

Family Sunday School

Lesson 1 - Saint Francis of Assisi

Introduction: We begin our series, "Saints and Celebrations," with an introduction to St. Francis. The way he led his life inspires us to be humble in our journey of life. Saints are not perfect. Saints are real people, sometimes revered by the Church for their acts or belief, sometimes impacting lives on the margins and out of view from the spotlight. Saints remind us that we are not alone on our spiritual journey. We have them to look to, inspire us, and help us to see and honor the holy around and within.

Start the Fun!

Drawing

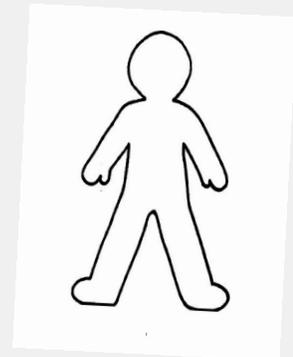
An Arrogant Person

On a piece of paper, draw an outline of a person. Label the figure Mr. or Miss Arrogant. Draw on clothing or accessories to represent arrogance, such as a crown, a foam finger saying, "I'm #1" or a shirt that says, "I Rock" or "I'm with stupid." Draw thought bubbles and speech bubbles around the figure and fill them with suggestions from children about what an arrogant person would think and say. Children may include phrases such as "I'm better than you" or "Ha ha. I won!"



A Humble Person

Use another outline to create Mr. or Miss Humble. What would this person say about others when they win a game or do better on an assignment? How could they give God credit for their success?



Read together

A Story About St. Francis

Have you ever wished you could talk to the animals? It is believed that St. Francis could. but this is not why he was made a saint.

St. Francis was born in 1182, in Assisi, Italy, while his father was away in France. His mother baptized him shortly after his birth, naming him after St. John the Baptist. When his father returned he was angry—naming his son after a saint!

“I want my son to be a wealthy cloth merchant like I am,” believed his father. So he renamed his son Francesco after the country of France which he loved.

Growing up young Francis had everything he could want, and as a teenager he led a sinful life. But he felt something was missing.

St. Francis began to pray. One day while he was out riding his horse, he spied a dirty leper who smelled bad. What would you do if you met someone who was very sick and smelled? Well, St. Francis got down off his horse and gave this man a kiss on the hand. This surprisingly made St. Francis delightfully happy. As he rode off on his horse he glanced back. The man had disappeared!

“That must have been a test,” thought Francis. “A year ago I would have turned my horse away from that man and ignored him.” St. Francis regularly went to a crumbling church to pray. One day, he heard Jesus talking to him from the crucifix.

“Repair my church,” Jesus said. Believing he was to fix this old church, St. Francis gave a bunch of his family money for repairs. This made his father angry. “Give me back that money, Francis!” demanded his father. In response, Francis declared that he was no longer part of the family, and he didn’t want any of his inheritance.

“I give back everything you have given me father, even the clothes on my body,” said St. Francis.

St. Francis then led the life of a beggar and served God. St. Francis and his friends rebuilt the tiny ruined church for the shepherds and other poor people to worship in. Eventually he established an order of monks. Followers of St. Francis usually lead simple lives without much money and try to help the poor.

Discuss:

Explain: St. Francis was really struck by God's humility. He appreciated that God gave up his divinity, or godliness, to be Jesus, a human. In order to honor God's sacrifice, St. Francis lived a life of poverty. *Ask:* What could you give up, for one day, to see what it is like to understand God's sacrifice this way? Imagine what it would be like to give up everything you have for the rest of your life!



Discuss: St. Francis was impressed by the "3 C's" of Jesus' life: crib, cross and chalice. The crib reminds us that Jesus was born in a lowly stable. The cross reminds us Jesus was willing to experience death like a human, even though He didn't have to. The chalice reminds us of Communion, where Jesus humbles himself by taking the form of simple bread. In order to remind us of Jesus' modest birth, St. Francis created the first creche like we use at Christmas and he wanted us to focus on the simplicity of it.

Ask: If Jesus had been born in a fancy house to wealthy parents, how would that have changed his understanding of people's needs?

Related video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtSvwOOOTBI>

St. Francis is credited with the quote, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words." What does this mean? How does the video relate to this quote?

Pray

Think of something that you do well. Give God and others credit for your abilities, rather than yourself. Thank God for your gifts in this area. Thank God for parents and teachers who have given you the chance to participate in the activity.

Participate

According to a biography of St. Francis, the only treat he indulged in were some honey almond cakes (or cookies) that a Roman noblewoman would make him when he went to visit the Pope. This recipe might create a cookie something like those he enjoyed.

INGREDIENTS FOR HONEY ALMOND CAKES

- Mostaccioli - An Italian almond pastry
- 1 pound blanched almonds (These are almonds without the skins. You can buy them blanched or blanch them yourself. Search “How to blanch almonds” online.)
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon, or 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 egg whites, lightly beaten
- Approximately 1 cup of flour
- Almond extract (optional)
- Melted chocolate (optional)



Directions

Chop the almonds very fine or coarsely grind in a blender

In a bowl combine the nuts, honey, cinnamon, and egg whites. Mix thoroughly. Gradually stir in enough flour to form a thick paste. *(The person who posted this recipe added: "I suggest adding a splash of almond extract to punch up the flavor of the almonds in the dough.")*

On a lightly floured surface, knead the paste until smooth and stiff. Roll out to about 1/4 inch. Cut into diamond shapes, about 2 1/2 inches long. Place the diamonds on a lightly buttered and floured baking sheet.

Let dry for 1 to 2 hours.

Bake in a preheated 250°F oven for 20-30 minutes or until set. Do not let brown.

These cookies are often dipped in chocolate but chocolate came to Italy from the New World after Columbus discovered the Americas, so St. Francis wouldn't have enjoyed them this way. Since he mostly lived on bread and water, it is surprising he allowed himself to eat these cookies even in their most plain form.

Yield: about 3 dozen
(from A Continual Feast by Evelyn Birge Vitz)

Wrap Up

God loves you and isn't asking you to give up everything you have to show your own devotion. However, loving our possessions can get in the way of loving God. At times it is a good idea to give up some of our time or wealth for the people God loves.

Take a Moment to Breathe

Starfish Breath

Hold your palm out and stretch out your fingers like they are a star. Starting on the left, use the pointer finger of your other hand to trace the five fingers on your hand. Breathing slowly through your nose, breathe in as you trace up toward your fingernail, breathe out as you trace down toward your palm. As you trace your fingers, focus on the sensation of touch and your breath. Repeat 2 to 3 times on each hand.

