: "Do you see it?" Was it a strange delusion? The evening sunshine was falling directly on the face of the Madonna. The sick man later testified under oath that he had indeed seen it. Fr. Frederick related the story in detail in 1897: For five or ten minutes, he saw the face of a living person, with a serious, severe expression marked with sadness. The testimony of the three men has never been seriously questioned. For Fr. Frederick, it was the expected response, signifying Our Lady's desire to receive all who would come to her for help. Two days later, 1500 pilgrims from the local region came first. By the end of the year 1888, there had been more than 10,000.

Fr. Désilets, the parish priest, died in August of that year, after a firm injunction to his Assistant, Fr. Duguay: "This is the work of the Holy Virgin. If you neglect it, she will dismiss you and choose another to work for her. Fr. Frederick will help you, because it is through a special design



of God's Providence that he has come here." Fr. Duguay wrote in the *Journal des Trois Rivières* on September 20, in an open letter on the prospects of the shrine:

We have the advantage of having with us here at the "Cap", the Reverend Father Frederick, Commissary of the Holy Land for all Canada... While awaiting the building of his modest house, the Reverend Father has accepted to stay with us through the month of the Holy Rosary.

His collaboration at the shrine will not be that of a *month's* time, but the work of 14 years, at the request of the Bishop, until the arrival of the Oblate Fathers in 1902, 14 years of coming and going between the "Cap" and the Commissariate on the present St. Maurice Street in Trois-Rivières, often all on the same day, a return-trip of seven miles.

In the early days, people naturally had doubts about the future of the shrine in what was then an isolated spot. Fr. Frederick was accused of seeking a questionable acclaim and fame. The Bishop, Msgr. Laflèche, defended him, and his successor, Msgr. Cloutier, declared:

The Rev. Father Frederick de Ghyvelde, O.F.M., Commissary of the Holy Land in Canada, was sent here by divine Providence. The good Father generously cooperated with the parish priest in promoting the confraternity of the Rosary, in serving the shrine, and in receiving pilgrims... He assisted greatly in overcoming difficulties and in spreading the devotion of the Holy Rosary.

He recruited pilgrims for the shrine in parishes of Trois-Rivières, Nicolet, Montréal and Québec while visiting his fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order, as it is now called. It is good to note here that, from 1892 to 1895, he helped with the care of Italian-speaking Catholics of Montréal. On August 12, 1892, 1200 pilgrims came from Québec aboard two ships. On September 10, 1895, 8,000 members of the

Third Order came, virtually forming a national congress of that Order. In 1892, along with Fr. Duguay, he founded the shrine magazine, *Les Annales du Très Saint Rosaire*, offering reports and articles under four headings: Mary in the Bible and Tradition, Relics of the Holy Land, Shrines of Mary, and Favours Obtained at Cap-de-la-Madeleine. For ten years, he was its only editor, while Fr. Duguay managed its business affairs which were considerable; there were 12,000 subscribers in its second year. A delightful glimpse of him in action is afforded in a letter to Fr. Raphael Delarbre in Rome on July 30, 1891:

I preside all the pilgrimages to the Cap-de-la-Madeleine... They come asking for rain or fair weather and the Blessed Virgin obtains it for them. They also ask with great eagerness for the cure of all their ailments, and there they make a big mistake: instead of asking it from Mary, Help of the Sick, they ask *me* directly in loud voices! It is frightening!

Fr. Frederick brought many things to the shrine: An annex for the Chapel; the extension of the railroad to provide better access; the erection of the Stations of the Cross; the obtaining from Rome of a plenary indulgence for pilgrims; a privileged text of the Mass of the Holy Rosary for pilgrim priests. In 1898, at his suggestion, English-speaking ladies of the Third Order had sacrificed their precious jewelry to make a crown and a golden heart to adorn the statue. Unfortunately, both were stolen in 1981, but were replaced with new ones in 1987. The original hanging Rosary, made of olive wood from the Garden of Gethsemani, which he brought from the Holy Land, is still in its place.

