



HEROES OF

LA FLORIDA

Hope in Uncertainty

A Home Activity Kit for Families



HEROES OF LA FLORIDA

Dear Parents,

In times of trouble, we turn to the saints to learn how we ought to live with faith, as well as to ask for their powerful intercession. The present pandemic is no different. As the faithful across the world turn to the Church triumphant for guidance and assistance, we at the Heroes of La Florida Curriculum Project would like to offer you some resources for learning about the Florida martyrs and sharing their stories with your children.

Since this is a time when many families are isolated at home in order to promote public health, this kit is designed to help families meaningfully dedicate time to learning about America's early martyrs and the world in which they lived. May the activities proposed and the resources provided here foster family discussions about self-sacrifice, freedom, and hope.

God bless you,

The Martyrs of La Florida Curriculum Team

RESOURCES INCLUDED (click to go to each section)

- I. Historical Background: Uncertain Times
- II. Short Story of Antonio Cuipa (with Discussion Questions)
- III. Choose a Martyr Skit
- IV. Coloring Pages

ACTIVITIES

The activities suggested here utilize included resources and other resources available online.

- Read the "Short Story of Antonio Cuipa" as a family and talk through the discussion questions.
- Assign parts and help children to act out the skits included.
- Children may write their own skits and act out the stories of Antonio Cuipa or other martyrs who interest them.
 - Both of these are available at <https://martyrsfloridamissions.org/gift-shop>.
 - Some particularly gripping stories are those of Fr. Luis Cáncer (1549), Mariana and Jacinto (1702), Manuel (1704), Cacica Maria (1704), Fr. Agustín Ponce de Leon (1705), Don Patricio de Hinachuba (1706), Joseph (1728), and Antonio Bendito (1760).

ACTIVITIES (continued)

- Read more about the history of Mission San Luis, where Antonio Cuipa and several other holy martyrs lived. It was the largest of the La Florida missions.
 - See <https://www.missionsanluis.org/> for more information.
 - Visit <http://missionsanluis.org/virtualTour/index.html> for a virtual tour of the mission (which is currently not open for personal tours).
- Build a miniature mission.
 - The Apalachee people in the missions lived in small, round huts covered in woven palm branches. This style was known as palm thatch.
 - If you are able, bring your children outside to collect materials to make their own miniature palm thatch houses—any type of leaf could work for a home model. Houses can also be made of construction paper.
 - Here’s a link to how Mission San Luis would have looked, on the Mission San Luis Website: <https://www.missionsanluis.org/learn/history/apalachee-before-european-contact/>
- Make a prayer shrine for your home.
 - In 1647, people in La Florida prayed to the martyrs (particularly the Franciscans who died in the early days of the missions) for healing during an outbreak of plague. Seeking such intercession can be helpful for us as well! Have children draw pictures of and write prayers to Antonio Cuipa and other martyrs or saints whose prayers would be helpful in this time of sickness.
 - Arrange pictures and prayers into a shrine for a corner of your home, or on a poster board which may be taken out for family prayer.
 - Coloring pages included in this kit may also be used for this purpose.
- Some additional video talks if you’d like to learn more about the Martyrs of La Florida:
 - SPQN podcast, “The Martyrs of La Florida: American Catholic History #020” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCd_ri5h3lg
 - Dr. Mary Soha on the Florida Martyrs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNhz2pj7hAs&>
- For a more in-depth look at saintly life in the Florida missions, read *Cacique: A Novel of Florida’s Heroic Mission History*, by Bishop Robert Baker with Tom Sands (available through various online sellers):
 - <https://www.abebooks.com/Cacique-Novel-Floridas-Heroic-Mission-History/9027673252/bd>

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

Every one of the many different martyrs of *La Florida* navigated dangerous and uncertain times with calm confidence in God's constant care. The first of *La Florida's* martyrs were priests who left behind their homes in Europe in order to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the native people living across the sea. Those holy men knew they'd probably never return home again, and they knew that the task before them was so immense that they'd never be able to succeed on their own. Some of those priests were killed by the people they intended to serve. Even though it might have seemed to some as though they died for nothing, martyrdom—death for the sake of the faith—never fails to bring about grace.

