Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Why This Saint?
Mother Teresa is perhaps one of the most recognized persons in the world. However, very young children may not know her. Even while she lived, people knew she was a holy person. Her selfless love shown through her care for the poor in India is well documented. For your children, the importance of this saint lies especially in her prayer life and her selfless care for others through her work with the poorest of people.

Lessons to Be Learned
- To discover that there are people in the world today who do not have enough to eat or a bed to sleep in or even water to wash with
- To learn that prayer can strengthen and help us through the day
- To persever in obedience as well as in listening to God’s voice
- To learn that real giving means going beyond what is extra, giving up what you want

Symbols Mark the Saint
White sari: The sari represents the common dress of Indian women; Mother Teresa did not wish to separate herself from people but to show she was one of them.
Blue stripes: The color blue is in honor of Mary, our Mother.
Bowl of rice: This shows that we can give even when we don’t have much.

Using This Saint
See general instructions common for all the saints (pp.2-5).
As an alternative to Acting Out the Story, the children might enjoy reenacting the rice story. Instead of rice, start out with a big bowl of popcorn. Read the story. Then ask the children to pretend the popcorn is their meal for the day. Show them how much there is. They will feel pretty certain they have more than enough. Divide it in half, then in half again, then again. Continue until there is very little left per person. Remind them about the part of the story about the Indian woman who gave half of her rice to her starving friend, even though her children were very hungry, too. You can compare this to the gospel example where Jesus praises the poor widow who puts two coins into the offering box (Luke 21:1–4).
Acting Out the Story

Figures: Sister Teresa (copy Saint Thérèse without roses and cross, p.131), Bishop (copy from Juan Diego, p.83), Mother Teresa, Buhkti

If you choose to use the figures to tell the story, here are some suggestions. Either you or the children can make one or more of each of the figures and attach them to popsicle sticks or dowels. Have the children hold their characters up and put them down at the places indicated in the story. Older children might make the characters act out the “actions”; for example, where the characters in the story are walking, have the figures “walk” (move back and forth); when the characters are talking, have the figures face each other and move up and down slightly; and so on.

Story

Mother Teresa was never a mother, that is, she never had any children of her own. But people all over the world call her mother. Do you know why? Because mothers take care of their children. People all over the world felt that Mother Teresa was taking care of them.

(Hold up Sister Teresa) Teresa became a nun when she was eighteen years old. Agnes was her baptismal name. For a long time, she was a teacher. Later she believed God was calling her to live with and care for some of the very poorest people in the world, in India. So Teresa went to the bishop to ask his permission.

(Hold up Bishop) “Bishop,” asked Teresa, “I wish to move into the poor hovels in the slums of India.”

“Why? Why would you leave your nice bed and good food to live where it smells. There are many diseases,” said the bishop.

“Because that is where I’m needed the most, Bishop. I can help the people there. I can teach them to care for themselves. I can teach them to read. Most of all, I can tell them about Jesus’ love for them,” Sister Teresa replied.

The bishop didn’t want to lose Sister Teresa, but he believed what she was saying was true.

“All right, Sister Teresa, you may leave your convent and live as you request. God bless you in your work,” he said. (Put down Teresa and Bishop)

Teresa did not want to wear her habit in the slums. She decided to wear the kind of dress that Indian women wear, called a sari. Teresa added some blue stripes to the sari to remind her of our Blessed Mother Mary.

For many years, Teresa helped the poor. She taught them hygiene. She taught them how to read and write by using the dirt on the ground for a chalkboard. And she taught them to love Mary and Jesus.

Other young woman came to work with Teresa. She was then called Mother Teresa.

(Hold up Mother Teresa and Buhkti) One day, Mother Teresa made a bowl of rice for a woman named Buhkti, whose husband had just died. The poor woman had eight children and no food. So, Mother Teresa walked with this big bowl of rice to the hovel that the woman and her eight children lived in.
“I am so sorry to hear about the death of your husband,” said Mother Teresa as she put down the bowl of rice on a stool near the floor. “He is with God now,” she said.

“Yes, Mother Teresa, I know he is with God. I miss him very much, but I know that Jesus continues to take care of me and our children. Look how he cares for me! He lets you come into my home with food!” Buhkti gave Mother Teresa a big hug.

(Have both figures “walk” to another place) Then the woman did something very curious. She picked up the bowl of rice and went outside. Mother Teresa followed her. Buhkti went to the door of the next hovel and pushed it gently with the toe of her sandal. When the door opened, Mother Teresa could see another woman inside that hovel. Around her were several young children.

“Hello, Marat,” said Buhkti. “See, I have come with food for you and your children!” She walked over to a low table and scooped half of the rice into a large empty platter that was there. Then she smiled at Marat and left the hovel. Mother Teresa followed.

(Have figures “walk” back) When they were back at Buhkti’s hovel, Mother Teresa said, “I see that you follow what Jesus taught very well, Buhkti. You give not only from your heart but from what you need. There was no extra rice in that bowl. You and your children could have eaten that food for two days instead of one. But you thought of your neighbor as yourself.”

Then Mother Teresa hugged Buhkti again and smiled as she walked out the door. (Put down Mother Teresa and Buhkti)

Mother Teresa was beatified in 2003.

Prayer

Dear Mother Teresa, teach me to give as Buhkti did, as you did all your life. When I have a chance to give something to a needy person, help me do it generously and with all my heart. Amen.

Words to Know

* Bishop: a priest who has been called and ordained to lead and serve other priests and people of a diocese
* Disease: sickness
* Convent: a place where nuns live
* Nun: a woman who gives her life and life’s work to Jesus
* Habit: a uniform that nuns wear
* Slums: where many poor people live
* Hovel: a hut or poor home