After a private crowning of the statue in 1898, six years later came the official public crowning by the Bishop of Trois-Rivières in the name of Pope Pius X, now St. Pius. It was a most glorious day for Fr. Frederick. After three days of solemn devotion, on October 12, 1904, an extraordinary

crowd assembled before the little shrine: sixteen archbishops and bishops with the Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Sbaretti, more than 400 clergymen, more than 15,000 Canadian and American pilgrims. In the imposing procession, recollected and somewhat embarrassed by the honour given him, walked Fr. Frederick, carrying on a cushion the precious crown which he would present to his heavenly mother. After the Mass celebrated by the Apostolic Delegate with a sermon by Cardinal Bégin, Msgr. Cloutier, Bishop of Trois-Rivières, outlined the history of the Shrine of Our Lady of Cap-de-la-Madeleine, paying tribute to the parish priests, Fathers Désilets and Duguay, and to the great zealous work of the Franciscan friar whom he called "The envoy of divine Providence."

That evening, after this triumph, Fr. Frederick exclaimed: "Now I can sing: Let your servant go in peace!" His prophecy of June 22, 1888 was being fulfilled. When the Bishops of the First Plenary Council of Québec in 1909 declared the chapel to be a National Shrine, Fr. Frederick had been replaced by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at his own suggestion. In true humility, he was glad to withdraw, but his productive work is still bearing fruit a hundred years later in 1988. Our Lady of the "Cap" who once opened her eyes over the city of Trois-Rivières, still has him in view, as his tomb in that city, now glorified by his title of Blessed Frederick, given by Pope John-Paul II in September 1988, receives the homage of the people for whom he once offered his life.





**PILGRIMAGE OF 1906 TO OUR LADY OF THE CAPE**

**With the Oblate Fathers and Msgr. Duguay, we see the Franciscan family: fr. Augustin Bouynot, fr. Ange-M. Hiral, fr. Frederick Janssoone, fr. Ethelbert Sambrooke.**

## *Chapter Four*

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### *PROMOTER AND PIONEER* *1902 - 1916*

## For the Holy Land and the Secular Franciscan Order

During his fourteen years of service of Our Lady of Capde-la-Madeleine (1888-1902), Fr. Frederick had never forgotten that he had been sent to Canada in 1888 as “Commissary of the Holy Land” and “Visitor” of the Third Order, as it was called then. (The title of “Visitor” in the idiom of religious orders denotes an official empowered by central authority to verify the practices of members and encourage and confirm them in the pursuit of their ideals.) He wrote to Fr. Provancher to explain his refusal to accompany him to the Holy Land: “God is visibly blessing both these works. For the present, I wish to give them all my strength and all my health.”

The preceding year, he had accepted to preach the priests’ retreat, which Cardinal Taschereau had asked him to give in Québec. It had brought 92 priests of the diocese into the Third Order. In January, 1890, he could write to Mother Mary of the Passion, foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary: “It would be difficult for me to list all the missions, triduums, and retreats which I preached last year.” And, while relating his severe digestive troubles, he mentions six sermons per day. 300 and even 700 new members of the Third Order. The Fraternity of Warwick, Québec grew with 184 novices and 150 professed members; in 1897, it had attained the record number of 400. Without giving a complete history of the Third Order, we should note that, in 1890, the year of the return of the Franciscan Friars as a corporate body, there were 34 parish fraternities, 17 of which had been founded by Fr. Frederick, with a total of some 12,000 members.

He included in his work as “Visitor” an apostolate of the printed word. His *Manual of the Third Order*, of which he published 5,000 copies, despite his serious illness, just



before his unexpected departure for the Holy Land in 1882, has already been mentioned. When he returned in 1888, it was practically obsolete. Pope Leo XIII had modified the earlier Rule of Nicholas IV. A new statement was needed: he wrote a booklet of 72 pages, published in 1889 under the title: *The Third Order, Its Rule and Its Excellence*; 10,000 copies sold quickly at \$3.00 per hundred.

The following year, another opportunity came his way. Since 1884, the "Tertiaries" of Montreal, then directed by a Fr. Cazeau, had a monthly publication with the title of *Petite Revue du Tiers Ordre et des Intérêts du Coeur de Jésus*. In 1890, the Franciscan Friars, newly returned to the country, took charge of it. It was a new outlet for Fr. Frederick in his double capacity of "Visitor" of the Third Order and Commissary of the Holy Land. While leaving the editing of the review to his new comrades, he became an earnest contributor: his influence appeared in the new title: *Revue du Tiers Ordre et de la Terre Sainte*, in its articles, and in the first books sent as gifts to subscribers: *Les Annales du Très Saint Rosaire* and the *Vie du Fr. Didace* in 1895.