The priests and brothers who came to Florida suffered to set up missions where people could live in community and learn about the faith. Some of them died doing this work. But God blessed their efforts, and they slowly established a chain of missions across northern Florida. At those missions lived individuals belonging to many of *La Florida's* native nations—the Timucua, the Apalachee, the Guale, and others. Many of the men, women, and children who lived at these mission villages embraced the Catholic faith with incredible joy and gratitude. Their lives were changed by the revelation of God's love in Christ.

The Christian natives who lived at the missions had to be patient with extremely difficult circumstances. The missions had two consistent enemies: plague and slave raids. The Spanish priests and farmers living among the Timucua and Apalachee sometimes carried diseases to which many of the Spanish were somewhat immune. Because of this, the natives suffered immensely in outbreaks of disease like smallpox or bubonic plague, and many of them died. Because of these recurrent epidemics, the population at the missions remained small and the number of living Timucua (and later, Apalachee) people on earth grew smaller, even as their numbers swelled in heaven. The Christians at the missions had more to fear than plague, however.

Ultimately, it was violent raiding which brought about the end of the missions. North of present-day Florida, the English had established colonies (like Georgia and Carolina). The English and the Spanish were political enemies, and the English particularly hated the Catholic Church. Even though the Spanish had arrived in the New World first, the English were determined to drive them away. When the English first established colonies, they had difficulty setting up successful farms, so they made money by selling native captives as slaves. (In Florida, slavery of natives was already illegal). Non-Christian native tribes, like the Creek, who were allied with the English, would attack Apalachee towns and sell their captives as slaves to the English.

In 1702, Col. James Moore of Carolina attempted to capture the Spanish capital at St. Augustine. Moore kidnapped three priests and burned the church and much of the town, but he was unable to breach the walls of the great castle, the *Castillo de San Marcos*. When help came from Cuba, he and his English and Creek allies had to retreat. In 1704, Moore and his allies decided to try again—but this time, instead of attacking the well-defended capital, they opted to attack the relatively defenseless missions. Although many Christians died as martyrs before 1702, 1704 marks a period of terrifying persecution of *La Florida's* Christians. The resources in this kit will introduce you to the stories of several holy people who died during that period of persecution. Despite plagues and attacks, most people who lived at the missions refused to despair. Rather, they turned ever more to God. They worked hard to make the world around them better, but placed their greatest hopes in heaven.

In 1703, foreseeing that life was becoming more uncertain and dangerous, Antonio Cuipa, an Apalachee chief at Mission San Luis, made a will, “fearing as I do that the hour of my death may come in these times that are times of war and of attacks from the enemies, and since death is a natural thing for every living [being].” He declared that he believed firmly in all that is taught by the Church, “under whose faith and belief I have always lived, and in which I want to die as a Catholic and a Christian.” Antonio knew that, to die as a Christian, he first had to live as one. He led his mission in new construction, making improvements to buildings, and going out to spread the Gospel to neighboring peoples. Antonio died less than a year after he made his will, with the same heroic Christian readiness in which he had always lived.

Even when we are scared or unsure of what’s going to happen, God never ceases to give us the virtues we seek when we need them. More importantly, God never abandons His people.

II. THE SHORT STORY OF ANTONIO CUIPA (1704)



This looks like a story with an unhappy ending, but it isn’t. It is a good story and a true one, and it is far happier than most. This is the story of a man who was virtuous, no matter the cost, and who loved God more than his own life. This is the story of Antonio Cuipa (Kwee-pa), a very brave man who lived and died in Florida in the early 1700s. Antonio’s life reveals that no evil is more powerful than virtue and love.

Antonio was born in the mission village of San Luis de Talimali, in modern-day Tallahassee, Florida. Franciscan priests, mostly of Spanish descent, served the mission, and many Apalachee people lived there. The Apalachee were a farming people who had been living in that region for centuries and had only recently learned about Christianity. Antonio’s father and mother were the first people in their family to become Catholic. They baptized the boy Antonio young and the Franciscans taught him to speak Spanish and some Latin. He learned to read and write, and to play the flute and guitar beautifully. He became a skilled carpenter. Beneath the mossy oak trees of northern Florida, Antonio spent his childhood learning that all people were made by a good God who loved them. When Antonio grew up, he married an Apalachee woman named Josefa. They had two children—a daughter, Clara, and a son, Francisco, two years later. Antonio loved his wife and his children very much.

