



Saint of the Month



The Mexican Martyrs May 21

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 a group of our Church's contemporary saints, The Mexican Martyrs, telling as much of, or parts of, the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that The Mexican Martyrs are saints because they 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
7. To expand children's vocabulary, as appropriate: Mexico, canonized, suppression, *Cristo Rey*, militia, martyred, homebound, negotiate, persecution, relics

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to the story of The Mexican Martyrs.
2. Read, or have read, the attached story. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. ***Pray: Mexican Martyrs, you chose to give up your lives rather than publicly reject your faith in Jesus Christ. Help us to know that when we are faced with hard choices in our lives that God will give us the grace to make the right decisions and follow Him. We pray that through your story we may grow in strength of faith daily. Amen.***
4. Use the follow-up questions (below).
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

The Mexican Martyrs

On May 21, 2000 Saint Pope John Paul II canonized a group of twenty five men who were executed for continuing to carry out their ministries of Catholic faith during the suppression of the Church in Mexico in the 20th century. Most of them were priests, though a few were lay men. All had a common love and devotion to Christ the King—*Cristo Rey*.

Although Mexico is known for being a Catholic country, many people are not aware that for over 70 years, the Church was officially suppressed there under the anti-clerical laws of then President Calles. This means that the Catholic Church was outlawed; public Mass was forbidden for many years. Even after that ban was lifted, the Church was not allowed to own property or run schools, convents or monasteries. There were only a certain number of priests allowed to be in Mexico at one time, which also meant no missionaries to help spread the faith.

The Church was forced underground. Mass was celebrated in secrecy. It was even illegal for a priest to walk the streets in his collar.

Many Catholics from around the country banded together to form an alliance called the Cristeros; some took up arms to fight against the government. None of The Mexican Martyrs were among them but were accused of being part of the militia. Each was martyred while acting upon his faith—one while bringing Holy Communion to an elderly woman who was homebound, another for refusing to reveal what some Cristeros had revealed in confession. Another was killed simply because he said a prayer for the family that was hiding him.

When Catholic Bishops finally came together with the government to negotiate an end to the persecution, it was agreed that public worship could once again take place. The government did not relinquish control of Church properties, however. Many Cristeros soldiers, though promised pardon, were arrested and hanged.

If President Calles and his government thought that these laws would kill the Church in Mexico, they were mistaken. As was first said by Tertullian, an early Christian author, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Today, Mexico is about 82% Catholic. The faith is practiced publicly. ¡Viva Cristo Rey!

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

1. The Mexican Martyrs were courageous in the face of danger. Does this mean they were not afraid? Name a time you were courageous – were you afraid but used your courage anyway? Why?
2. Sometimes, we may complain about having to go to Mass *every* Sunday. Does it surprise you that people would fight for the right to do so? Why or why not?
3. What would you ask one of the Martyrs about his reasons for sacrificing himself for God?

Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. There were 25 saints canonized as The Mexican Martyrs. Pray a Hail Mary to each one, asking for their intercession in your life so that you may always be courageous in your faith. Go around the classroom and have a different student lead each one. Say the prayers in Spanish if you can!
2. Think of the Mexican Martyrs when you go to Mass on Sunday. Draw a picture of how you would feel if you could not go at all.

Older students:

1. Because Mexico had a new railway system in place at the time of the imposition of the Calles Laws, many Mexicans fled the country and immigrated to the United States in search of religious freedom. Research where they ended up settling and what impact they have made on the Catholic Church.
2. Find out about the upcoming Fortnight for Freedom here in the U.S. at the Bishop’s Conference website: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/fortnight-for-freedom/>
3. The picture on the front of this lesson plan is of the reliquary of seven of The Mexican Martyrs. What is a relic? Why do we revere them?

All students:

1. Many of the Mexican Martyrs who were priests died because they refused to reveal what others had told them in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Assign each class at your school/parish a week to go to Reconciliation before Mass at your parish in honor of the Mexican Martyrs. (Be sure to let your pastor know in advance!)
2. School children in Catholic Schools and Religious Education programs in Mexico are also members of the Missionary Childhood Association! Go to this website: <http://ompemexico.com/obras/iam>. On the bottom right of the page is a photo gallery (Galleria IAM—for *Infancia Misionera*). Watch the slide show and see how our Mexican brothers and sisters are living their MCA (or IAM) membership! They can also be found on Facebook: IAM (Infancia y Adolescencia Misionera) México. *Like us at Pontifical Mission Societies Boston!*