

SAINTS AND FEAST DAYS

A Resource and Activity Book



The Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio



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*To Saint Julie Billiart,
spiritual mother of the Sisters of Notre Dame,
in gratitude for her inspiration and example*



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Today we rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place.
—from the Opening Prayer for the Feast of All Saints

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Introduction



Looking at a statue cannot possibly give a true impression of the saints. A statue is cold and immobile, while saints are people of action. Use these stories to help the children glimpse the saints as mothers with children tugging at their skirts, fathers instructing their sons, monks praying late into the night, and preachers traveling the back roads of their countries on foot.

The calendar of saints represents men and women from every walk of life, every period of history, and every part of the world. They became saints because they loved. They remind us that it is possible for us to change and grow in the love of God and of others. Through the power of Jesus working in us all, we can become holy and can help the world come to know and love God. Praying to the saints encourages us to live up to our full potential so that we may join them in eternal life.

We who come after them draw inspiration from their heroic example, look for fellowship in their communion, and in prayer seek their intercession with God on our behalf.

(National Catechetical Directory 107)

All men and women are called to holiness. All of us are called to be close to God, to listen and to pray, to respond to Jesus' teachings, whatever the cost, as did the saints. The saints are our companions; we thank God for the example of their lives that makes Christ more present to us, and we ask their intercession.

Our world is, in some ways, very different from the world of the saints, and, in some ways, very much the same. Some saints lived before the writing of biographies was common. Their stories were passed on by word of mouth, and some were naturally embellished. But the substance of the stories is to be considered true. Legends have grown about some of the saints. This does not mean that they are fictional. It literally means they were "to be read" in the Divine Office and are to be understood in the spirit in which they were written. When reading the lives of the saints, remember that their lives and their deaths give purpose and meaning to ours. When we see how God is glorified in them, we are encouraged to strive ever more eagerly to win the crown of everlasting life.

As you and your students read about the saints, you will see one thing over and over: goodness attracts goodness, love begets love. Just as Jesus did, the saints, even hermits and martyrs, attracted followers. Tertullian, an early Christian theologian, said that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Unlikely as it seems by worldly standards, you will find that it is true—from the first century through the 21st century, in Europe, Africa, North America, South America, and Far East Asia.

People with a mission to teach or preach or cure the sick found they couldn’t do all the work alone. Just as Jesus did, they gathered a group of individuals who shared their ideals and charism and founded religious orders to carry on their good work. Some saints spread the Good News through action (missionaries and social workers), some through words (writers and preachers). Some saints even inspired other saints. A holy person can lead others to sanctity. Let these saints attract your students to goodness and holiness. Let them inspire, awe, console, guide, challenge, and teach the young people in your classroom.

Saint Gregory the Great

September 3

(c. 540–604)

How would you like to be called “the Great?” Try it out: (Your Name), the Great. Today’s saint is Gregory the Great. Read his story to find out why he is called “the great.”

Gregory lived in Rome during a period of wars, invasions by hostile tribes, famine, and destruction. He was the son of Gordianus, a wealthy Roman senator. Like most of the upper class of his time, he was well educated. But unlike many, he was generous and concerned about the poor.

When he was in his early 30s, Gregory was made the chief prefect, or governor, of Rome. He had long been attracted to the religious life, however, and so left his position before very long. He converted the family estate in Rome into the Abbey of St. Andrew, became a monk there, and founded six Benedictine monasteries on his estates in Sicily. His life of quiet and prayer did not last long; for around 578 he was ordained one of the seven deacons of Rome and sent as the papal ambassador to Constantinople, where he served until 585. When he arrived back in Rome, he was made the abbot of St. Andrew’s.

Five years later the pope died, and Gregory was acclaimed pope by the clergy and the people of Rome. Unwillingly Gregory accepted the role. He was the first pope to call himself the “servant of the servants of God.” But Gregory was such a good leader that he became known as Gregory the Great.

Because of his political skill, learning, talents, and deep devotion to God, Gregory was able to make peace with the invading Lombards, save the city from famine by reorganizing the property and granaries of the Church, and restore order within the Church itself. Even though there were tremendous problems in Rome, Gregory was able to look beyond his land to the needs of people in foreign lands. He sent a group of monks to England to teach the faith to the people who lived there. So great was Gregory’s interest in them that he has come to be called the Apostle of England, even though he himself was unable to travel there to preach.

What really made Pope Gregory great? His achievements were many and had a widespread effect, but Gregory became a saint because of his love for God, which was reflected in all that he did.

ACTIVITIES

Saint Gregory the Great / September 3

BRAINSTORM QUALITIES OF HOLINESS

Discuss how Gregory responded to the needs of his time. Ask the students to brainstorm the qualities a person would need today to be considered a great saint.

LISTEN TO GREGORIAN CHANT

Although Gregory's full influence on the music of his day is debatable, he is sometimes credited with the Church's liturgical chant form, the Gregorian chant. Play some samples of Gregorian chant for the students and get their reactions and opinions.

SING A LITURGICAL SONG

Grades K-3: Simply sing one of the children's favorite songs from your parish liturgy.

