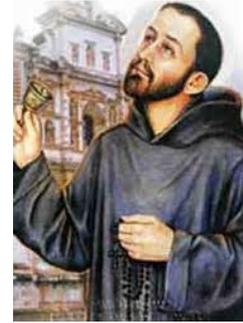




## Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



**Saint Pedro de San José Betancur**  
**April 18**

**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 Pedro de San José Betancur, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Pedro 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 children develop listening skills

### Procedure:

1. Prepare children to listen to Pedro de San José Betancur's story. (have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Pedro. 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 Pedro de San José Betancur

On July 30, 2002, at a Mass of canonization for Saint Pedro de San José Betancur, then-Pope John Paul II referred to Pedro as "an outstanding example" of Christian mercy. The pope said that the saint had practiced mercy "heroically with the lowliest and the most deprived." Perhaps this close connection with the least of his brothers and sisters came from Pedro knowing firsthand what it was like to live among the hungry and homeless, depending on others for daily handouts to survive.

Born in the Canary Islands, which are owned by Spain but located off the coast of the African country of Morocco, Pedro was born to a poor family and worked as a shepherd until he was 23. He spent long hours in the field, praying while he tended his flock. Wanting more from life, he embarked on a long sea journey to New Spain—present day Guatemala—hoping to connect with a relative who had a government job. Evidently, he underestimated the amount of money it would take to reach his destination: when he arrived in Havana, Cuba, he had run out of money. He worked for a year as a weaver to earn enough to continue his journey to the New World. He felt a calling to be a priest and was sure that God wanted him to work spreading the Gospel there. When Pedro Betancur finally arrived in Guatemala, he was so destitute that he joined a breadline run by local Franciscans to feed the poor.

Pedro's dream of being a priest was not to be. Although he joined a Jesuit seminary, he found the school work too difficult to master. He left after three years. Determined to live a life of service, Pedro worked as a sacristan at a local church and prayed to the Blessed Mother for guidance. He decided to rent a small house and began teaching reading and catechism classes to the local poor children. About this time, Pedro joined a lay order of Franciscans and took the name Pedro de San José—Peter of Saint Joseph. He expanded his work of charity to include visiting prisons, jails, hospitals, and those who were unemployed. Within two weeks, he who had once struggled with schoolwork had memorized the entire rule of Saint Francis by which the order lived. This was twenty-plus chapters long!

Brother Pedro converted a hut into a house where those released from the hospital but still needing further care could come and convalesce. He begged from townspeople to support his work. He called the home Bethlehem, after Jesus' first home. He later opened a homeless shelter, a hospital for children, and an inn for priests. He worked hard to popularize the rosary at all the sites he founded.

Saint Pedro de San José Betancur died at the age of 41 after giving his life to the poor.

**Pray:** *Saint Pedro, you followed God's will for your life. Help us to learn from your example to listen while we pray so that we, too, may follow the will of God in our own lives. Help us to learn from your life's example, so that taking care of our brothers and sisters becomes as second nature to us, as it was to you. Amen.*

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

1. Saint Pedro's life didn't work out like he thought it would—he never became a priest. Yet, God saw to it that he was a success at what he did. How did Pedro learn what God had in store for him?
2. Pedro could have given up many times along his life's journey. What made him persevere?
3. How do you think Pedro's experience of accepting handouts helped him to beg for others?

**Follow-up Activities:**

**Younger students:**

1. Saint Pedro de San José Betancur loved the rosary. In his honor, pray the World Mission Rosary for children in the missions who live on the margins like the people who the saint served—poor, hungry, and homeless.
2. Many food banks are in desperate need of donations right now. Call neighbors and ask them to leave plastic bags of non-perishable food at their front door for you to pick up. Ask a grown-up to help you deliver what you collect to a local food bank and donate them anonymously.

**Older students:**

1. Saint Pedro de San José Betancur was known to walk through his town ringing a bell, collecting for the poor and asking people to pray. In this way, he called people's attention to Jesus and the least of his brothers. Organize a Prayer Parade through your school or parish neighborhood. Make banners for each car with your school or parish name and inspiring messages for all to see. Put a crucifix on the lead car. Ask people to pray the rosary for all the people they pass as they drive in the parade. Ring bells, or honk horns to call attention to your Prayer Parade. Have extra World Mission Rosaries on hand to give to people you pass by. Need extra rosaries? Just let us know and we'll send them to you!
2. Choose one week and give up all snacks. Take the money you would spend on the snacks and donate it to the Missionary Childhood Association to be used to help poor children in the missions.

**All students:**

1. Saint Pedro de San José Betancur also promoted the ministry of intercessory prayer—asking people to pray for others. This month, use a simple notebook to make a list of people, things, or events that you would like your family to pray for. Leave a pen with the book so others may also write their prayer intentions in the book. Check the book on a daily basis and say a Hail Mary for all the intentions listed in your Book of Prayers.