

SAINT OF THE MONTH



Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi



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

This month, we are inspired by
Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi

Feast Day
January 20

Beatified
1998 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 - even the saints didn't know they would become one!
- To teach children to turn to saints in prayer

Materials Needed:

- This lesson plan
- A map or globe
- An open heart

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 Blessed Iwene Tansi'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 of the story as you deem appropriate for children of your grade level.

Use the suggested follow-up questions to begin or enhance your discussions about Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi.



Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi



Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi was the first born child of his non-Catholic family, in 1903. His father named him Iwene, which translates to “Let malice not kill”. Iwene’s mother died after giving birth to a second son. His father remarried and the family was joined by four more boys and a girl. Although young Iwene was permanently blinded in one eye as a youngster during a mud fight with another child, he would let his name be his life’s motto — *he did not let anger get the best of his heart or soul.*

Iwene’s Dad was determined that his son would grow up and get a good job to help lift the family out of poverty. So, when he was six years old, Iwene was sent to live with his aunt, a Christian, in a village where a better education was available.

Iwene’s new school was run by Irish Spiritan missionaries who taught him about our Catholic faith. Within three years, Iwene was baptized and took the Christian name of Michael. He loved serving as an altar boy and a catechist to other students.

When Michael graduated from school, he became a teacher and later the headmaster (principal) of a school. He was known to be very strict and a bit of a perfectionist. During this time, Michael felt God calling him to serve him as a priest. Michael’s father was appalled that his son would think about entering the seminary—he was expected to earn a good salary to help the family, not become a priest with no income!

Michael trusted that God would care for all of them and entered the seminary where he developed a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Mother.

Once ordained, Father Michael became the first native priest in the area. This was especially important because local boys could now see a path to the priesthood - they had the example of one of their own!

Father Michael was known to live very simply and to be extremely hard-working. He taught local people new techniques of home building with adobe and mud bricks.

People loved their new pastor for his kindness. Father Michael stood up for the oppressed, especially women. He encouraged them to stand up to anyone who would mistreat them and established homes for unmarried women where they could live peaceably until their marriage.

While serving at his last parish, which was in his hometown, Father Michael became less strict and more internally prayerful. He felt God calling him to a new way of life. When the local bishop announced he was looking for volunteers to travel to England to study so that they could start a monastery in Nigeria — encouraging a life of simple work and prayer — Father Michael volunteered immediately and was sent.

As a novice, Father Michael took the name Cyprian, after a Roman martyr. He worked in the kitchen, garden, and bookbindery at simple tasks of service. One of his teachers could be demanding and now-Father Cyprian recalled the times that he may have been overly strict and asked for God’s forgiveness.

Father Cyprian was to return to Africa to help start a Trappist monastery in Cameroon but fell ill. He died on January 20, 1964 of heart trouble.

He was beatified by Saint John Paul II on March 22, 1998, at Oba, Nigeria, becoming the first West African to be “Blessed” in the Catholic Church.



Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi



Pray

Dear God, you chose Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi to be an example of holiness and humility. Help me to spread faith in you everywhere I go, as he did. Grant that I may also live my life in loving service to You and to my neighbor. Amen.

Think

1. Blessed Cyprian Michael once said, "If you are going to be a Christian at all, you might as well live entirely for God." What does that mean for your daily life? What practical things can you do during Lent to "live entirely for God"?
2. Blessed Cyprian Michael was known to put the needs of others before his own. Think about times when you have done this. How did you feel?
3. Blessed Cyprian Michael loved to pray and listen to God. This Lent, make a plan to spend more time talking and listening to God. Use your MCA student calendar to help you with ideas to make the plan!

Act

All students: Many children in Blessed Cyprian's home country of Nigeria go without the basics of education that he cherished. Every day during Lent, thank God for your school and teachers and make a small sacrifice for mission children into your Mite Box. Don't have one? Make a mission bank from a shoe box or other container - maybe a plastic soup container - with the attached template for inspiration.

Younger students:

Missionaries were Blessed Cyprian's teachers. Thank your teachers and then make a gift to Missionary Childhood (give up some candy, soda, or chips and donate the money saved) to honor teachers.

Older students:

Iwene means "Let malice not kill" - which says that we should be kind, not angry, so as not to injure a soul. Invent a new "meaning" for your name this Lent that will guide you through the forty days. Make a sign for your desk that proclaims it to your class. Then, live by it!



Make Your Own Mission Bank



Lesson: We call our Mission Banks “Mite Boxes” in honor of the parable of the Widow’s Mite. Jesus told His followers the story of a woman who sacrificed her last coin (it was called a ‘mite’) for others who she thought may need it more than she did. Using the directions and attached pattern, color your own paper wrapper for a plastic container. Students may ask any adult to cut a slot in the lid of the container and - voila! They have a bank—a Mite Box!

Materials Needed:

- 1—1 quart plastic soup container with a lid
- 1—8.5 x 11 sheet of white paper
- Clear tape
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- The pattern of the world map for the wrap
- Scissors
- These instructions

Instructions:

Print the instructions and pattern of the world map of your choice to color.

Using the markers, crayons, or pencils, color in the parts of the world. You can use our examples as a guide for colors or create your own!

Cut the world map wrap out, following the curved line.

Tape the colored world map wrap to the soup container—it may not go all the way around depending on your container size!

Cut out our Missionary Childhood Association logo.

Tape it onto the container as a reminder of who the sacrifices are for.

Start saving your spare change, earning funds by doing extra chores, or picking up “found money.” Children in the missions will be glad you did.

When you are finished, send your sacrifices to the address on the bottom of the page. We’ll send you a certificate of thanks!