Not only his writings call for our attention; there was his tireless popular preaching. In addition to the care of the fraternities which kept him busy for weeks at a time, there were pilgrimages which called for him as their favourite leader to go with them by boat or railroad to Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, to Our-Lady-of-the-"Cap", and, after 1912, to St-Joseph's Oratory on Mount Royal. These were unique opportunities for Fr. Frederick to prolong his extensive talks for willing audiences.

In reading the accounts of his celebrations of the feast of August 2, "Our Lady of the Angels" or the "Portiuncula Indulgence," one must conclude that they were veritable spiritual marathons, that were led from noon of the



preceding day till the late evening of the feast-day, with crowds of faithful moving in and out of the church to gain the greatest possible number of indulgences according to the number of their visits to the church. Fr. Frederick thus relived his great days as a young preacher at Bordeaux in France fifty years before, now in Québec, Montréal, and Trois-Rivières. His reported hours of work in preaching, prayers, and confessions over a day and a half add up to 25 hours!

There were the Stations of the Cross, preached in the open air at the places he had himself erected and blessed: at the Cap-de-la-Madeleine (1896); on the mountain of St-Elie-de-Caxton (1895); in the groves of "La-Réparation-au-Sacré-Coeur" in Pointe-aux-Trembles (1897), a shrine carried on by the Capuchin Franciscans since 1921. It was his favourite devotion, where he relived with his hearers his experiences of Jerusalem and awakened their deepest convictions and feelings to the point of tears in both preacher and faithful.

Even before the teachings of Pope Leo XIII and St. Pius X, on the meditated reciting of the Rosary and frequent communion, Fr. Frederick excelled, without great flights of oratory, in winning over his hearers to these devotions, with his vivid descriptions and Gospel stories coming from the fullness of his mind and heart.

All this while, he continued his work for the Holy Land which he had begun in 1882 with his excellent little book of 79 pages: *Notice Historique sur l'Oeuvre de Terre Sainte*, (Historical Account of the Work of the Holy Land), the earliest book of its kind in Canada and one of his best. He was always delighted with the tangible results of the Good Friday Collection, in a country he considered the "poorest in the world, and yet the most generous." He estimated that 2



million Catholics gave more than 50,000 francs or \$10,000.00, at the time.

It appeared to him that his many apostolic activities in a bilingual country could be extended farther if he could learn to speak English. One day in 1902, at the age of 72, he decided to go ahead and master the language. He spoke about it to Msgr. Laflèche. The Bishop of Trois-Rivières replied, it is said, with a kindly smile. He had had better results in 1894 in suggesting that Fr. Frederick become a “farmland missionary”, urging farmers to survive economically by growing sugar-beets, and thus not be forced to migrate to the United States. For a while, he was called the “Beet-Father” to his great amusement, especially when a sugar refinery began to yield good profits!



## For the Return of the Franciscan Friars

It must be noted that Fr. Frederick had received no official mandate to reestablish his Order in Canada. The First Franciscan Order had been absent from the Church in Canada since 1796, fateful date of the fire that destroyed the friary in Québec's Upper Town, where the Récollet Franciscans had been living since 1693, and the sad order of Bishop Hubert suppressing their community life. Since 1888, however, while working in the service of Mary at Cap-de-la-Madeleine and in his Commissariate of the Holy Land in Trois-Rivières, he did in fact prepare very effectively for the return of the Friars of his Order. As a true pioneer, he scouted the possibilities and established contacts. He created an image of the Franciscan Friar as humble, devoted, ready to respond to urgent needs: visits to the Third Order, helping ministries, farmland problems, and many others.

His travels and excursions, judged excessive by his more monastic confreres, had only one aim: to respond to people in need. "Through him, the Franciscan robe and cord reappeared in Canada; he drew souls to him by his example, his action, and his reputation of holiness." These are words of his Provincial Superior, Fr. Colomban-M. Dreyer, O.F.M. who became an Apostolic Delegate in Indo-China.

