



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Saint Gabriel Possenti February 27

Goal: To provide a lesson for children about a saint or saints who exemplify a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others.

Materials Needed: This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow-up activities

Objectives:

1. To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
2. To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a saint?
One who:
 - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
 - teaches others about Jesus by their example
 - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Gabriel Possenti, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level.
4. To learn that Gabriel was a saint because he lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
5. To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
6. To help the children develop listening skills

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Saint Gabriel's story. (Have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Gabriel. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. *Pray: Saint Gabriel, you show us that a person can enjoy life and still be devoted to God. We want to live lives of joy while staying connected to others through our love of Christ and His Cross. Help us to stay focused on what God calls us to be in our own lives and to listen to His call always. Amen.*
4. Use the follow-up questions (below).
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Saint Gabriel Possenti

Born in the town of Assisi, Italy, Francesco Possenti was not only given the name of the famous saint from the village (Francis—Francesco in Italian) he was baptized in the same baptismal font! Possenti was the eleventh of thirteen children. His father, Sante, was a lawyer. His mother, Agnes, was a much-loved person in town and well known for her charity and piety. Agnes and four of Francesco's siblings died before the young boy's fourth birthday, leaving his father to care for him and eight other siblings.

Francesco was known to be a very bright and mischievous boy who had a hard time controlling his temper. Most people who knew him as a young boy would not have thought he would grow up to be a saint after they witnessed him fly into a rage at the smallest correction from his father or a teacher. He was known to slam doors in anger as well!

His anger would cool as quickly as it flashed and Francesco would soon be begging forgiveness of the person he had hurt.

Francesco was a lively boy who liked to dance. He also took great care with his appearance, making sure that he dressed in the latest fashions and was properly groomed before leaving the house. He attracted the attention of many young ladies and was actually engaged to two women—at the same time! Francesco was also an avid horseman and marksman. While he was the center of attention at parties and loved the theater and music, he also loved to read and was an excellent student. In high school, Francesco starred in school plays, received excellent grades, and had many good friends—he was a popular young man. He graduated at the top of his class and was given a gold medal for excellence. Many in the room who cheered for him that day may have assumed that he would go on to a great career in law, like his father. They were very surprised when they heard that the next day, Francesco left—not for a vacation, but for the seminary.

Francesco's father made sure that all of his children were brought up well in the faith—they said their morning and evening prayers and went to daily Mass when they could. During his teen years, Francesco had made promises to God, during times of illness, that if he were cured, he would become a priest. Those promises always seem to go away when his health returned, so his friends and family expected that Francesco would return home soon after leaving to join the Passionist Fathers, a missionary order of priests. But true to his nature, Francesco excelled at the seminary, and received the name of Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Gabriel loved the religious life of study and prayer. He especially loved focusing on the Passion of Jesus. He was soon to embrace his own cross, as he fell ill with tuberculosis. He remained cheerful throughout his illness and was a source of inspiration to others. Before he could be ordained, Gabriel died just before he turned twenty-four. His feast day is February 27th.

Follow-up Questions: (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Saint Gabriel sometime seemed to live in ways that our faith would not agree with, yet he became a saint. How is this possible?
2. List some of the qualities that make you and Saint Gabriel alike and different. Are you proud of these traits? If so, how can you use them to answer God's call for your life? If not, what can you do to change them?
3. As a young boy, Francesco saw many difficulties in his life, but did not turn away from God. How does God help you in hard times?

Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. When Francesco joined the Passionist Fathers, he had to travel almost 83 miles. This was a long journey in 1856! Ask friends and family to pledge a sacrifice as you walk around your church 83 times in honor of Francesco's trip towards his vocation. Donate the funds to the missions so that other children may live out their call from God!
2. Saint Gabriel joined the Passionist Fathers because he wanted to be a missionary and he loved the story of The Passion of Jesus. Read JN 19: 1-37 with your class. Draw a picture or write a poem or essay about the part of the story that touches you the most.

Older students:

1. Saint Gabriel joined the Passionist Fathers because he wanted to be a missionary and he loved the story of The Passion of Jesus. Read JN 19: 1-37 with your class. Assign parts and produce your own version of The Passion of Jesus. Be ready to perform it during Lent for friends and family. Charge admission and send the funds to Missionary Childhood so that children around the world can know what Jesus sacrificed for them, too.