



Goal: To provide a lesson for students about a Saint who exemplified a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others

Materials Needed: This lesson plan, accompanying story and any necessary materials for follow up activities

Objectives:

1. To assist students in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
2. To help students respond appropriately to the question: *What is a Saint?*
A Saint is one who:
 - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
 - teaches others about Jesus by their example
 - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's Saints, Saint Juan Diego, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the students at your grade level
4. To learn that Juan Diego was a saint because he lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus

Procedure:

1. Prepare the students to listen to Juan Diego's story. A map or globe would be helpful to have available.
2. Read, or have a student or leader read, the attached **Story of Saint Juan Diego**. Elaborate or abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. Ask the follow-up reflection questions found below
4. Present follow-up activity or another follow-up activity can be substituted. Have the students come up with one on their own.

The Story of Saint Juan Diego

Juan Diego was born in an area of Mexico that is just north of modern day Mexico City. His original native name, *Cuauhtlatoatzin*, means "one who talks like an eagle". Historians describe him as a poor man—one that did not belong to the ruling or educated class. He was not, however, a slave or servant. Juan was known to be a hard worker. He owned a small piece of land on which he built a house and farmed. He also made mats out of local cactus fibers to support himself and his wife. When he was about 50 years old, he was baptized into the Catholic faith by one of the first Franciscan Missionaries to reach Mexico. He was given the Christian name Juan—Spanish for John. Juan was very devoted to his faith, and walked 14 miles several times a week to attend Mass.

Being a poor man, Juan walked barefoot, clothed in a cape, or *tilma*, made of fibers from the maguey cactus. This material is similar to rope and somewhat uncomfortable to wear; only the wealthy had access to cotton.

It was during one of these walks that Juan first encountered a beautiful young woman dressed like an Aztec princess. She told Juan that she was the Virgin Mary and that she wanted a church to be built on the spot where they stood. She asked Juan to bring that message to his local Bishop [also named Juan], Most Reverend Juan de Zumarraga. Juan delivered the message but the Bishop was skeptical—*why would the Blessed Mother appear to one so lowly?* He asked for proof that it was truly Mary. As Juan was preparing to meet again with the beautiful Lady, he got word that his beloved uncle was gravely ill. He felt guilty for disobeying the bishop but hurried to see his uncle, avoiding the route where he had met Mary. She found Juan as he traveled, assured him that his uncle was cured and told him to go to the hillside to gather flowers in his tilma as proof of her true identity.

Juan gathered roses—*flowers that never grew in that area*—and presented them to the Bishop as a gift from Mary. As he opened his tilma and the flowers spilled out, everyone was amazed that the image of Mary herself was imprinted on his cloak. Juan's tilma hangs to this day in the Basilica that was built as the Blessed Mother instructed.

Juan lived out his life in a hut built next the church. He died at age 74 and was canonized in 2002. He was the first indigenous American Saint.

Saint Juan Diego

Prayer for the Intercession of Saint Juan Diego

Happy Juan Diego, true and faithful man!

We entrust to you our brothers and sisters so that, feeling the call to holiness, they may permeate every area of life with the spirit of the Gospel.

Bless families, strengthen spouses in their marriage, sustain the efforts of parents to give their children a Christian upbringing.

Look with favor upon the pain of those who are suffering in body or spirit, on those afflicted by poverty, loneliness, marginalization or ignorance.

May all people... always act in accordance with the demands of justice and with respect for the dignity of each person, so that in this way peace may be reinforced. **Amen.**

Prayer by written St. John Paul II



Follow-up Questions: [Add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level]

1. Saint Juan Diego was a humble man. Why is it not surprising that Mary appeared to someone so “lowly”?
2. Juan didn’t give up when the Bishop did not believe him and asked for a sign that he had truly seen Mary. How does it feel to be questioned when you know you are right or telling the truth?
3. Juan tried to hide from the Blessed Mother and visit his sick uncle. Discuss how often we think we may “be hiding” from God.

Follow-up Activities:

For Younger Students:

1. Juan took a walk and found a miracle—roses! Take a walk with your class and give a prayerful bouquet to children in the Missions: pray the World Mission Rosary as you walk. Keep your eyes open for the miracle of God’s work in nature!
2. When Mary appeared to Saint Juan Diego as Our Lady of Guadalupe, she looked like a Mexican women—just as the Saint would have expected. Draw a picture of what you think Mary would look like if she appeared to you and your family. Compare them in class and discuss the differences or similarities.

For Older Students:

1. Saint Juan Diego was a convert to the faith. Ask your pastor to arrange a visit to your class from a person who has gone through the parish RCIA program and become a Catholic. Find out what the process is like from someone who has made that faith journey as an adult.

For All Students:

1. Saint Juan Diego was chosen to be a messenger. His tilma was his sign. All Missionaries are God’s messengers—that means we are, too! Create your own tilma as a sign to the world about how much you love God and His people. Use a brown paper bag as the boy pictured here did.
2. Though it was rarely done in those days, Saint Juan Diego went to Mass more than once a week, walking fourteen miles each way [*barefoot!*] to get there. Many people in the Missions today do not have that option due to lack of priests and chapels. Ideas on reflecting on Saint Juan Diego’s walk to Mass regularly:
 - Ask your parents to help you measure the distance from your house to your parish church. Make a sacrifice to the missions for each mile [or foot if you live close by!] you count.
 - Consider, instead of buying an additional new pair of shoes or sneakers for yourself, donating that money to a Missionary student half a world away, in honor of Saint Juan Diego and his walking barefoot to Church.
 - Go to Mass more than once a week through Advent or December.
 - Thank you Pastor for brining Mass to your community on a daily basis [*and everything else He does!*]