Antonio was the inija, that is, the second-in-command to the cacique (chief), of the Mission San Luis. Because he was the leader, Antonio could tell others what to do; but he was always willing to do thankless, tiresome work himself. Since he was a carpenter in addition to being the inija, he personally helped in the construction of many new buildings for the town. His hard work and humility inspired others in the community, and the whole town became more joyful and prosperous. Antonio often reminded his people that to be a Christian meant behaving as another Christ.

In the evenings, Antonio would sit with others and carve flutes. He played the flute in a haunting Apalachee style. He painted his flutes with lines, rainbows, birds, and animals—images of the beautiful things he observed around him in nature. When the Franciscan missionaries wished to go to other native villages to preach the Gospel to people who had never heard it, Antonio would accompany them, or sometimes even go by himself or with a few friends. Before trying to speak of Christ, Antonio would play his flute. The beautiful music would move peoples’ hearts and calm their fears. After he played, Antonio would give as gifts the flutes he had made and painted. Only then would he begin to speak of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In this patient, gentle, and moving way, Antonio drew many people to God.

The world holds many good people, like Antonio, but the existence of good people does not mean there are no bad people. In 1702, an Englishman named Colonel James Moore of Carolina (before North and South Carolina were separate) attacked St. Augustine in the name of England. Moore failed to conquer the fortress there (the Castillo de San Marcos), however, and had to retreat in shame back north. He returned to Florida two years later. This time, instead of attacking the soldiers at the strong fortress in the capital city, he attacked the almost defenseless natives of the Christian missions in the north.

The first place Colonel Moore attacked with his army of English and Creek warriors was the mission town of La Concepción de Ayubale. It was January 25, 1704. Ayubale was about a day's travel away from Mission San Luis, where Antonio lived. Learning that their friends were in danger, Antonio and the other bowmen of San Luis quickly set out to help them. The men going to defend Ayubale did not think that they would win the battle. They knew they were likely to be killed. The English and the Creek outnumbered them and had guns, whereas the Apalachee mostly had just their bows and arrows. They were willing to die, however, for the sake of protecting the missions, the only places where they had access to priests and sacraments. They were willing to risk their lives to defend God's law in Florida.

The Apalachee from San Luis did not win the battle at Ayubale. They put up a good fight, but to no avail. Many of the Catholic men, women, and children, warriors and noncombatants alike, were killed, and the rest, including Antonio, were taken hostage. For years, the Creek had been accustomed to give Christian captives a choice between denouncing their faith or dying. They hated Christians, and Antonio's faith was renowned throughout La Florida. On January 26, 1704, Antonio and numerous other captives were tied to wooden posts and outdoor Stations of the Cross and burned to death.

Antonio was victorious that day, even though he didn't escape. Antonio was victorious because his faith in God did not vanish in the face of danger and death. On the day he died, Antonio's virtue, through God's grace, triumphed over every earthly threat and evil. While he slowly burned over the course of the day, with his tormentors mocking him constantly, he comforted and encouraged those who were being killed along with him. He preached for hours, reminding them that God was good and faithful. He sincerely warned his attackers to turn from the evil they were doing and to be good, for the sake of their souls. In the final moments of Antonio's life, the Virgin Mary appeared to him. She did not free Antonio from his bondage, but when he looked into her eyes, he gained the strength he needed for the final heroic victory.

Antonio had known for years that life in the missions was dangerous and that he could be called upon at any time to lay down his life. Every day, then, despite his fear, he did his duty and practiced the virtues that eventually made him able to bear even painful martyrdom. Despite his pain, he trusted in God's promises, even when the whole world seemed turned against him. Antonio understood that the purpose of his life was to love and glorify God, and so he spent every day of his life doing exactly that.

Antonio lived and died as a true and unshakeable hero, whom even torture and death could not overcome. The hero won—and that is a happy ending.

Discussion Questions

1. What made Antonio's life interesting?
2. What virtues did Antonio practice very well?
3. What things did Antonio do which showed his faith?
4. Where in Antonio's life do you see evidence of God's kindness?

III. CHOOSE A MARTYR SKIT

A. The Peacemaker

Fr. Luis Cancer (1549)

Parts: Fr. Luis, Fr. Gregorio, Fr. Diego, Juan Muñoz

FR. CÁNCER: Hello. My name is Fr. Luis Cáncer, and I am a Catholic priest in the order of St Dominic. I have spent most of my life as a missionary, far away from where I grew up in Spain.