The Bishop of Trois-Rivières, Msgr. Laflèche and the Bishop of Montréal, Msgr. Fabre had been hesitant about having a full Franciscan foundation in either of their dioceses, because of growing financial demands and consequent responsibilities. Fr. Provancher wrote to the Bishop of Trois-Rivières:

I will take this occasion to ask you once more to permit the Fathers to establish in your diocese a Commissariate of the Holy Land. At first, there would be two priests and one Brother. They would live on alms, as they do everywhere, and

would visit the fraternities and other groups. I am convinced that within six months in Canada they would have more work offered them than they could do... They would be no burden on your diocese...

In 1887, Fr. Caisse, Procurator of the Seminary of Trois-Rivières, had pleaded successfully with his Bishop for the founding of the Commissariate: "The assigned superior is Fr. Frederick, whom Your Excellency knows and who is happy to return to Canada..."

The Commissariate of the Holy Land was to be the first step in the return of the Franciscan Friars to the banks of the Saint Lawrence River. The Bishop and the Cathedral Chapter of Trois-Rivières welcomed him as we have seen, and were glad to see his joy in returning to their land. It was a second Spring for the Franciscan apostolate. It was to be a new period in Fr. Frederick's life, at first with one companion in 1889, Brother Lazare Fromentin whom he had brought from Jerusalem, then joined in 1892 by his good friend, Fr. Augustin Bouynot, then by a Belgian Brother, Accursius Vervinck, and later, by some brother-postulants. The Commissariate was called a "desert of prayer and penance." Fr. Frederick described how his companions and he were "determined to live like saints, in our incomparable solitude, keeping a strict silence, and keeping ourselves with joyous hearts in the presence of God." Their life was austere; their food more than frugal. They were motivated in their sacrifices by the desire to obtain from heaven the recovery of the tomb of the saintly Récollet Brother Didacus, whom they believed buried since 1754 in the old Récollet chapel of Trois-Rivières, now an Anglican church.

However, with all Fr. Frederick's responsibilities at the Shrine of Cap-de-la-Madeleine outlined in Chapter 3, it must be understood that the Commissariate was often closed until 1901, when Brother Pascal-M. Buisson was able to ensure a





permanent presence. The key to the house had often to be entrusted to their good neighbour, Mr Gédéon Désilets. From 1892 to 1895, Fr. Frederick had to allow his dear friend Fr. Augustin Bouynot to go to Montréal at the request of Bishop Fabre to minister to the Italian Community there. He had first met Fr. Augustin in the Holy Land, and both had grown in mutual esteem. They completed each other in a remarkable way, in faith and apostolic charity: Frederick at ease on the road and before crowds; Augustin as quiet confessor, spiritual director, and visitor of the sick, even considered “more holy” than Frederick by many people around them.

Thus, the great yearning of members of the Franciscan Third Order to see again their Récollet Fathers, transmitted providentially by Fr. Frederick to the Chapter-Meeting of his Province of Saint Louis, meeting secretly (the law of the time forbade it!) in Marseille in 1882, was gradually to be answered. Friars of that Province came with official approval to Montréal in 1890. In 1903, some joined him in his Commissariate in Trois-Rivières, while the new Franciscan foundation went on to take root in Quebec City (1900), Edmonton, Alberta (1909), and Rosemount, Montreal (1915).

## For Centres of Prayer

Fr. Frederick worked unceasingly with the printed word, but his articles and books were written largely to promote the life of prayer; the very sales of his books were destined to help religious houses and centres of prayer. In 1893, he had planned a publication that would bring a taste for good reading into homes: a weekly of 12 pages, to sell for .50 cents a year! Nothing daunted him; he wanted this weekly mailed so as to arrive in time for Sunday!

A more realistic project was to be the *Revue Eucharistique, Mariale et Antonienne*, (Eucharistic, Marian, and Antonian Review), begun in 1900 with the help of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and their Chaplain, Fr. Louis-Honoré Paquet. It survived Fr. Frederick, but not its 66th year. He was eager to see parish libraries established, as he proposed to the future Cardinal Bégin in a letter of 1894. He was ready to supply lists of good useful books, but thought that new ones should be produced in Canada. He thought of contributing a life of St. Francis, and did indeed in 1894. Above all, however, he wanted to publish the *Life of Jesus Christ* which he had planned since 1880, at the beginning of his service in the Holy Land. He wished to offer a harmonized, combined version of the four Gospels, using the well-known French text of Glaire. He went to work during the winter months of 1893-94 in the priest's house at the "Cap": ten or twelve hours day and night, on his knees, transcribing the sacred texts. The book appeared in 1894, and in eight reprintings attained in 1907 a total of 42,000 copies: it was the "best-seller" of the times. Thus, long before the Plenary Council of Quebec in 1909 asked parish priests to supply every family with a New Testament, Fr. Frederick had pioneered the distribution of Bible texts in the country.

