

Mother Laura Montoya

1874-1949

INTRODUCTION

For older students:

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). On May 12, 2013, Pope Francis canonized Mother Laura Montoya, and she became Colombia's first saint. Mother Laura was an educator who worked tirelessly to confront racial discrimination and to sacrifice herself in order to help the people of Colombia encounter Christ's love.

Mother Laura was born in a rural, mountainous town in northern Colombia in 1874. Her father was killed in the Colombian Civil War of 1876 when she was only two years old. Her family was left destitute and Laura's childhood was marked with great sorrow and loneliness. During this time, she found consolation in meditating on scripture and in the Eucharist.

When Laura turned 16, her mother asked her to become a teacher in order to help support the family. Despite her apparent academic shortcomings, (given that she had received no formal education), she was accepted into the program and stood out for her success.

During this time Laura began to feel a call to the religious life. She deeply desired to become a cloistered Carmelite nun, but at the same time she felt God calling her to the work of a missionary. Eventually this calling became so strong that at the age of thirty-five, Laura and four other women left modern society to live in the jungles of Colombia in order to bring love and hope to the indigenous communities there. This is how the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and St. Catherine of Siena was founded. These passionate and determined women received much ridicule



from the local Christian community, which regarded the indigenous people as nothing more than "wild beasts."

Mother Laura believed in a "pedagogy of love" and spent the remainder of her life teaching the indigenous peoples of Colombia about Christ's love, as well as authoring writings for her fellow sisters. She worked tirelessly to maintain a balance between the apostolic and contemplative lives.

Mother Laura died on October 21, 1949 in Medellín, after a long and painful illness. The last nine years of her life were lived in a wheelchair, but she continued to teach, work, and write, all while living mountainous jungles of Colombia.

Today her Missionary Sisters work in 19 countries throughout America, Africa and Europe.

We celebrate her feast day on October 21 and ask her intercession for people who suffer from racial discrimination and for the people of Colombia.

For younger students:

Mother Laura Montoya was a teacher who lived in Colombia, South America. She loved God very much and worked hard to learn more about him by reading the Bible and receiving the Eucharist. She wanted all people to know about God and his great love for them, so she left the comforts of the village schools where she was a teacher, and ventured into the mountainous jungles with four other women to teach the people there, ignored by most of their country, about God's love for them.

Mother Laura felt that God was calling her to tell all people about His love, especially people that others ignored or looked down upon. Life in the jungle was hard, especially when Mother Laura was older and had to be in a wheelchair because of an illness, but she remained joyful and generous, never leaving the jungle or the people she loved so much.

Pope Francis canonized Mother Laura and we celebrate her feast day on October 21. She is the patron saint of orphans and anyone who feels left out.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
Help me to be brave like Mother Laura and to take on new challenges, especially those that will help other's experience God's love for them. Give me the courage to always defend those who are mistreated or excluded. Help me set an example of love for those around me in order to shine Christ's light. Mother Laura Montoya, pray for us. Amen.

Or...

Dear Lord,
Help me to be brave like Mother Laura and to stand up for what is right. Help me to be a good friend and to show love to people who are different than me. Help me shine your light. Mother Laura, pray for us. Amen.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Religion

- Celebrate Mother Laura's feast day on October 21st by reading about her life and praying for her intercession.
- Say a rosary for those suffering from discrimination around the world, and especially in our own country.
- Say a prayer specifically for the indigenous communities throughout the Americas, who have been marginalized and mistreated for centuries.
- Learn to make and say the sign of the cross in Spanish. *En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espiritu Santo.*

Writing

- Journal about issues of discrimination/bullying that students have encountered.
- Have students research and write about indigenous communities in the United States.
- Visit the website of a Native American Catholic school and inquire about your students becoming pen pals with students in the school.
- Write a letter to Mother Laura.
- Have students write about how importance of good teachers and write thank you letters to their favorite teachers.

Social Studies

- Compare and contrast the state of indigenous communities throughout the world. (Resource: <http://www.iwgia.org/regions>).
- Have students research causes that have led to the marginalization of Native Americans throughout history (greed, disease, deception, etc.). Learn about the Trail of Tears.
- Create lessons about the histories and cultures of indigenous communities and other marginalized peoples. For example, invite students to discover how the Constitution of the United States was influenced by the political

system of the Iroquois.

- Find Colombia on the map. Study its history, culture, and terrain.

Art

- Draw pictures of what it might mean to be a “light” to people, especially the marginalized of our society.
- Watch the film: *The Mission* (use discretion with scenes of violence; for older students)
- Create a mosaic featuring photos of all of your students to celebrate the rich tapestry of diversity within your own classroom.



Language

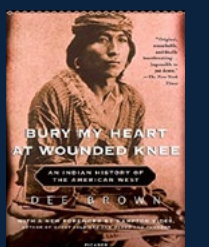
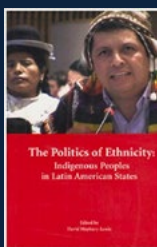
- Pick one prayer (the Hail Mary or Our Father, for instance), and have students say it in different languages.
- Try to find prayers written in native languages and have students say those.

Home and Family Connections

- Take a trip to a reservation in the United States in order to learn more about native cultures.
- As a family, pray for people who are marginalized or face discrimination.

Book Recommendations

- *The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin American States* (Maybury-Lewis, 2003).
- *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Brown, 1971).



Service Projects

- Have a fundraiser for a school located on a Native American reservation.
- Go on a mission trip to an American indigenous community.

Relevant Songs

- “Light of the World” (from *Godspell*)
- “Christ, Be Our Light”

SOURCES

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