PRESENT AWARDS

Gregory is known as a patron of teachers, scholars, and singers. Discuss with the students why these areas are especially related to Gregory. Have them make "_____ the Great" medals or certificates for outstanding teachers, students, and singers.

RESEARCH FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

Along with Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, Gregory the Great is considered one of the four Fathers of the Western church. All are included in this book. Have the students discover what is necessary in order to be called a Father of the Church.

VIEW A VIDEO ON MISSION WORK

Gregory supported mission work. During his life he sent groups of monks to evangelize Britain. The practice of sending monks as missionaries was not usual. Show a video on the work being done in the missions today. Many excellent programs are available from the active missionary congregations in the Church.

WRITE TO YOUR BISHOP

In his book *Pastoral Care*, Gregory wrote a powerful description of the qualities and duties of a bishop. Invite the students to find out more about their local bishop. Bring in recent issues of the Catholic newspaper in the diocese and read about some of the activities of the bishop. Encourage the youngsters to respond by writing supportive letters to their bishop.

Catechist's Notes:

Birth of Mary

September 8

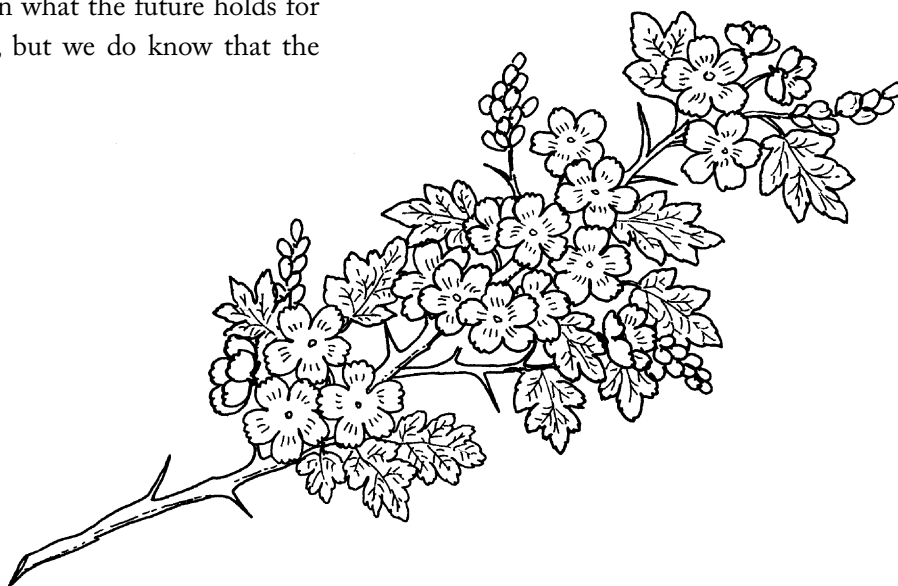
We know that everyone has a birthday. The Bible doesn't say anything about Mary's birth, but we know that she was born. Like all parents, Mary's parents—we call them Joachim and Ann—probably took one look at their newborn daughter and knew that she was special.

Joachim and Ann loved God very much, and they were filled with gratitude to God for the gift of a child. They raised Mary as a child of God, teaching her to love and serve God. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen to be the Mother of Jesus, she already had great faith in God. Her strong faith and trust allowed her to say yes to God's plan for her.

We cannot be certain what the future holds for any newborn infant, but we do know that the

life of each person has meaning and purpose. When Mary was born, the world did not know who she was. Sometimes others—and maybe even you—don't see how special you are. Maybe you forget that God is calling you, too, right now, to do what Mary did—to bring Jesus into the world.

When we celebrate his mother's birth, we honor Jesus too. Today thank God for the gift of life, and give honor to both Mary and Jesus by showing respect and concern for one another—remembering that God has created each person with love and with a call to something very special in life.



ACTIVITIES

Birth of Mary / September 8

PRAY AND SING

With the children, pray the Memorare; Hail, Holy Queen; or Hail Mary. These prayers may be found on the blackline master on page 436.

Close the class with a hymn honoring Mary.

CELEBRATE MARY'S BIRTHDAY

Grades K-3: Bring in cupcakes or another birthday treat for the children. Light a candle and invite them to sing "Happy Birthday" to Mary.

Grades 3-6: Have the students design a Marian candle, using symbols of Mary such as a lily or an M. Use this candle on the prayer table during the year or for feasts of Mary.

Grades 6-8: The date of the feast of the Birth of Mary, September 8, was used to fix the date of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8. This situation also occurs for the conception and birth of Jesus: the Annunciation on March 25 and the Nativity

on December 25. Point this out to the students to reinforce the Church's teaching that life begins at conception.

SHOW ICONS OF MARY

Traditionally this feast is believed to have originated in Jerusalem and was celebrated in the Eastern church before it came to be observed in the Western (sometime around the eighth century). Use this opportunity to share with the students several icons of Mary from the Eastern tradition.

CELEBRATE FEASTS OF MARY

Divide the class into groups, and assign one group to each of the feasts of Mary you plan to celebrate during the school year. Have the students research and present ethnic or national customs honoring Mary. Such presentations may include icons or religious images, samples of music and food characteristic of these celebrations, processions, and so on. Ask the students to be ready to present their plan to you several days before the actual feast.

Catechist's Notes:
