

EDUCATION MINISTRIES

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What is a Saint? and What do Saints do?



"In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love." St. Teresa of Calcutta

As you recall, last Sunday we celebrated All Saints Day. This is an important day in our church. At preschool, we try every year to balance the kids' excitement for Halloween with this significant day. Given that the world around them is full of spooky decorations, lots of candy, and costume choices, it is not always easy to keep the scales balanced. As Catholic educators, we recognize, however, how crucial it is to teach our students about the saints.

Our teachers use creativity in combination with expertise to bring the saints "to life" for our preschoolers. They often utilize stories and art projects to begin and expand on their lessons. As I have written in previous articles, young children will learn and remember what they are taught better when they can relate to or have had experience with the new material. Because we always celebrate the feast of St. Francis with our preschoolers, this is often a good starting point. The children can pull from what they learned about St. Francis and add it to the new information. Learning about St. Joseph, Jesus' father, or St. Anne, His grandmother, are also good connections as most of our students have a family with at least one or the other. St. Nicholas is a favorite one to learn about at Christmas time. Many teachers add the stories of St. Valentine and St. Patrick as

well. All of these well-known saints can provide a strong beginning idea for who a saint is and what they did to show how much they loved Jesus. Having images of these saints already in their imaginative repertoire helps our preschoolers better understand less familiar saints. What other saints can you discuss at home based on everyday life? I know that my two children learned early all about St. Anthony, the patron saint of lost things, because it was easy for their mother to lose things!

As many classes were focusing particularly on saints last week, I posed a few questions to some of our preschoolers. They were: What is a saint? and What do saints do? I enjoyed hearing their enthusiastic answers. Following are just a few: Thomas, one of our older 2-year olds: A saint is..."one of the statues that you see at church and Jesus is there." He clearly has been observant on his occasions to church! From one of our 3 year olds, Joey: "They pray." We know this is true! Evelyn, a 4-year old: They "help people & love people." A 5-year old, James said, "They bring messages from God." While I appreciated all of their thoughts and on-target answers, I think, Miles, another 4-year old, said it best: Saints are... "maybe us!" In Fr. Jairo's homily last week, he said that we are all called

to be saints; we are all called to be holy people of God. We have a responsibility to emphasize with our children that they too can be a saint. One of the beautiful things about our Catholic preschool is that we are already setting our students on the path of learning how to be a saint. We do this in lots of ways including by teaching them to help and love people, by teaching them to pray, and by teaching them about church among other things.

The above quote from St. Teresa further reiterates that it's not necessarily what we do, but rather how we do it. I interpret her words to mean that even our youngest people can make a big difference by performing just small acts. Little things can help keep you on the path to following Jesus. Ms. Mili, one of our teachers, summed it up when she said that it is essential to teach our children about saints because they provide a role model for how we should really live our lives and stay close to Jesus. May we always remember in all that we think, do, and say that God loves us and wants us to share His love with others!

To learn more about the wonderful opportunities that we provide, please visit our website at: preschoolatstfrancis.com or contact Shelley Freeman at: shelley.freeman@stfrancisraleigh.org