

AGENTS OF MERCY LESSON: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

GRADES 7-8

Goal

Our world is often confused by what true mercy looks like. Pope Francis calls us to a culture of encounter, to recognize the dignity in the person in front of us. This encounter leads us to action on their behalf by serving others through works of mercy. Christ has called us to go and make disciples of all nations and in a special way to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead. In so doing, our hearts change and we learn to be merciful as the Heavenly Father is merciful.

Materials

- Bibles
- Art Supplies

Lesson

It is important first to define mercy. A good explanation for this age group is: mercy is something that we are given that is completely undeserved. God could choose to judge us and treat us harshly. Instead, he tells us that he offers us mercy so that, again and again, we can make the choice to love him and follow him. And, he asks us to do the same in our own relationships—to offer mercy rather than judgment to those we encounter.

Scripture

Read the story of Zacchaeus the Tax Collector. Luke 19: 1-10.

Discussion

- Who is Zacchaeus?
- What does he do for a living? Is he well-liked?
- Why or why not?
- What happens when Jesus encounters Zacchaeus?
- Why are other people angry that Jesus is going to eat at Zacchaeus' house?
- When Jesus shows mercy to Zacchaeus, does he say "you are forgiven so keep doing whatever you want?" Or does Zacchaeus change his ways in response to mercy?
- What does this tell us about the nature of God's mercy?
- God's mercy is not judgment, but he demands that we repent and change our ways. Why?

Journal

Ask students to consider the following three obstacles Zacchaeus had to overcome to meet with Jesus.

- Do they encounter anything similar in their own lives?
 1. His small stature—he could have thought he was not good enough to meet Jesus or that Jesus wouldn't care about him.

2. His shame—he had sinned by committing fraud and theft and could have felt that he was not worthy to face Jesus.
3. The crowd—Those around him tried to sway his trust in God so he would give up.

Watch

- [Jesus is Mercy](#)
- [What does it mean that God is merciful?](#)
- [The Mercy of Jesus sets us free!](#)

Discuss

- What is mercy? What is justice? Are mercy and justice incompatible with each other or can both exist at the same time?
- How did Jesus demonstrate mercy during His life?
- What are some ways that we experience His mercy in our lives?

Watch/ art

- Watch [Mercy is Greater](#) video.
- Ask students to gather in pairs or groups to complete 5 examples that finish the sentence: “Mercy is greater than ...” Then have the students turn one of their sentences into art that can be hung in the classroom for the entire week.

Activity

1. Discuss the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy ([see link](#)).
2. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a specific work of mercy.
3. For homework, have students review the list of 51 Corporal Works of Mercy ideas.
4. Encourage students to pick one of these to carry out during the week, either alone or in small groups (they can use the [Respect Life Office website](#) for local ways to serve in the New York area).
5. Ask them to create a short video of what they did and what they learned from the experience.

Prayer

Loving God, Help us to open our hearts to receive your mercy.

As you cast open the doors of Your heart to us, May we respond by joyfully proclaiming your mercy to others. Help us to be witnesses of your mercy, living it as Jesus did. May we never grow tired of being merciful and compassionate to others. And help us to remember that Your mercy is unending. We ask this in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Lesson adapted from the plans on the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Life, Justice and Peace website