He took to the road himself, to bring his books into

homes. Other works followed: *The Life of St. Francis* (1894), *The Life of St. Anne* (1900), a *Life of St. Joseph* (1902), and then, a *Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, according to Sister Mary of Agreda (1904). He distributed these books and others to families in four dioceses, for the benefit of religious communities: the Poor Clares of Valleyfield (1906 & 1911); the Monastery of the Precious Blood of Joliette (1909 & 1911), the Chapel of Perpetual Adoration of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Québec (1895 to 1904), St. Anthony's Franciscan Church in Trois-Rivières (1909), which would one day hold his own tomb, in 1988.

Since he could not realize a totally contemplative life himself, he worked for places that would invite to prayer. He would have liked to add to his beneficiaries the Monastery of Trappistine Sisters at St. Romuald near Lévis, but at the time his 72 years of age compelled him to limit his movements. He had traveled to the 150 parishes of Québec, with some 20,000 families in all. He wrote to Msgr. Gauthier in Ottawa, asking to promote the sales of his *Life of Jesus Christ* in that city and its surrounding places. In Valleyfield diocese, the Bishop had obtained a special blessing for his work from the Pope, St. Pius X. Everywhere his method was always that of personal contacts, in themselves occasions of prayerful instruction. His books are dated now, of course, but they remain impressive products of piety and patient labour, fruitful works of a man of God, not scholarly so much as edifying and leading simple hearts to prayer and virtue. Their sales helped literally to build houses and centres of prayer.

In 1902, Fr. Frederick wrote to Fr. Raphaël Delarbre in Rome: "Might I not go to Mount Tabor with Fr. Augustin to end my days in its solitude?" (Tabor is the mountain of the Transfiguration in the Holy Land.) To his Provincial, Fr. Columban-M., in November 1902, he expressed the desire



“to be relieved of my duties as Commissary, and become again a true Franciscan before I die; for fifteen years, it seems, I am not. What do you advise?”

To understand his answer, it must be understood that St. Francis had planned for his friars places of solitude, hermitages, and had even written a special Rule for the friars living in them. In Italian, they were aptly called *retiros*. The Provincial answered simply and firmly: “Make yourself a *retiro* in your deepest heart.” This reassured Fr. Frederick in his course of action, and encouraged him to continue his work, in which he had, as the record shows, achieved a fruitful balance between prayer and preaching, contemplation and action.

### Called the “Holy Father”

For 25 years, you have been Commissary of the Holy Land and I have been a Bishop. But they call you the “Holy Father” and me, simply, “the Bishop”. You must be greater than I in virtues and holiness... You have walked faster than I on the road to Heaven.

So did the Archbishop of Quebec, Msgr. Bégin, soon to become Cardinal, remark playfully to Fr. Frederick in 1913. He was alluding to a conversation he had with a talkative driver in St. Pierre de Broughton, who had identified two great moments in his life: one, when he drove his Bishop; the other, when he had driven “the Holy Father, not the Pope, of course, who has never come here, but good Father Frederick, the Franciscan who came to our homes to give the *Life of Our Lord* to our families...”

He might have added, as did so many others: “He predicted events that did happen as he said; he cured my mother, or my sister, or my brother; he preaches so well about the Gospels and the Way of the Cross.” The complete

list of all that has been attributed to him, words of encouragement, gestures of compassion and cures, would be long indeed.

Many were the testimonies presented at the informative inquest begun at Trois-Rivières in 1927, 11 years after his death. Here are a few: Mr. Henri Trudel of St. Stanislas de Champlain expected his wife to die from a very serious illness; she dropped to the floor in a faint before Fr. Frederick, who said, after she had been placed in bed: "Let her sleep; she'll soon be well." The next morning, she awoke completely cured.

At St. Charles de Bellechasse, he was brought to a young girl, Anne-Berthe Gosselin, who has suffered from tuberculosis for at least five years, given up by her doctors. Fr. Frederick entwined his cord-cincture around her diseased limb. A month later, she was quite well. Later, she married and became the mother of thirteen children.