FR. GREGORIO: A missionary, by the way, is a person who tries to teach people (especially those who have never encountered Christianity before) who Christ is and how to love God.

FR. CÁNCER: Since we believe that it's through Christ's mercy that people go to heaven, it is worth missing home if I can help people around the world to gain this essential knowledge. For a long while, though, some Spaniards went about, exploring and conquering people with violence. But Our Lord Jesus Christ was gentle.



FR. DIEGO: Fr. Luis and other priests decided that the Gospel could be preached only in peace and freedom. Fr. Luis proved this by going to the most violent place in Guatemala—

FR. CÁNCER: (an aside) An area that was literally called "The Land of War."

FR. DIEGO: No soldiers were allowed to go in with the priests, who worked slowly and gently to learn the languages of the people, offer them gifts, win their friendship, and attract them to Christian truth. Within two years, the "Land of War" came to be known as the "Land of True Peace."

FR. CÁNCER: That's when I approached my friend, Fr. Gregorio Beteta (gesturing). I knew of another dangerous, violent land that as yet knew no Christianity—La Florida!

FR. GREGORIO: Most priests to visit La Florida so far had been in the company of violent soldiers like Hernando de Soto and Pánfilo de Narvaez. These explorers had failed to establish permanent settlements in Florida, and they had treated the native people horribly, in ways that made it difficult for priests to evangelize.

FR. CÁNCER: But if we were to come peacefully, without weapons, to a place where no Spaniards had been, as Christ himself would have come, maybe we could bring the Gospel to this place. In 1549, I approached Fr. Gregorio, Fr. Diego Tolosa, and Br. Fuentes (all members of the Dominican religious order) and asked them to come with me.

FR. DIEGO: Of course, we agreed. We took with us a Christian native woman named Magdalena, to be our interpreter and guide. We asked Captain Juan de Arana to make sure we wouldn't land near where the previous expeditions had gone. In those places, people would be on guard, and would likely attack us without ever listening to our words. Unfortunately, we somehow ended up landing our ship exactly where Hernando de Soto's violent expedition had landed ten years before. We didn't realize this at the time, though, and boarded landing boats to look for people to speak with on land.

FR. CÁNCER: Fr. Diego reached shore first, and climbed a tree to look around. Twenty native men who'd seen him arrive rushed out to surround him. Afraid, I leapt from the landing boat and waded onto the beach. After kneeling a moment in prayer, I ran to where the Tocabaga men had gathered around Fr. Diego. I gave them gifts of cloth and beads which I had brought with me. They seemed to like them. Once Magdalena and Br. Fuentes joined us on the shore, we knelt down and began to pray together. Some of the watching natives squatted or knelt as they watched us curiously. I left the others on the beach and went back to the ship for more gifts for the natives. When I returned a few hours later, everyone had vanished.

FR. GREGORIO: Fr. Luis, Fr. Juan Garcia, and I searched the beach and the woods for two days, hoping to find our companions, but we found no one. Just as we were about to give up, we heard two people shouting in broken Spanish: "Friends! Friends! Good! Good!"

FR. CÁNCER: It was Magdalena with some of the other Indians. She said that Fr. Diego was waiting with other natives. Magdalena said she had assured the people we were on a peaceful mission, and that they wanted to hear what we had to say the next day. Delighted by this change in fortune, we returned to our ship with the news, hoping to return in the morning. When we came to the ship, we met Juan Muñoz, and everything changed.

JUAN MUNOZ: I had been a part of Hernando de Soto's violent expedition ten years before, and had been captured as a slave. For a full decade, I had lived among the Tocabaga. When I spotted the Spanish ship anchored nearby, I knew I finally had a chance to escape and return to my home country. I stole a boat and rowed out to the Spanish ship. There, I gave Fr. Luis the terrible news: the Tocabaga had killed and scalped Fr. Diego and Br. Fuentes.

FR. CÁNCER: The weather was bad for the next two days, so we could not go ashore again immediately. I spent the time writing in my journal and praying. We had come across the world in order to bring news of Christ to these people who had never known him. I wanted to share the Gospel or die trying, so, after reflecting on the matter, we went ashore one last time. Juan Muñoz and Fr. Gregorio went with me. From the boat, we could see many Indians waiting on the shore. They were holding weapons.

