



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux Patroness of the Missions



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:

- To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
- 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
- To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
- To learn that Thérèse is a saint because she lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
- To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives

Procedure:

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

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of the Missions

September 30, 2019 marks the 122nd anniversary of the death of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. How did it come about that this young woman, who entered a monastery at age fifteen and spent the last years of her short life there, became the patroness of missionaries and the missions?

She was born Marie Françoise Martin in Alençon, France in 1873, and was the youngest of nine children. Only Marie Françoise and four others lived past infancy. Her father was a watchmaker. Her mother, who was a lace maker, died of breast cancer when Marie Françoise was five. The family then moved to Lisieux, where she was raised by her elder sisters and an aunt. Two of her sisters went on to become Carmelite nuns. Marie Françoise wanted to become a nun, too, but was refused because of her youth. She appealed to the Pope in front of a General Audience in Rome. He blessed the bold girl kneeling at his feet and assured her that if it was God's will, it would happen. After she returned home, the local bishop gave his permission — Marie Françoise made her vows in 1890 and was given a new name as a sign of her new life: Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

Although periods of illness followed, Thérèse lived a spirit of patience and prayer. She was asked to write the story of her childhood and, later, of her life in the convent.

Throughout her life as a Carmelite, Thérèse wanted to be a missionary. She hoped to be sent to Vietnam, where there were two Carmelite monasteries that had a connection with Lisieux. The monastery in Saigon began with nuns from Lisieux and another monastery in Hanoi was an off-shoot of the one in Saigon. The Lisieux prioress recognized Thérèse's missionary vocation, but hesitated to send her to the missions because of her poor health.

Thérèse found a way to be a missionary right where she was: she wrote letters. A young man studying to be a priest wrote to the monastery and asked that a sister devote herself especially to helping him through her prayers and sacrifices. A year later, another seminarian asked that someone in the monastery be chosen to pray for him and his future mission. The prioress asked Thérèse to take charge of the spiritual interests of these future missionaries. One of them went to China and the other to what we now know as the African country of Malawi.

Thérèse prayed, sacrificed, and offered her hardships to God for the missions. She wrote in a poem, "In God's eyes there is no distance. For God the whole universe is one speck. My weak love, my little sufferings, blessed by God make God loved far and wide."

As her death approached, Thérèse asked that instead of purchasing flowers after her death, the money should be contributed to the missions to baptize and support little girls who were found abandoned. Thérèse also spoke of being in heaven and what she would do from there, "I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love God, of giving my little way to souls. If God answers my desires, my heaven will be spent on earth...I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth." She was convinced that this great desire was of God and that it would be so, for only God could have given her another kind of desire.

Thérèse died of tuberculosis on September 30th, 1887 at the age of twenty-four, just seven years after making her final vows as a Carmelite. A short 28 years later, she was declared a saint of the church. Within two years she was named as a patroness of all missionaries and all missions, along with St. Francis Xavier.

Thérèse spoke of herself as "a little flower gathered by Jesus". In her life story she compared the human spirit to flowers in a field. "Not all can be great like the rose or lily. God created smaller blossoms, like the daisy or violet, that also give joy to God who glances about and sees our wondrous variety and beauty and colors to Christ".

Pray: St. Thérèse, help me to always believe, as you did, in God's great love for me, so that I might imitate your "Little Way" each day. Amen .

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

1. Saint Thérèse faced many difficulties in her early life. She always turned to God. Discuss the importance of leaning on your faith in times of both happiness and sadness.
2. Why do you think Thérèse wanted to be a missionary? What do you think calls people to be missionaries today? Do you think God would call you to be a missionary?
3. Thérèse talked about people being like flowers. What does that mean to you?

Follow-up Activities:

All students:

1. Saint Thérèse is the Patroness of the Missions. Celebrate her life by having a World Mission Rosary Dress-Up Day. Organize each class to dress in a color of the rosary, then come together and pray it! Charge each student \$1 "entrance fee". Donate the proceeds to the Missionary Childhood Association.
2. Saint Thérèse talked about living life in her "Little Way", meaning that she did small tasks with great love and offered them as service to God. Hold a "Little Way Week" in your class. Spend the first week of school doing little things for others—holding the door, carrying groceries, sitting still in class—and praying for others as you do them. Ask God to bless the people you serve. Write down five words at the end each day that describe how you felt.

Younger students:

1. Make flowers in the colors of the World Mission Rosary. Write your five words from "Little Way Week" on your flowers. Display your "Little Way Garden" on a bulletin board.

Older students:

1. Saint Therese was a Carmelite Sister. Invite a professed Religious Sister to speak to your class about her life. Contact Sr. Germana Santos, F.S.P Archdiocesan Delegate for Religious at 617-746-5637 to schedule the visit.