

AGENTS OF MERCY LESSON: CELEBRATING SPECIAL NEEDS

GRADES 7-8

Goal:

Students will learn about the importance of loving and reverencing those who are different from us. Students will learn to recognize that every person is unique and created by God and loved for who they are. They will learn that our physical appearance and abilities cannot change our irrevocable dignity.

Lesson:

God makes each person special—a unique creation whom He planned from the beginning of time. God does not make mistakes. He has made each person in love and for love, precious in His eyes. In our world, it is so important that we learn to respect the dignity of every human person, no matter our differences. Unfortunately, people with disabilities experience a great amount of discrimination, including bullying. When we cannot recognize their dignity as children of God, we need to change our perspective and recognize the incredible lives of those around us. People with disabilities deserve the same love and support as everyone else. God has a special plan for every single person, no matter what our abilities are.

Watch:

- Watch the amazing Paralympics video “[We’re the Superheroes](#)”.
- [Dear Future Mom](#) of Child with Down Syndrome
- Watch [Nick Vujici’s story](#)

Discussion:

- What are some of the challenges of being born with a disability? What are some of the gifts?
- What attitude do you see repeated in all of these people with down syndrome or special needs? Why do you think they are so joyful?
- Do you think the rest of the world is accepting of those with disabilities? How could we be more accepting?
- How was Nick affected by the Gospel passage he read? Why do you think his story is able to touch so many people?

Reinforce the message that, because God makes each one of us and creates us for a reason, he gives us all of the gifts that we will need to fulfill our purpose in this life. If someone is born with a disability or a special need, it must mean that God’s plan for that person will use that special need and create something wonderful out of it! Our worth, our definition, is not found in our physical appearance or “defects”, or even worldly accomplishments or success, but in the love of our Creator. Our dignity is found in that! Nick sharing his message with the world is not making the best of a bad situation—it is fulfilling the exact role that God had in mind for him!

Watch:

- [My Name is Deformed](#)
- [Carly's Cafe](#)

Discussion:

- Who is “Deformed”? Why are they called that? How does their culture view disability?
- What does the simple corrective surgery do for the people with cleft palate or lip?
- How does offering that solution to these children impact the lives of the doctors and nurses?
- What is the significance of a name? What does it mean for these people to be renamed?
- Who is Carly? What is her special need?
- How does something like going to a coffee shop overwhelm Carly?
- What does her experience teach us about people living with autism?

Activity:

- Brainstorm as a group ways that you can be of assistance to people with special needs or disabilities without being awkward or rude.
 - What is it that they actually need?
 - How can you meet those needs while respecting their dignity?
- If students have access to computers or iPads, have them use the online resources to learn what it is like to have [dyslexia](#) or [ADHD](#).

Homework:

Have students watch [Butterfly Circus](#).

- Question for reflection:
 - How does the barker’s description of Will as “the man whom God Himself has turned His back upon” affect how Will sees himself?
 - How does Will find a community? What makes the Butterfly Circus special?
- In class discussion, remind students that Will finds a someone who recognizes his dignity, rather than abusing him for his disability. Discuss how Will was able to inspire another person just by living out his gifts to the fullest.

Prayer:

Loving God, you teach us that the power of the Holy Spirit means more than any human limitation or weakness.

Through surrender to your will, may we bear witness to the truth
that the source of our human dignity is not the outward condition of the body,
but our likeness to the Creator.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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