JUAN MUÑOZ: I called out to them to stop their display of force. Fr. Luis told me to keep quiet and to not provoke them.

FR. GREGORIO: I was concerned when I saw their weapons. I told Fr. Cancer to wait, and not to land.

FR. CÁNCER: I couldn't wait. I had been born for this moment. Even if these men would not give me the opportunity to speak of Christ, I could go to them with open arms and show them a death like Christ's. Even if they could not understand, I would show them I loved them. I brought the boat to shore, and began walking towards the crowd of warriors. I fell to my knees to pray for aid. When I looked up, I saw them coming at me, swinging clubs. This was the last thing I saw on earth.

FR. GREGORIO: We saw Fr. Luis die, beaten down by those he came to serve, and we rowed back to our ship, sad, but inspired. We knew that our cause was just. We knew that good work like what was done in Guatemala could be done here, too. In time, that work *would* be done. Fr. Luis sowed the seed of faith through the shedding of his blood. God would achieve great things in this land for which our friend gave his life.

B. Mother and Son

Mariana & Jacinto (Nov. 5 or 6, 1702)

Parts: Mariana, Jacinto, Esteban

MARIANA: Our mission of San Juan de Puerto had not always been so small. Only forty-five or so of us lived and worshipped there. There used to be many more people, but disease took its toll. I was the daughter of a cacique, a chief and leader of the people. My father had died long ago, and my husband too had finished this life. But I still had my beloved son, Jacinto.

JACINTO: After my father died, my mother took it really hard. There were times I would see her cry. But she would say that she had to be strong for both of us. And she would always go to the church to find her strength. She would look to the cross of our Lord, seeing in his love outpoured a model for herself. She became a sacristan, always cleaning the church and caring for the priests' vestments.

MARIANA: When I looked at the cross, I saw a God who suffered. I could see his own pain and suffering offered for me. When my heart was broken as my husband was lost to me, my heart knew pain. But it was a pain which could be offered as a gift of love.

JACINTO: It was early November of 1702 when our mission was surrounded. I was just nine years old. The Creeks gathered us into the central plaza. They ordered all of the crosses to be brought out from the homes. They took all the crosses from our necks, our homes, and our church, and threw them into a big pile. Then they asked us if we believed in the faith of our ancestors. But all of us were baptized Christians. They told us that if we did not want to die there, we should renounce our Catholic faith and customs and spit on the Cross. For a while, everyone was silent. But I wasn't surprised when it was my mother who answered the Creeks. She stepped forward and spoke in the only way she could.

MARIANA: I told the warriors that I could not spit on the Cross. Doing so would be like destroying my own heart. For me, the Cross and my heart were the same. It had given me the strength to love through pain. I couldn't bear to have it taken from me. I said, we would not lose eternal life for the sake of avoiding torture and death.

JACINTO: Just then, the Creeks grabbed me and began beating me. They tied me to a stake in front of my mother and began to set it on fire.

MARIANA: I watched as they beat and burned my son. They kept throwing sticks on the fire, but my son began to pray the Rosary.

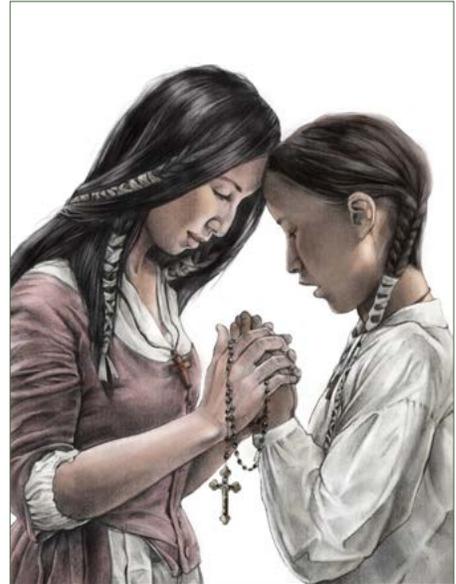
JACINTO: I prayed as my mother had taught me. I prayed the Our Father and the Hail Mary. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

MARIANA: I joined my son, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

JACINTO: My mother continued to pray even after I was no longer able to do it. I died in the fire.

