

Saint Hilary of Poitiers c.300-368



Goal: To provide a lesson for children about a saint who exemplifies 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:
 - loves and respects everyone in God's family
 - teaches others about Jesus
 - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Hilary of Poitiers, telling as much of, or parts of, the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level.
4. To learn that Hilary 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 be witnesses to the truth
7. To help the children develop listening skills
8. To expand children's vocabulary, as appropriate: **heresy, Latin, Old and New Testament, Moses, Psalms, converted, incomprehensible, omnipotence, exile, pagan, evangelizer**

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Hilary's story. (Have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Hilary of Poitiers. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. **Pray: Saint Hilary, Instead of keeping quiet in the face of what you knew to be wrong, you stood up for your beliefs, even in the face of punishment. Help us to always stand for the truth and each other so that we may lead others to God by the example of our lives as you did. Amen.**
4. Use the follow up questions (below)
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Saint Hilary of Poitiers

Saint Hilary lived in the fourth century in the town of Poitiers in western France. His name comes from the Latin word for cheerful or happy (*Hilarius*). His parents were wealthy pagans, which is how non-Christians who worshipped multiple gods were referred to at the time. Education was very important to them, so young Hilary even learned a little Greek, which was not common in the Western world at that point in history. Because most Bibles were written in Greek then, Hilary read both the Old and New Testaments and over time came to believe what was written – that there was one true God and that Jesus Christ was His Son.

In the Old Testament, he was particularly moved by the story of God speaking to Moses, saying, "I AM WHO AM." (Exodus 3:14) He was amazed at the way God had defined Himself – as something that exists but is

incomprehensible, not to be understood by people. When he read the Psalms, he learned of God's omnipotence – that His power was almighty. In the Gospel, he found the stories of Jesus – in particular the Gospel of John identifying Jesus as The Word (Jn 1:1-2), God's Son, who had existed from the beginning with God. By this time, Hilary had married and was a father of a young daughter. His whole family converted, entering the Church together. As Hilary's faith and knowledge grew, he began to tell other people about God and his son – Hilary became Poitiers first evangelizer. The people of Poitiers were so impressed with his faith and knowledge of God that they elected him a bishop even though he was married.

Around the time that Hilary became a bishop, a group of people called Arians were proclaiming things as truth that were not – they were speaking heresy about the Christian faith. Arians believed that Jesus Christ had not existed with God in heaven all along, that he had been created by God the Father at a later time and was therefore somehow “less than” God. Another great man at the time who went on to become a saint – Athanasius – spoke up against this falsehood. When he was attacked, Hilary defended him and was exiled – sent away from his family to live - as a punishment for speaking up for the truth. He lived for almost four years away from his home; instead of becoming bitter, however, he used the time to pray and read and become closer to God. He also wrote many great books outlining the truth about Jesus and the falsehoods of the Arians. Eventually, he was looked to for advice from the leaders of the Church and the heresy was put down, thanks to – among others – Hilary's resolve to stand up for the truth in a difficult situation.

St. Hilary of Poitiers' Feast Day is January 13.

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

1. Education was very important to St. Hilary's family, but at some point he took on the desire to learn himself, even going so far as to read the whole Bible! As a challenge, try to go a whole week without complaining about the amount of homework you have but instead, thanking God for the opportunity to learn. Spend some prayer time imagining life without school – it wouldn't be one long vacation!
2. What are some ways that you can be as courageous every day in school as Hilary was?
3. What is one of the biggest “social heresies” of our time? (Teachers: start the discussion with age appropriate subjects, i.e. it's ok to spend time at a friend's house without parents being home, though it's against the rules if nothing happens and we don't get caught, being famous and having money is more important than being a good person, Abortion – it's not really a baby, etc.)
4. How can you speak up for the truth at school? At home? On the sports field?

Follow-up Activities:

1. **Younger students:** Saint Hilary taught many people about God and Jesus (he was an evangelizer) but his first students were his family, including his daughter. Your parents are teaching you the faith right now! Make a card for your parents/guardians to thank them for teaching you about Jesus.
2. St. Hilary was Poitier's first evangelizer. Do you think he used only his words? Why or why not? If not, what did he use to tell people about Jesus?
1. **Older students:** St. Hilary was Poitier's first evangelizer. As such, he was probably rejected by some people, accepted by others. Create a short skit about what it would be like to try to tell someone about Jesus, assuming they knew nothing of who He is. Show both sides of the story. Discuss the rejection version versus the acceptance version.
2. Do you have a favorite Bible quote or story as St. Hilary did? What is it and why? If not, look up the two cited in his story and write about what they mean to you.
1. **All students:** Originating with the English legal system, some English and Irish colleges still have a “Hilary term” starting the Sunday before his feast day and lasting until the ninth Sunday after his feast day. Calculate the length of this year's “Hilary term”. During that time, use your MCA Mite Boxes to sacrifice for children around the world who don't have the opportunity to go to school like you and St. Hilary. Write a class prayer to St. Hilary and recite it every day during his term.