A workman had his hand accidentally poisoned in a blacksmith's shop, and was threatened with amputation. Fr. Frederick was deeply moved with compassion and told him: "You will be cured." The swelling disappeared and the hand was restored.

Fr. Duguay of Cap-de-la-Madeleine confided to Fr. Mathieu-M. Daunais, in speaking about Fr. Frederick's sojourn in his house: "For fourteen years with him, I worked in the supernatural." He could not forget — as he testified at the informative inquest — Fr. Frederick's crossing of the river on floating ice in the evening of April 15, 1893. After a visit to Rho family in Bécancour on the South Shore, across from Cap-de-la-Madeleine, he had returned alone, without his driver, after patches of open water had prevented their horse from proceeding. "I don't know how I got here," he



admitted to the parish priest in the house, "I entrusted myself to Our Lady, and here I am."

In the Spring of 1916, at a "Sugaring-off Party" for the students of the Franciscan Junior Seminary at Trois-Rivières at a Maple-Sugar Bush near Sainte Angèle, there were enough pancakes to satisfy all the hungry boys, to the great astonishment of the cooks whose dwindling supplies of flour and fat never gave out. Fr. Frederick had promised there would be enough!

A great forest-fire was raging only ten miles away from the village of St. Tite de Champlain. Fr. Frederick was asked to pray for the safety of a whole district threatened by the destroying flames. He asked all the children to pray, then promised that Our Lady of the Rosary would remove the danger. The Bishop himself, present on a pastoral visit, became the wondering witness of the faith and courage of his missionary companion and of the extraordinary protection obtained on that night of June 7, 1891.

In all these accounts of miracles, it is striking to note the unassuming and simple attitudes and gestures of Fr.





Frederick. They recall the brief words of the Saviour Himself in the Gospels. As a true son of St. Francis of Assisi, he knew that he was only God's humble instrument, and studiously avoided any personal human display, or prominence for himself, knowing well that "Whatever we are in the eyes of God, that we are, and nothing more."

Pierre Jansoone, the missionary in India, had called his brother; "A saint to work miracles, a real saint, a great and lovable saint..." after he had seen him sick in Jerusalem in 1886. One might question this statement of a brother, if he were the only one to feel that way. But 30 years later, in 1916, a large and enthusiastic crowd confirmed it as they flocked to greet the passing of his mortal remains. After his death in Montreal, the coffin arrived by train at the station of Trois-Rivières. As the procession wended its way to the Franciscan church for the funeral, cries of joy broke out to acclaim the "holy Father" whose powers of intercession were well known to the people of Trois-Rivières. Now the Church, after 72 years, officially agrees with them, and encourages us all to ask for more miracles to obtain his canonization!

*Chapter Five*

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*A LEGACY OF SPIRITUAL TREASURES*  
*1916 - 1988*



## A Significant Incident

Fr. Frederick's influence has continued to be widespread and profound. In 1944, when World War II was drawing to a close in Europe, Canadian troops were among the invading forces who moved past Dunkerque to Ghyvelde, his old home town. Some of the soldiers were from the region of Trois-Rivières; it is interesting that some had Rosaries around their necks! In the ruins of Ghyvelde, they spotted something they knew: pictures of Good Father Frederick, one of them on a wall, undamaged and intact. To the amazement of some observers, the soldiers knelt down for a prayer. They knew from home whose picture it was; they had heard of his powers.

## Steps to the Altar: Recognition by the Church

A brief outline will suffice to show the progress of this recognition which will continue.

1916 August 4 & 6: Solemn funerals at Montreal and Trois-Rivières. Burial under the Franciscan Church of St. Anthony in a special vault.

1916 August 14: Funeral Service at Our Lady's Shrine at the "Cap" with a prophetic sermon by Fr. Joyal, O.M.I., ending: *You will live one day in the whole Catholic Church through the wonders already attributed to you during your lifetime and through those you will accomplish, we hope, after your death.*

1926 Appointment of a Vice-Postulator for his cause of Beatification, Fr. Mathieu-M. Daunais, O.F.M.

1927 - 1933 Informative inquests at Trois-Rivières, Lille, Cairo and Jerusalem.

1930 - 1937 Examination of Writings, continued in 1948 - 1956.

