

Heaven's Heroes: growing in the faith, with a little help from the Saints.



This month, we are inspired by:

Saint John de Britto

Feast day:

February 11

Patron saint of:

Portugal, the Catholic Diocese of Sivagangai, Sakthikulangara, and Catholic Archdiocese of Madurai.

Catholics are encouraged to pray for all those working in mission territories, often risking their lives to spread the Gospel in lands that are hostile to Christ and His message of Love.

Goal of this activity:

To inspire in children a love for the saints and helping them understand that we are all called to a life of holiness, inspired by those who came before us, and in whom we can trust to intercede on our behalf when we are struggling.

Materials Needed:

This lesson plan, the accompanying story and prayer card, which we encourage is shared through the parish and/or school's social media accounts if available. Depending on each month's and the age of the students, other materials, such as coloring pencils, might be necessary.

It might be useful to remember, and remind the students...

that a saint is a person who lives like Jesus and teaches others about Jesus with their example. And that even though not only those who have been proclaimed by the Church as saints following their deaths are in Heaven, but the official recognition of sainthood also allows us to venerate them.

With this month's activity we hope...

you will be able to introduce to your students Saint John de Britto, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level.

With this activity, which will help children develop their listening skills, as you are invited to share Saint Bakhita's story with them, we hope that they will learn that John was holy because he lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus, and that we are all called by God to share the Gospel with others.

In the classroom:

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



St. John de Britto

John de Britto was born in Lisbon, Portugal on March 1, 1647 to an influential and aristocratic family. This social standing did not protect them from experiencing personal loss. John's father was the Colonial governor of Brazil and died while serving in that country. His older brother, Christopher, died during a war when John was very young. When John was ten, he fell ill with tuberculosis and doctors feared the worst. His mother, greatly fearing another loss, prayed to Saint Francis Xavier, patron of the missions, to petition for John's healing. John soon recovered and in thanksgiving, his mother dressed him for a year in the vestments worn in those days by the Jesuit Fathers, the order to which St. Francis Xavier belonged.

During this time, John decided to follow in the example of St. Francis Xavier. On December 17, 1662, at the age of fifteen—and against his mother's wishes—he joined the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and began studying at the University of Coimbra, Portugal. Upon finishing his studies, he left his life and family behind to travel as a missionary to India to convert the Hindus of Madurai. When his mother learned of his decision, she used all of her social influence and power to try and prevent him from leaving the country. She even tried to persuade the Papal Nuncio to interfere in the matter. John was determined to travel to India and did so, saying, "God, who called me from the world into religious life, now, calls me from Portugal to India."

Having learned that in eighteen years of attempts, no missionary had reached the kingdom of Maravá,

east of Madurai in southern India, he decided to take on the dangerous business. First, he sent some of his most talented catechists. Then, John himself traveled to Maravá preaching to all who would listen. The goal of the mission was to establish the Catholic Church in India. This was a bold idea at a time: India had not had any exposure to Catholicism and almost no European cultural contact.

When he arrived in Maravá, John realized that he needed to understand the people before he could spread the Gospel to them. He learned the native languages and traveled about dressed in yellow cotton, living like a Hindu, abstaining from every kind of animal food and from wine. He remained a strict vegetarian for the rest of his life. John de Britto tried to teach the Catholic faith in concepts that would make sense to the people he was teaching. John spent fourteen years in India spreading the Gospel using local customs. He baptized many people.

John de Britto's preaching converted a prince in Maravá who had multiple wives. The prince agreed to dismiss all but one, causing a furor with a neighboring king who happened to be the uncle of one of the wives let go. He ordered the persecution of Christians in his kingdom in retribution, burning churches and looting the houses of the faithful. John and his catechists were arrested. They died for their faith on February 11, 1693.

John de Britto was canonized on June 22, 1947 by Pope Pius XII

Pray

Saint John de Britto, you followed the path God laid before you even when it meant going against the wishes of people you loved, changing the way you lived, and risking your life. Give us the courage to live as you did: putting God's will first as we serve and love others. Amen.

Follow-up Activities:

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

1. Saint John de Britto relied on God's plan for his life—his vocation. How did he know what that was? How can you know what God has in mind for you?
2. What famous person can you name who is also a Jesuit and has ties to the date December 17th?
3. Why was it important for John to live as the local people of India and know their languages before he introduced them to the Gospel?

Follow-up Activities:

1. Come to class dressed as your favorite saint –as Saint John de Britto dressed as a Jesuit! Pay \$1 to the missions for the privilege of coming to class in costume.
2. Saint John de Britto travelled approximately 5,641 miles from Lisbon, Portugal to Madurai, India to spread the Good News. During the month of February, challenge your class to raise 1 penny for every mile he travelled: \$56.41. Brainstorm ways to this—give up candy or snacks and save the money, redeem bottles and cans, have a bake sale, host a read-a-thon—you are only limited by you imagination!
3. Saint John de Britto's family had ties to three different countries: Portugal, Brazil, and India. What countries are you families from? Make a list of all the different countries represented in your class and pray the World Mission Rosary. Name those countries when you come to the corresponding continent color on the rosary.

Other suggestions

1. Pray a living World Mission Rosary for modern-day martyrs everywhere. Dress in the colors of the different continents to make a statement that you stand with the millions of Christians worldwide whose lives are at risk for following Christ.
2. Reflect on these words by Pope Francis: "The age of martyrs is not yet over, even today we can say, in truth, that the Church has more martyrs now than during the first centuries. The Church has many men and women who are maligned through calumny, who are persecuted, who are killed in hatred of Jesus, in hatred of the faith: some are killed because they teach the catechism, others are killed because they wear the cross ... Today, in many countries, they are maligned, they are persecuted ... they are our brothers and sisters who are suffering today, in this age of the martyrs."