



Teaching the Saints

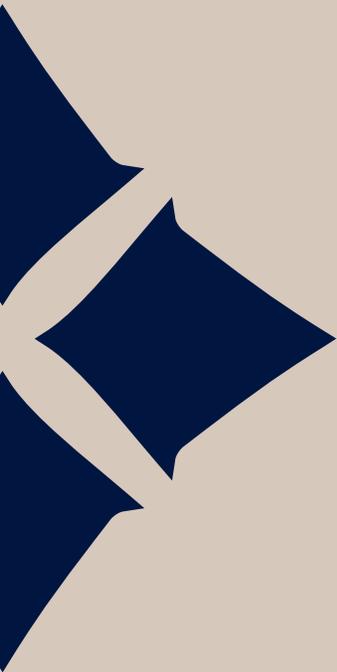
A Workbook for
Faith Formation
and Education

Saints for the month of
DECEMBER

McGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE



Where higher learning meets faithful service.



The saints selected for this month are drawn from the "Witnesses to Holiness" collection from Notre Dame Vision, a high school conference hosted by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. Notre Dame Vision asks teenagers to consider their God-given talents and how they will use their gifts to respond to God's call for their life. For more information, visit vision.nd.edu.

The illustrations of saints used in this workbook were created by Julie Lonneman, who holds exclusive rights to the further distribution and publication of the art.

How to Use This Workbook

Turn to the witness and intercession of the saints to lead middle school and high school students toward a deeper sense of God's invitation to follow Him. This free teaching resource features the lives of the saints paired with short guided prompts for further reflection, discussion and action.

The worksheets can be used by youth, parents, teachers, religious educators and ministers to celebrate saint feast days during December. Adapt the worksheets for use in the classroom, home or parish to highlight the myriad and unique ways that God calls us to use our gifts to serve the Church and world.

Each worksheet includes the following:

- ◆ A short biography on each saint's life and witness
- ◆ A reflection inviting the student to consider ways each saint resonates with their faith journey
- ◆ A challenge prompting the student to put the saint's witness into action



St. Juan Diego

- ◆ ca. 1474-1548;
Cuauhtitlan, Mexico
- ◆ Feast Day: December 9

Juan Diego and his wife were members of the lowest and largest class of the Aztec Empire. They lived a simple and humble lifestyle in a small house on a small piece of land. His native name was Cuatitlatoatzin, which means “the talking eagle.” In the 1520s, he and his wife converted to Christianity and took the names Juan Diego and Maria Lucia.

Juan’s wife died shortly after her conversion, so he left Cuauhtitlan to live in Tolpetlac with his uncle. He lived a very devoted religious life and walked many miles to attend Mass and receive religious instruction. In 1531, when Juan was 57 years old, he met a beautiful woman surrounded in light on a hill in Tepeyac. It was the Blessed Virgin Mary, who began to speak to Juan in Nahuatl, his native language. She wore a European dress, but the decorations were like those in Juan’s native land and her face was Mestizo. She was pregnant with the Lord Jesus.

Mary spoke to Juan of love and peace and instructed him to go to the local bishop and tell him to build a church on the site of the apparition. Juan did as Mary asked, but he had a difficult time convincing the bishop that he was telling the truth. The bishop wanted a sign. Juan went back to Mary and told her what the bishop had said, and she gave the bishop his sign—an image of the Lady appeared on the cloak that Juan was wearing. The bishop agreed to build the church on the site.

Juan’s uncle, who was gravely ill, also received a visit from Mary. She told him to call her and her image, “Santa Maria de Guadalupe.” After his encounter with Mary, Juan’s uncle was cured.

The chapel that held Juan’s cloak soon became a site for many pilgrims. For the last years of his life, Juan dedicated himself to serving the pilgrims and telling his story. Today, the cloak is kept at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tepeyac and still attracts thousands of pilgrims. It is one of the most popular religious pilgrimage sites in the Western Hemisphere. In honor of his humility and simple faith, Juan Diego was beatified in 1990 by Pope John Paul II in Mexico City, and was canonized in the summer of 2002.

I am nobody, I am a small rope, a tiny ladder, the tail end, a leaf.

—St. Juan Diego

Reflect

What about St. Juan Diego's life stands out to you?

Do you blame Juan's local bishop for wanting a sign of the Virgin Mary's request?
What would you have done if you were in the bishop's position?

Most times, we are not given signs from God as clear as the one that appeared on Juan's cloak. But God is always showing us signs of His presence. Where do you see the signs of God's presence in your own world? You might think of your family, friends and your community. What are they?

Act

At one point when Juan was struggling to fulfill the Virgin Mary's requests of him, she appeared and comforted him with the words: "No estoy yo aqui que soy tu madre?"
Translated, this means, "Am I not here, I who am your mother?"

Consider honoring Mary's constant presence in your life this week by praying a Hail Mary or the Angelus prayer. As you pray, consider the truths behind the words of these prayers. What might Mary's example inspire you to do this week?