- 1930 Beginning of Apostolic inquests.
- 1932 His Bibliography published by Fr. Hugolin Lemay: 131 books and articles by Fr. Frederick; 146 about him.
- 1938 Excavation of a crypt-museum around his tomb. Blessing of the crypt and a monumental statue outside the church.
- 1940 His cause introduced in Rome.
- 1948 Opening of the tomb; his body found mummified.
- 1948 Remarkable cure of Mr. Niwayama in Urawa, Japan, through the intercession of Fr. Frederick.
- 1952 Critical biography written by Fr. Romain Légaré, translated into English by Mr. Raphaël Brown (1959).
- 1956 Illustrated brochure in English by Fr. Onésime Lamontagne: "He Saw Our Lady."
- 1965 Bronze memorial plaque dedicated at Cap-de-la-Madeleine.
- 1975 Complete file published by the Roman Postulator of the Cause.
- 1985 March 18 — Decree of Heroic virtues: Fr. Frederick is declared officially "Venerable."
- 1987 May 7 — Approval of the Niwayama miracle for the Cause.
- 1988 March 28 — Reopening of his tomb.  
                   September 25 — Beatification in Rome.  
                   November 5 — Installation of the tomb in a lateral chapel of the church by Fr. Philippe Bélanger, Guardian.



*The church, the friary and the monument.*

### **The Saga of a Franciscan Soul**

Such is his life. He was a rover of the spirit, through France, the Holy Land, and North America. The world became his Galilee. The original Galilee he had roamed familiarly for ten years, meeting in his mind's eye Jesus with his Apostles, his Mother Mary and Joseph her Spouse, and even his grandmother, Anne. His spiritual home was there, in the Holy Land of his contemplation, which he passionately loved to describe to his hearers, who were always eager for his concrete, rather sentimental preaching, vibrant nevertheless with a Gospel presence of the Lord. His popular books and articles, his endless preachings, his human contacts aimed at edification have caused him to be identified with St. Francis,





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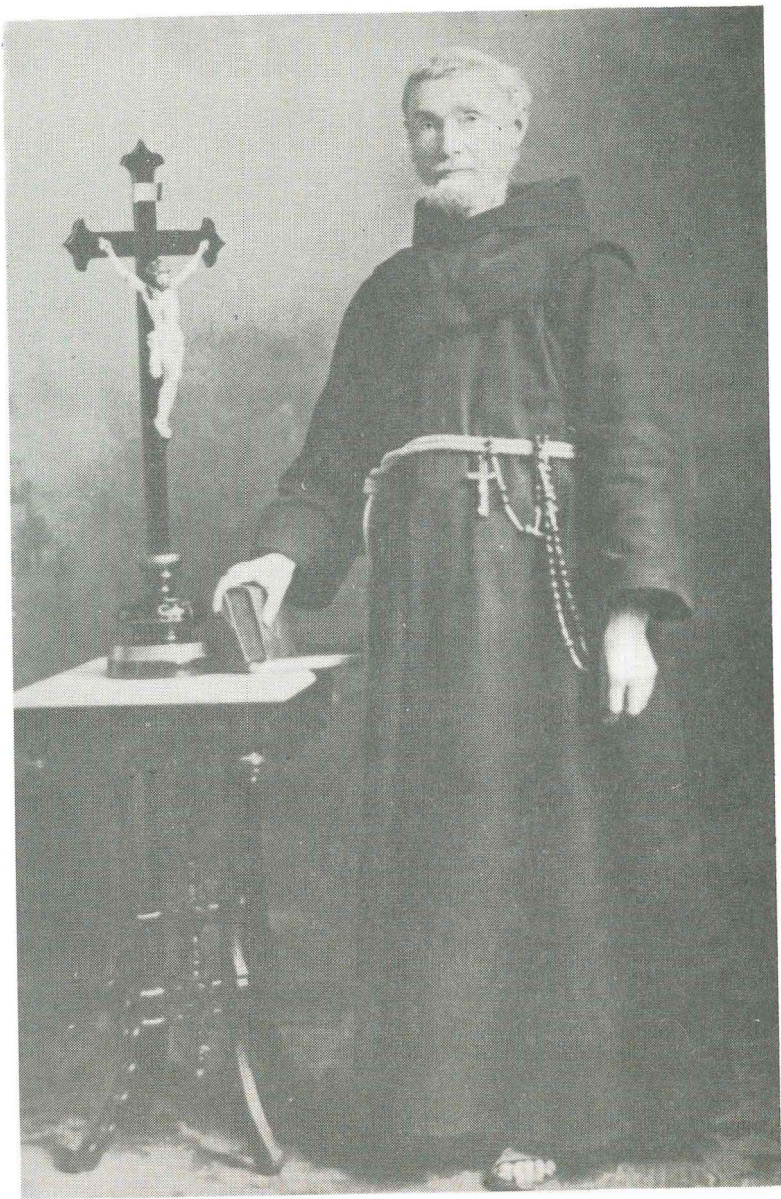
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tender, yet dynamic, bold to attack evil, yet gentle and courteous, an evangelist without violence, attracting to good deeds.

