



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Saint Peter Claver: A Missionary Saint September 9

Goal: To demonstrate the importance of the contribution of one role-model in our Christian tradition, and his or her ability to share our faith with others

Materials Needed: This lesson plan, accompanying story, map of the world/globe and any necessary materials for optional 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 by their example
 - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our saints, Saint Peter Claver, telling as much of the story as you feel will interest your students at their grade level
4. To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
5. To help the children develop listening skills
6. To assist children to see that the church is universal-worldwide

Procedure:

1. Prepare the students to listen to a story by praying to Saint Peter Claver (Have a map or globe nearby)
2. Read, or have read, the story of Peter Claver. Elaborate or abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of the listeners.
3. **Pray: Dear God, through the inspiration of Saint Peter Claver, help us to have the courage to use our faith to help those who suffer unjustly. Let us always work to better the lives of those who are treated unfairly by the world. We pray to show Your Mercy to the world. Amen.**
4. Use the follow-up questions (below)
5. Present the follow-up activity (below). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Saint Peter Claver: Missionary to Slaves

Peter Claver was a man with a mission. Born in Spain in 1581, he entered the novitiate of the Jesuit order when he was twenty years old. In 1610 he was sent as a missionary to Cartagena, which is now Columbia, South America. He finished his studies and was ordained in Cartagena in 1616. While he studied, Peter was very disturbed to see that Cartagena was an important, busy city not because of good business but because it was the principal market for slave trade in the New World. The African countries of the Congo, Angola, and coasts of Guinea had become the market for slave dealers. Native kings sold their subjects and their prisoners to slave

dealers. Ten thousand slaves arrived in Cartagena every year to work in the mines and on local plantations. The conditions of the slaves' journey from Africa were atrocious. They were packed in the dark holds of ships, chained together in filthy conditions, and fed barely enough to keep them alive. About one third of them died on the ship before it landed. Hundreds of thousands of Africans were brought to Cartagena, herded into warehouses, and auctioned off to the highest bidder.

Each time a ship landed, Peter Claver would hurry down to the dock and get past the captain to reach the terrified human cargo. He would move around among the dazed, half-dead people, treating their wounds and distributing medicine, fruits, vegetables, bread, and clothing. He would give them fresh water to drink. His first concern was to tend to the slaves' human needs and to restore their sense of dignity after they had suffered so much. Peter would say frequently: *"We must speak to them with our hands before we try to speak to them with our lips."* He nursed many back to health and, while they were in the warehouses waiting to be sold, through pictures and interpreters, would tell them about Jesus. He tried to give them a sense of their human worth and God's saving love.

Peter was often met with anger by the business and civil authorities who suspected that his ministry was hurting their lucrative slave trade. Because he also preached Christianity to sailors, they were afraid that the sailors would stop working on their slave ships. Nevertheless, he continued his efforts tirelessly. During his 40 years in Columbia, Peter baptized nearly 300,000 slaves. He tried his best to follow them to the mines and plantations, where he continued to try to meet all of their faith needs. Peter's work did not keep him from ministering to the residents of Cartagena, the traders, and the visitors to the city. He realized that everyone needed to hear the Good News. He worked in local hospitals and prisons as well. In 1650, Peter Claver was sickened by an outbreak of the plague. Bedridden and unable to serve his people, he died four years later. The city that had once opposed his work honored him greatly after his death. He was declared a saint in 1888.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

1. Why do we call Saint Peter Claver a missionary?
2. What is the meaning of "slave trade?" How does a Christian view "slave trade?" Why?
3. In our world today, can you think of anything that compares to the slaves' condition in the ship? (e.g. undocumented workers packed in vans being smuggled across the border)
4. In our time, name people whose works of mercy compare to those of Saint Peter Claver.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY:

1. Review the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Draw pictures of Saint Peter Claver's ministry, showing how he was involved in these works. Make a Mercy bulletin board with the drawings to inspire students to perform works of mercy.
2. Find Colombia, Guinea, The Congo, and Angola on maps. Calculate the distance from the African countries to Columbia. Discuss the realities of the travel for the captured Africans during the journey (no bathrooms, showers, little food, medicine, privacy, women giving birth, people dying, etc.). Ask each student to sacrifice a penny for every mile for missionaries supported by MCA working with children in those countries.
3. Invite a member from the local chapter of the Knights of Peter Claver, a Catholic Service Organization for African Americans (<http://www.kofpc.org/>), to visit your school and talk about how they carry on the ministry of mercy of Saint Peter Claver. Contact Grand Knight Rashaun Martin at: Rashaunmartin13@gmail.com or 617-869-3801.