MARIANA: When Jacinto had died, the Creeks beat me down with their clubs. I could only turn to the example of my Lord on the Cross, asking God to pardon them. They beat me more. I fell to my knees, then collapsed on the ground and died.

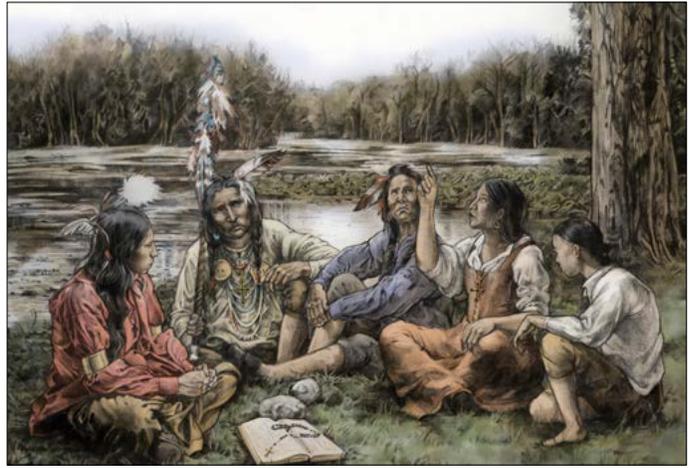
ESTEBAN: I was one of the few to escape to the woods when our village was attacked. We hid there to avoid capture. Even though our village was destroyed, we set up crosses where Mariana and Jacinto had been left. Long after, people would bring flowers to leave where their bodies had been, in order to commemorate the courage and love of those saints of God.



C. The Truly Free

Cacica Maria (early 1704)

Parts: Buenaventura,
Epiphanio, Cacica Maria



BUENAVENTURA: My name is Buenaventura. There were about 50 of us who set out along the path of the Wacissa River. I can't say for sure how many of us there were, because we never stopped moving. We were afraid that if we followed the road that we would be caught by those who had attacked our village. We knew the course of the river, so it seemed the safest route we could take. In my village I served as an *atiqui*, which means "translator." People thought well of me because of my gift with languages. It was already a privilege that I was able to study Spanish. I could help the people and the priests speak to each other, especially when the priests were new. Sometimes I could help ease troubles with the Spanish ranchers. Now that we were on the run, I could tell I was no different than anyone else. We feared losing even our own lives.

EPIPHANIO: I was only ten years old. We saw the church burning where just last Sunday I had been an altar boy. Our homes had been destroyed.

BUENAVENTURA: Our Mission, Santa Cruz de Ichutafun, had just been attacked. We had long suspected it was only a matter of time. Many of the missions near us had already been destroyed. We thought that hiding by the Wacissa River would be safest.

CACICA MARIA: We ran right into a trap. As we were making our way along the Wacissa River, we found ourselves surrounded by about 200 Creeks. There were a handful of Englishmen with them. They tied us together in pairs and said that they would have us march to Charleston in Carolina to become slaves. None of us had ever been so far from our home.

EPIPHANIO: We were devastated to realize that we had not only lost our homes, but were now facing lives of certain slavery. We didn't know if we would be separated from our loved ones. But we were strengthened by the courageous words of our *Cacica* (kah-SEE-kah) Maria, our leader. She was a noblewoman esteemed by all. She was nearly fifty years old, and as wise and faithful as she was brave. We heard her call out in a loud voice.

CACICA MARIA: I said that we did not wish to go with them, that death was better than going with them. After all, if they took us away from our lands, we would be far from our churches and from the missionaries who are like fathers to us. It was better, I said, to lose our lives for the holy faith of Jesus Christ than to let ourselves be taken from our land by such evil masters.

EPIPHANIO: *Cacica Maria's* words gave us courage, but the Creeks and English only laughed at her. Since we would rather die than be taken from our land, they said, they would take us from the land and throw us into the river to drown. Despite these threats, many of us agreed with our *cacica* that it was better to die right then than to spend the rest of our lives as slaves unable to receive the sacraments.

CACICA MARIA: Our arms still tied, they pushed us into the river and shot arrows at us until we drowned. Some escaped and were able to bear witness to what we suffered and why. They were able to tell other Christians about how our faith gave us freedom. The enemies couldn't scare us into obeying them, and a life without Christ was more horrible to imagine than any pain or death could have been.

