



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Saint Juan Diego December 9

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:
 - lives like Jesus
 - teaches others about Jesus by their example
 - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
3. To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Juan Diego, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Juan Diego 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 others by the way we live each day
6. To help the children develop listening skills

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Juan Diego's story. (Have a map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Juan Diego. Elaborate or abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. Use the follow-up questions (Below).
4. Present follow-up activity below (Optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Saint Juan Diego

Juan Diego was born in an area of Mexico that is a bit north of modern day Mexico City. His native name, *Cuauhtlatoatzin*, (pronounced Coo-a-oo-tlaa-tot-sing) means "one who talks like an eagle". Historians describe him as a poor man—one that did not belong to the ruling or educated class. He was not, however, a slave or servant. Juan was known to be a hard worker. He owned a small piece of land on which he built a house and farmed. He also made mats out of local cactus fibers which he sold to support himself and his wife.

Cuauhtlatoatzin was about 50 years old when he was baptized into the Catholic faith by one of the first Franciscan missionaries to reach Mexico. He was given the Christian name Juan—Spanish for John. Juan was very devoted to his faith, and walked 14 miles several times a week to attend Mass.

Being a poor man, Juan walked barefoot, clothed in a cape, or *tilma*, made of fibers from the maguey cactus. (Only the wealthy had access to cotton.)

It was during one of these walks that Juan first encountered a beautiful young woman dressed like an Aztec princess. She told Juan that she was the Virgin Mary and that she wanted a church to be built on the spot where they stood. She asked Juan to bring that message to the local bishop. Juan delivered the message but the bishop was skeptical—why would the Blessed Mother appear to one so lowly? He asked for proof that it was truly Mary.

As Juan was preparing to meet again with the beautiful lady, he got word that his beloved uncle was gravely ill. He felt guilty for disobeying the bishop, but hurried instead to see his uncle, avoiding the route where he had met Mary. She found Juan as he traveled, assured him that his uncle was cured, and told him to go to the hillside and gather flowers in his tilma to give to the bishop as proof of her true identity. When Our Lady spoke to Juan, she told him, “Do not let anything bother you, and do not be afraid of any illness, pain or accident.”

Juan gathered roses—flowers that never grew in that area—and presented them to the bishop as a gift from Mary. As he opened his tilma and the flowers spilled out, everyone was amazed that the image of Mary, herself, was imprinted on his cloak. Juan’s tilma hangs to this day in the church, now a Basilica, that was built as the Blessed Mother instructed.

Juan lived out his life in a hut built next to the church. He died at age 74 and was canonized in 2002. He was the first indigenous American saint.

Pray: Happy Juan Diego, true and faithful man! We entrust to you our brothers and sisters so that, feeling the call to holiness, they may permeate every area of life with the spirit of the Gospel. Bless families, strengthen spouses in their marriage, and sustain the efforts of parents to give their children a Christian upbringing. Look with favor upon the pain of those who are suffering in body or spirit, on those afflicted by poverty, loneliness, marginalization or ignorance. May all people... always act in accordance with the demands of justice and with respect for the dignity of each person, so that in this way, peace may be reinforced. Amen. (*Prayer by written St. John Paul II*)

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

1. Saint Juan Diego was a humble man. Is it surprising that Mary appeared to someone so “lowly”?
2. Juan didn’t give up when the bishop did not believe him and asked for a sign that he had truly seen Mary. How does it feel to be questioned when you know you are telling the truth and are not believed?
3. Juan tried to hide from the Blessed Mother and visit his sick uncle. Discuss how often we think we may be ‘hiding’ from God!

Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. Juan trusted Mary and found a miracle—roses! Give your heart to Mary, too, and offer a prayerful bouquet to children in the missions: pray the World Mission Rosary. Need rosaries? They are available from our office at no cost—email mheil@propfaithboston.org.
2. When Mary appeared to Saint Juan Diego as Our Lady of Guadalupe, she looked like a Mexican woman—just as the saint would have expected. Draw a picture of what you think Mary would look like if she appeared to you and your family. Compare them in class and discuss the differences or similarities.

Older students:

1. Saint Juan Diego was a convert to the faith. Ask your pastor or teacher to arrange a Zoom visit to your class from a person who has gone through the parish RCIA program and become a Catholic. Find out what the process is like from someone who has made that faith journey as an adult.

All students:

1. Saint Juan Diego was chosen to be a messenger. His tilma was his sign. All missionaries are God’s messengers—that means we are, too! Create your own tilma as a sign to the world about how much you love God and all His people. Use a brown paper bag as the boy pictured did. Pay \$1 to wear your tilma to class before Christmas and send the funds to MCA for children in the missions who may not have access to good clothing.
2. Though it was rarely done in those days, Saint Juan Diego went to Mass more than once a week, walking fourteen miles each way (barefoot!) to get there. Many people in the missions today do not have that option due to lack of priests and chapels. Use Google Maps to measure the distance from your house to your parish church. Make a sacrifice to the missions for each mile (or foot if you live close by!) you count. Help build the Church, as the Blessed Mother asked Juan Diego!