St. John of the Cross

- ◆ 1542-1591; Spain
- ◆ Feast Day: December 14



John, who was born in Spain with the name Juan de Yepes, had a difficult childhood. His father died when he was very young, and his mother moved him and his siblings from town to town looking for work. Once they finally settled down, John found work at a hospice caring for the sick and studied at a Jesuit school.

After he completed his studies, he joined the Carmelite order and was ordained a priest in 1567. Unhappy with the Carmelites, John was considering transferring to a different order when he met Teresa of Ávila, who had begun a reformed Carmelite Order, the Discalced (barefoot) community, for women. She convinced John that instead of leaving the Carmelites altogether, he should begin a Discalced community for friars. He followed Teresa's advice and took a new name, John of the Cross.

John and Teresa worked hard to spread the Discalced movement. As Discalced members,

they followed a lifestyle of contemplative prayer and total poverty. Through his involvement in the movement, John began to make enemies. In 1557, angry Carmelites who were against reform had John arrested and imprisoned at Toledo. He was treated very harshly in prison, but he began to write beautiful, mystical poetry. After nine months, John escaped. He continued writing and completed great spiritual books that are still read and highly regarded today, such as *The Dark Night of the Soul*, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Living Flame of Love*, and *The Spiritual Canticle*.

John's troubles, however, were not over. After 1590, John's enemies came from within his own community. Some friars thought that a reformed community was not enough; they wanted to break completely from the Carmelites. They thought that John was too moderate and forced him down from his leadership position. They viciously attacked his character and humiliated him. In the midst of these attacks, John contracted a serious fever and died in 1591.

In 1926, the Church recognized John's incredible contribution to spiritual theology by naming him a Doctor of the Church. He is remembered for his life of courage, perseverance, and deep spirituality.

Do not feed your spirit on anything apart from God. Cast away all cares and let peace and reconciliation fill your heart.

—St. John of the Cross

Reflect

What about St. John of the Cross' life stands out to you?

Choosing to live barefoot was a radical move in the eyes of John's community and society at large. At the same time, it was a simple confession of a profound truth. No earthly status or possession could describe or define his worth. John's witness invites us to focus on our worth, not as defined by earthly standards, but by heavenly ones—God's love. Shoes or no shoes, it is God's love and desire to be in relationship with us which sustains, protects and guides our steps on His way.

Imagine God looking at you with love. How might He describe you?

Act

While you may not feel called to forgo your shoes, practices of fasting or abstinence help us direct our attention away from the things which lead us away from God's call for us. As we prepare to celebrate love taking on human flesh at Christmas, consider embracing a practice of fasting or abstinence that might help you focus and remember God's love for you. Consider embracing this practice in your group of friends, as a class or as a family and take time for reflection along the way.

What do you notice about yourself as you embrace this practice? About God?

St. John, the Apostle and Evangelist

- ◆ First Century
- ◆ Feast Day: December 27
- ◆ Patron Saint of Asia Minor and Turkey



John was fishing on the Sea of Galilee with his brother, James, and his father, Zebedee, when he received the calling that would change his life. As John and James mended their nets, Jesus walked by and asked them to follow him. The brothers put down their nets and began their journey of discipleship.

As time went by, John became one of three disciples who were closest to Jesus, along with Peter and James. John was present at many important moments during Jesus' ministry. John witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus and the raising of Jarius' daughter. During Jesus' agonizing time in Gethsemane before his death, Jesus asked John, Peter, and James to stay with him. John and Peter were also given the task of preparing the Last Supper.

Christians typically identify John with the "Beloved Disciple" in the Gospel of John. In this

Gospel, John is the only disciple to follow Jesus to the cross. He follows his call to discipleship to the very end and is asked by Jesus to take care of Mary. He is also the first to reach the tomb after Mary Magdalene reports seeing it empty. John sees the tomb and believes.

After Jesus' death, John continued his discipleship by working with Peter to establish the church in Jerusalem and later worked with the church in Ephesus. John and his followers are believed to have written the Fourth Gospel, three Letters, and the Book of Revelation.

One popular story places John in Rome during the persecution of Christians by Emperor Domitian. John was dipped into boiling oil, but he walked away unhurt. He lived a long life and died of old age in Ephesus around the age of ninety-four.

John is often depicted with the image of an eagle. The eagle represents the style of his Gospel and its emphasis on divinity and the heavenly. The Gospel reflects a profound experience of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.

—1 John 4:7-8

Reflect

What about St. John the Apostle's life stands out to you?

John witnessed many liminal events in the life of Jesus: the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46) and the Empty Tomb (John 20:1-18) to name a few.

Go back to read one of the Scripture passages listed above and imagine the story from John's perspective. What do you think he might have been feeling as he witnessed the event? What might you have felt if you were there?

Act

Jesus invites the fishermen John and James saying, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10). How might our lives and witness "catch" others? During the winter and holiday season, many needs rise to the surface. Consider a way that you might make a commitment to meet a need this month in your local parish or school. Afterward, talk about your experience.

What did you do? What did you see? Where might you have been "caught" or surprised by God's presence?



McGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE

Where higher learning meets faithful service.