



## Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



**Saint Katharine Drexel**  
**March 3**

**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 Katharine Drexel telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Katharine was a saint because she 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 Katharine Drexel's story. (Have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Katharine Drexel. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. *Pray: Saint Charles, you and your companions were young – some only boys. Yet you had the courage to trust that what you had learned about God and His promise of Heaven would get you through every hardship, even the pain of sacrificing your life. Help us to trust God in our everyday decisions, no matter how small, knowing that He alone knows the path that is right for us. Amen.*
4. Use the follow-up questions (below).
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

### Saint Katharine Drexel

Katharine Drexel was born into a family of wealth and privilege in 1858. Her mother died within a month of her birth; she and her older sister lived with an aunt and uncle until her father remarried two years later. As an international banker, Katharine's father's job afforded them a life that most young girls could only dream of—international travel, private tutors, and rubbing elbows with the rich and famous of her day. Her parents were also deeply devoted to their Catholic faith; Katharine's father set aside thirty minutes a day to pray while her step-mother opened their grand house three times a week to the poor to hand out food, clothing and other necessities of life. For those who were embarrassed to be seen accepting charity, Mrs. Emma Drexel and her children would quietly seek them out to deliver the much needed aid. She was quoted as telling the girls, "Kindness may be unkind if it leaves a sting behind."

After watching Emma suffer from terminal cancer for three years before succumbing to the illness, Katharine learned a valuable life lesson—no amount of money can shield you from suffering in life. When Mr. Drexel died just two years later, Katharine and her sisters inherited a massive fortune allowing them to live any life they chose.

Katharine was always interested in the plight of Native Americans and those she felt were treated poorly because of their race. While traveling in the Western part of the United States, she had been dismayed at the living conditions of the our native citizens as they were forced off their land and onto small reservations. On a visit to Rome, the Drexel sisters were granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII. Katharine asked him to send missionaries to the West; the Pope turned the request back to her suggesting that she, herself, become a missionary.

Drexel returned home to enter the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh, Pa. Philadelphia social circles were stunned - newspaper headlines read “Miss Drexel Enters a Catholic Convent—Gives Up Seven Million”. Drexel took the name Mother Katharine and devoted herself to the service and education of Native and African Americans. Mother Katharine founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to serve the needs of both communities. Because she did not want her Sisters to be unprepared for their duties, she first opened a school at the Drexel Estate for African American orphans. The home provided a needed place to live and learn for the children, while providing the Sister with a place to train for their work in the West. They also took classes at Drexel University, which was founded by Mother Katharine’s uncle. By educating women and caring for people who were marginalized because of their race, she put herself at great risk. This was a time when her convictions for social justice for all were not shared by many. Segregationist harassed her, even burning one of her schools in Philadelphia.

The Sisters opened a boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico for Native Americans in 1894. A string of mission schools followed. By 1915, Mother Katharine had started a secondary school for African Americans in New Orleans. Ten years later, it would become Xavier University, the first Catholic university for African Americans in the United States. It was funded early on by her personal fortune. Mother Katharine was also publicly active in her faith and an out-spoken advocate for many. She supported petitions to Congress to increase aid to reservation schools, wrote letters to the editors of newspapers that she felt were biased against Native Americans, and started a letter writing campaign in support of anti-lynching laws.

At the time of her death/By the time she died in 1955, at the age of 96, 500 Sisters were working in 63 schools across the country; she had established 50 missions for Native Americans in sixteen states.

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

1. Saint Katharine Drexel could have lived a comfortable life of luxury. Instead, she used her millions to help others. What can she inspire you to do with your life? Do you think you would be able to do the same? Why or why not?
2. How did the faith of Saint Katharine Drexel’s parents make a difference in her life? How did it help her develop a kind heart towards those in need?
3. What does Saint Katharine Drexel teach us about our relationship with people who are “different” from us, whether by culture, race, or gender?

**Follow-up Activities:**

*Younger students:*

1. Saint Katharine Drexel used her own money to help others. This Lent, follow her example and donate your own funds to Missionary Childhood to help other children around the world. Reflect on how you feel after giving.
2. Saint Katharine Drexel met the Pope and got to ask him a question! What would you ask Pope Francis? Write it down and draw a picture of yourself asking him the question. Send it to us. We will mail it to him!

*Older students:*

1. Break into small groups and research the state of race relations during Saint Katharine Drexel’s life. Make a story display board to show the school what you learned. What surprised you the most about what you learned?
2. Saint Katharine Drexel used her own fortune to do great things. Come together as class groups and each have your own fundraiser for Missionary Childhood - host a walkathon, a read-a-thon, or a bake sale... pray and use your imagination to serve others!