

Lesson Plans that Work
Martin of Tours
Lesson Plans for Older and Younger Children
Feast Day, November 11

Martin of Tours
c. 330-397

The saints are “the lights of the world in every generation,” people whose lives and deeds have shone brightly and helped others more closely follow God. There are saints who lived long ago and there are saints living and working in the world today, saints who are known by the church and saints who are known only to God. We say that the church—we—are part of the Communion of Saints, the company of all faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those who are alive now, and those who haven’t yet been born. The word “saint” means holy.

In the Episcopal Church we have a Calendar of Saints, holy men and women we remember in prayer and with readings from the Bible on their feast day.

Supplies needed: white cloth for prayer table, a candle. For older children: a Bible, poster board and markers, copier paper and pens. For younger children: mason jars or jam jars, yellow and orange tissue paper, glue or ModPodge, brushes, votive candles (battery-operated or real), wire to fashion handles if desired.

Prepare: Prepare your prayer/gathering space with a small table, or space with a piece of cloth. On this cloth place a white candle. You may wish to place an image of Martin on the table.

Welcoming the children: Gather the children around the prayer space and ask some wondering questions: I wonder what kind of person is called a saint? I wonder what the work of a saint might be? (You may wish to share the introduction above.) Today we will hear the story of Saint Martin of Tours.

Light the candle.

Opening prayer: Jesus, your saints are the lights of the world in every generation. Help us to shine as they do, letting your light glow in us that through us others might see you. Amen.

Tell the story:

Martin of Tours was the son of a soldier in the Roman Army of the fourth century (about 1700 years ago). He was born in what is now Hungary, grew up in Italy and first attended church at the age of ten, against his parents’ wishes. When Martin was fifteen, he was required to join the army himself and served in Amiens, France. One winter night, he saw a beggar at the city gates shivering with cold. Martin had no money to give him, but he took off his heavy cloak and sliced it in half with his sword, giving half to the beggar. That night, Jesus came to Martin in a dream, wrapped in half of Martin’s cloak. Martin’s biographer, who knew him personally, wrote that the

next day Martin “flew to be baptized!” The piece of cloak that Martin kept was saved and much later, French kings swore oaths on it and carried it into battle. The words chapel and chaplain both come from the French word that means little cloak for the little temporary churches that were used to hold the cloak and for the priest who took care of it. Eventually, all priests who served in the military caring for soldiers were called chaplains, and small churches everywhere became known as chapels. Martin, however, decided that he could not be both a soldier and a follower of Jesus. Accused of being a coward, he was put in jail. Martin volunteered to stand between the two fighting troops without a weapon to show that he was not afraid, but he was released when a peace agreement was signed. He founded the first monastery in Europe and was elected Bishop of Tours. At first he didn’t want to become bishop, and he hid in a barn full of geese, but their honking gave him away and he reluctantly agreed. Some people thought he shouldn’t become bishop—because his hair was so messy! Martin was especially dedicated to freeing prisoners and rulers sometimes refused to see him when he came because they knew he would talk them into releasing their captives. He is remembered today as the patron of all those who serve in the military, and the day of his death, November 11, is also Veteran’s Day when we honor those who have fought for the protection of others.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what part of Martin’s story you like best?
- I wonder what part of Martin’s story you think is the most important?
- I wonder what part of Martin’s story is also about you?

You may move to another space with tables for the activity time.

Activity for Older Children: One of the readings for Martin of Tours is Isaiah 58:6-12. Have the children read verses 6-9a aloud from the Bible.

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator* shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.

⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Invite the children to help the parish plan a coat drive. They can make posters to put around the church and the neighborhood giving a date, time and place for the collection of gently-used clean coats for men, women and children that will then be distributed through a community program or

thrift shop. Use the copier paper for the children to design flyers with the same information that can be photocopied and displayed in the community or scanned and emailed. Talk together about other ways to serve those in need, particularly veterans.

Activity for younger children: In the Middle Ages, Advent began with the Feast of St. Martin and lasted for 40 days until Christmas, just like Lent, the season that prepares us for Easter. In Europe, children still make lanterns on St. Martin's Day as the night comes early to carry his light and the light of Christ into the darkness. Let the children tear pieces of yellow and orange tissue paper. Then give each child a jar to cover in watered-down glue or ModPodge. Layer the tissue paper onto the jar, and cover with another coat of glue. Place a candle inside the jar for the family to light at home at dinnertime. You may wish to send home a copy of the prayer that begins the lesson.

Prayer for Martin of Tours: Lord God of hosts, who clothed your servant Martin the soldier with the spirit of sacrifice, and set him as a bishop in your Church to be a defender of the catholic faith: Give us grace to follow in his holy steps, that at the last we may be found clothed with righteousness in the dwellings of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer for Younger Children:

Dear God, (Dear God),
may we with your help (may we with your help)
follow Martin (follow Martin)
caring for those in need, (caring for those in need)
living peacefully ,(living peacefully)
and all for Jesus' sake (and all for Jesus' sake)
Amen. (Amen.)

Written by: Wendy Claire Barrie

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