IV. COLORING PAGES

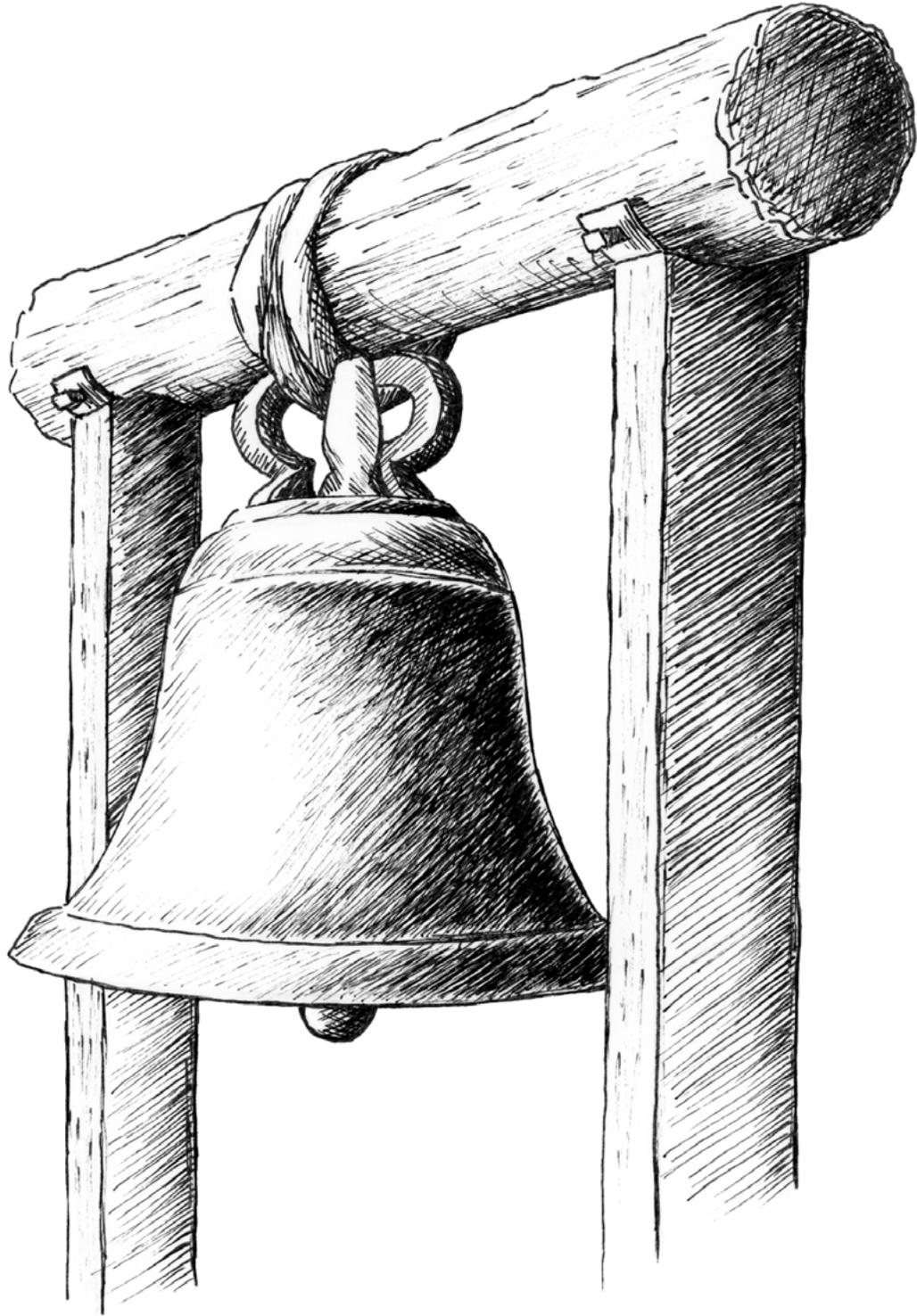
Secret Historical Coloring Tips:

- Franciscan priests in Florida normally wore blue-gray robes.
- Spanish people loved wearing black!
- Dark blue and bright red were common clothing colors.
- People didn't really wear much green, because green dye faded quickly.