How could it be otherwise for an apostle of the Holy Rosary, that humble, mighty prayer to Mary, inviting all people to give themselves in simplicity? People rightly called him the Good Father Frederick. He had not shunned the rigorous austerity of the Spanish Observant Franciscans taught by Fr. Areso, the restorer of the Friars in France. But he transcended it, came through it, and was able to adapt his ways to life in his "dear Canada," as he called it, where the generous faith of the turn of the century brought him to work miracles along his way.

A great way it had been. Frederick had been a traveling salesman to help his family in his youth, obliged by his function of Assistant Custos to beg alms in Canada, led to visit parish fraternities of the Third Order, then to recruit pilgrims for Our Lady's Shrine at Cap-de-la-Madeleine, then to sell his books from door to door in the towns and townships of four dioceses so as to help his centres of prayer: all these were parts of a journey for a poor Franciscan friar who constantly had to renew himself to respond to his vocation, so as not to contradict by his life what he offered in his hands and speech and cherished ever in his heart.







tension. Indeed, the liberalism of the Canadian party had no explicit anti-religious bias as it had in France. Political liberals were hurt and indignant; emotions ran high, so high that Archbishop Taschereau felt obliged to silence the preacher. He had to leave. He had tried to explain his semantic blunder in the newspapers, but his excuses seemed lame and ineffective. The happy beginning turned into a severe humiliation, one of the worst in his priestly life. One hundred years later, it may be called a blessing in disguise, but his last week at Cap-Rouge must have been extremely painful for him. His host Fr. Provancher immediately arranged to send him to his friend, Msgr. Laflèche, Bishop of Trois-Rivières, whose anti-liberal convictions were well-known.

Fr. Frederick was warmly received and soon felt that he could securely continue his apostolate for the Third Order. He had good results at Bécancour, then in the city's cathedral, with visits to the sick, confessions, and sermons without end. The closing of the Novena Devotions preparing for the feast of St. Francis on October 4 kept him in the cathedral for fifteen consecutive hours! He never complained; despite considerable fatigue, he began a preaching tour of the diocese, promoting the Third Order, on both sides of the river; four months of unceasing activity followed in parishes, religious communities, and Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. To appreciate his work, it should be remembered that the Franciscan Third Order at that time had austere requirements which would be mitigated by Pope Leo XIII in 1883: daily recitation of the "Office" of 54 "Our-Fathers", with the psalm *Miserere* and the *Credo*, morning and evening, wearing of a large scapular, extending from the shoulders down to the cord cincture, frequent abstinences and fastings, a very demanding school of prayer and penance for generous and hardy souls!

In 1881, a new phase of Fr. Frederick's life had begun with his meeting with Fr. Provancher; now another meeting was to set the stage for another phase of action: He met the Désilets family of Trois-Rivières. There were four brothers: Alfred, a notary; Gédéon, a journalist; Petrus, less well-known; and finally, Luc, the parish priest of Cap-de-la-Madeleine. The notary had sought the cure of his sick child; Frederick gave him also his warm friendship. It was Alfred who introduced him to his brother, the parish priest.



The Désilets family traveled from Trois-Rivières to the "Cap" in a long dugout canoe, made from a single huge tree trunk. On the morning of September 29, 1881, they brought along Fr. Frederick. The view from the river was magnificent. To their right, on the South shore, lay the farm-lands of Bécancour, where he had already preached; to their left, the islands in the mouth of the St. Maurice river gave it its threefold channel; in the background were wooded hills; in