

SAINT OF THE MONTH



Venerable Pierre Toussaint



Heaven's Heroes: growing in faith with a little help from the saints

This month, we are inspired by

Venerable Pierre Toussaint

Feast Day

None yet.

Feast days are set upon beatification

Declared Venerable

1996 by Saint John Paul II

Catholics are encouraged to pray to the saints, blessed, and venerable people for strength and guidance. Reading about their lives can serve as inspiration to us for our daily lives. May the following lesson, follow-up questions, prayer, and activities bring us closer to Jesus and help us to grow as missionary disciples.

Goals of the Lesson:

- To inspire children to have a love for saints
- To help students understand that we are all called to holiness
- To teach children to turn to saints in prayer

Materials Needed:

- This lesson plan
- A map or globe
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers for coloring project

It may be helpful to remind students that a saint is a person who lived their lives in a way that honored Jesus' teaching and by doing so, taught others about Him. Also, it is important for them to know that it is not only those whom the Church has proclaimed a saint who are in Heaven. The official recognition simply allows us to venerate them.

In the Classroom

Prepare students to listen to Venerable Pierre's story by inviting them to remember that he was holy because he lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus. Read or have read, as much or as little of the story as you deem appropriate for children of your grade level.

Use the suggested follow-up questions to begin or to enhance your discussions about Venerable Pierre Toussaint.



Venerable Pierre Toussaint



Pierre Toussaint was born enslaved on June 27, 1776 in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which is now modern day Haiti. He was the third generation of his family to be owned by another person, as his grandfather had been captured in Africa and brought to Haiti against his will. At the time, the French used the Haitian land for sugarcane plantations which were farmed by African slaves. Pierre, however, was a “house slave”; he did not work in the fields. He served the family in the home.

The plantation on which Pierre worked was owned by a Catholic man named Jean Bérard. Pierre and his sister, Rosaline, who was also enslaved, were taught to read and write by the family’s tutor so that they could read the bible. It was uncommon for slaves to be educated.

In 1787, as tensions in Saint-Domingue rose over the rights of slaves to be free, it became dangerous for slave owners to stay in the country. As a slave-led rebellion exploded, the Bérard Family relocated to New York City and brought their slaves with them.

Once in New York, Jean had Pierre apprentice with one of the most popular hairdressers in the city. Pierre had a natural ability and, in combination with his natural charisma, he quickly became a favorite among the wealthy people of the city, both black and white. Jean Bérard liked being known as the owner of a popular hairdresser and allowed Pierre to keep his earnings.

Jean Bérard returned to Haiti, where he died, leaving his wife Marie with no income. With his own savings and salary, Pierre took on the responsibility of supporting the family, while still being their slave. He was a selfless person and felt that being kind to others was the way God wanted him to live his life.

Pierre was given his freedom when Madame Bérard died in 1811. He took the surname of Toussaint, likely in honor of Toussaint Louverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution. Later that year, Pierre was able to buy his sister’s freedom as well as the freedom of his soon-to-be wife, Juliette Noel. They would go on to adopt his orphaned niece.

Pierre quickly became a prominent and well-respected New Yorker. During his time in New York, Pierre kept correspondence with people in Saint-Domingue and France and was known to help people immigrate to the city. Being fluent in both French and English he was often asked by officials to translate documents. He and his wife also opened up a credit bureau to loan new immigrants money so they may establish a life for themselves.

Urged to retire and enjoy a more leisurely life with his wife the wealthy Toussaint replied, “I have enough for myself, but if I stop working I have not enough for others.”

Pierre was an active, generous parishioner of Saint Peter’s Church in Manhattan and attended Mass there regularly. He also gave a great deal of money to help build the original St. Patrick’s Cathedral. The story is told that on the day of its dedication, Pierre went to the church for the celebration. But, because he was black, an usher would not let him in. Pierre, who had given so much for the cathedral’s building, apologized and turned to leave. But another usher recognized him and immediately brought him to a seat of honor.

Venerable Pierre Toussaint died at the age of 87 after a lifetime of helping others. He is buried beneath the altar of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, alongside Cardinals and Archbishops.



Venerable Pierre Toussaint



Pray

Dear Jesus, Venerable Pierre Toussaint did not allow his heart to be filled with anger and hatred, even when he was enslaved. Instead, he devoted his life to charitable acts and to serving God. We pray for his beatification, so that Your faithful people everywhere will be inspired to live by his example. Amen.

Think

1. Like Venerable Pierre Toussaint, you do not have to travel to faraway countries to be a missionary. He chose to be a missionary in his own city. How can you be a missionary in your own city, parish, school, or home? How does Missionary Childhood help you?
2. Venerable Pierre Toussaint was born a slave, but later helped the family who "owned" him when they fell on hard financial times. Why do you think he did it?
3. It's a great honor to be buried in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, usually reserved for Archbishops of New York. Why does Venerable Pierre Toussaint deserve it?

Act

All students: Sometimes it's more important to be quietly kind to others and let them keep their dignity as Pierre did, rather than be boastful. This month do good deeds for others and keep it to yourself. How did it make you feel? For every deed you do, put a donation in your Mite Box or classroom Mission Bank so Missionary Childhood can help other children.

Younger students:

Venerable Pierre Toussaint is pictured holding his hairdressing scissors in the shape of a cross. Draw a picture of yourself holding something that represents how you live your faith - even if it's as unlikely as a pair of scissors! (Use our template if you need help!) Can you guess whose picture is whose?



*Venerable
Pierre Toussaint*

