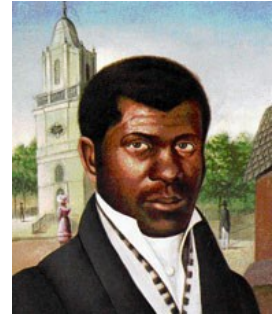




Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Venerable Pierre Toussaint
June 27, 1766 – June 30, 1853

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 someone on the path to sainthood, the Venerable Pierre Toussaint, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Pierre was made venerable 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 the children develop listening skills

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to the Venerable Pierre Toussaint's story
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of the Venerable Pierre Toussaint. Elaborate or abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners
3. ***Please pray: Dear Jesus, the Venerable Pierre Toussaint devoted his life to charitable acts and to serving God. We beg you for his beatification, so that your faithful people everywhere will be inspired to live by his example. Amen.***
4. Use the follow-up questions
5. Present follow-up activity below. (optional) Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Venerable Pierre Toussaint

Pierre Toussaint was born a slave on June 27, 18 1776 in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which is now modern day Haiti. At the time the colony used the land for sugarcane plantations which were farmed by African slaves like Pierre. The plantation on which Pierre worked was owned by Jean Bérard, a Catholic man. Pierre and his sister, Rosaline, were taught to read and write by the family's tutor so they could read the bible. It was uncommon for slaves to be educated.

In 1787, as tensions in Saint-Domingue rose over the rights of slaves, which later lead to the Haitian Revolution, it became dangerous for slave owners. The Bérard Family relocated to New York City and brought their slaves with them.

Once in New York Jean had Pierre apprentice with one of the most popular hairdressers in the city. Pierre had a natural ability and, in combination with his rapport and charisma, he quickly became a favorite among the wealthy people of New York, both blacks and whites. Jean Bérard liked being known as the owner of a popular hairdresser and allowed Pierre to keep his earnings.

When the family fell on hard financial times after Jean Bérard's death, Pierre had saved enough money to take on the responsibility of caring for Madame Bérard and her children. To keep Madame's dignity Pierre remained a slave, even though he was supporting them and using his money to keep up their lavish lifestyle. Pierre would finance family parties, and even be a server to help keep up appearances. He was selfless enough to know that being kind to others is the way God wanted him to live his life. Given his generosity to the family over the years, Pierre was granted his freedom from slavery when Madame Bérard died in 1811; he was 45. Later that year Pierre was able to buy his sister's freedom as well as the freedom of his soon-to-be wife, Juliette Noel.

Pierre quickly became a prominent and well-respected New Yorker. During his time in New York Pierre kept correspondence with people in Saint-Domingue and France and was known to help people immigrate to the city. Being fluent in both French and English he was often asked by officials to translate. He was an active parishioner of Saint Peter's Church and attended Mass there regularly.

When a cholera outbreak struck New York City, Pierre provided aid and nourishment to people who were quarantined. Pierre and Juliette opened up their home to orphan children in the aftermath. They also opened up a credit bureau to loan new immigrants money so they may establish a life for themselves.

He was instrumental in raising money for the construction of the new cathedral in the city, which is now known as Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral, and was a benefactor of Saint Vincent de Paul School, the first Catholic school for black children. Upon his death in 1853, he left his money to a variety of Catholic charities in the city.

At the time of his death Pierre was buried outside Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral. In 1996 when he was made venerable by Pope John Paul II, his remains were transferred to the crypt inside the current Cathedral. He is buried near the Venerable Fulton Sheen, the former national director of the Propagation of the Faith.

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

1. Like the Venerable Pierre Toussaint, you do not have to travel to faraway countries to be a missionary. He chose to be a missionary in his own city. What are some ways you can be a missionary in your own city? What are some ways Missionary Childhood help you be a missionary in your parish, school, and home?
2. The Venerable Pierre Toussaint was born a slave, but later helped the family who owned him when they fell on hard financial times. Why do you think Pierre would help the people who enslaved him?
3. It is a great honor to be buried in the crypt at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, usually reserved for Archbishops of New York. What does this suggest about the Venerable Pierre Toussaint's relationship with the Church?

Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. Venerable Pierre Toussaint and his wife did many charitable acts for the people of their city and modern day Haiti. With the children of Haiti in mind, plan a summer car wash at your school or parish, and donate the money to the Missionary Childhood Association.
2. Being made venerable is the first step in becoming a saint. Archbishop Fulton Sheen was also made venerable. Pray the World Mission Rosary (available for free at our office!) that these two men, whose love of God allowed them to selflessly help others, will become saints. Tell God (and discuss in your class) why you think the Venerable Pierre Toussaint should be a saint.

Older students:

1. Read about what it means to be made venerable. Write a short paper of the process of becoming a saint. Who are some other examples of people waiting to be canonized? Share your report with the class.
2. Research the current situation in Haiti. When did it become free from France and when was slavery abolished? What is life like in Haiti now? Share your findings with the class.

All students:

1. Sometimes it is more important to be kind to others and let them keep their dignity than to be boastful, as Pierre did. This month do kind deeds for others and keep it to yourself. How did it make you feel? For every deed to do put a quarter in your Mite Box and send it to Missionary Childhood to help other children.
2. Contact Missionary Childhood to schedule a speaker about current missionary work being done in Haiti.