Art credit to Emily Austin and Jaclyn Warren.



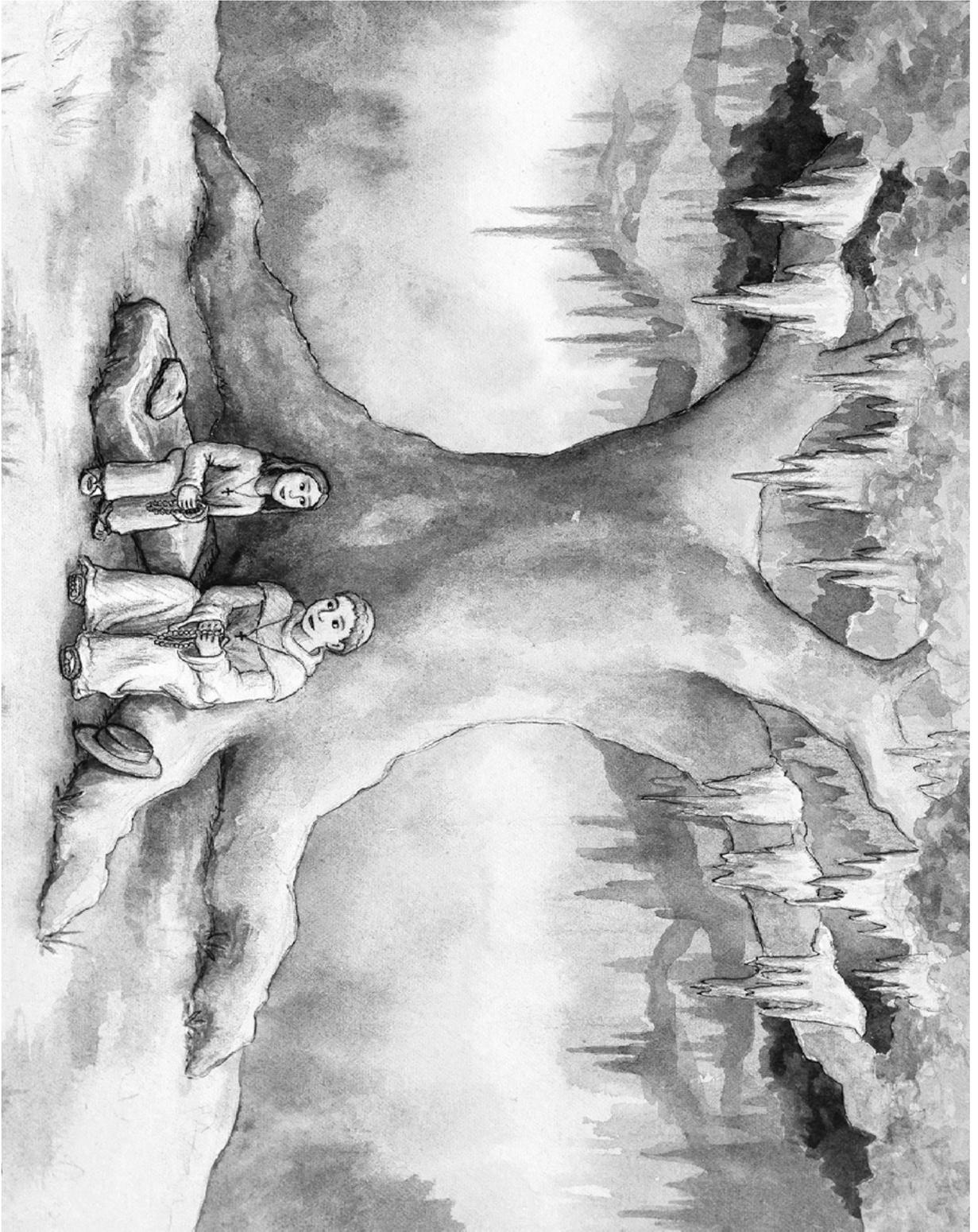
A young *Franciscan friar*



The Church bell at a mission



Don Patricio de Hinachuba, the Apalachee "Cacique of the Poor"



A young Antonio Cuipa learns to pray the Rosary



Manuel serves at the altar during Mass



Mariana and Jacinto pray the Rosary

The church and council house at a mission

