

AGENTS OF MERCY LESSON: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

GRADES 4-6

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
- Props for skit
- Access to iPad smart phone or video camera for recording

Lesson:

It is important first to define mercy. A good explanation for this age group is: Mercy is the ability to choose to do something that will help someone else even when you have the ability to take the easy way out and not make that choice. In other words, mercy is always a free choice to help another.

Scripture:

Read the story of the Unmerciful Servant. Matthew 18:21-34

Discussion:

- a. What causes the master to have mercy on the servant?
- b. How does the servant respond to the mercy shown to him?
- c. Why is the master upset with the servant's actions?
- d. What is the proper response when mercy is shown to us? Why?

Watch:

- Watch [this scene from Les Misérables](#)
- Or summarize the story (below):

Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Misérables*, powerfully illustrates grace, mercy, justice, and redemption. At the outset of the French Revolution, the main character, Jean Valjean, has completed an extended prison sentence for stealing bread. When finally released from prison, Valjean's passport marks him as an ex-convict. Valjean seeks to get a fresh start, but he is spurned and mistreated. Eventually, gracious Bishop Myriel takes him under his roof.

After clothing and feeding Valjean, the criminal repays the Bishop's kindness by stealing his valuable silverware. The next day, the local authorities arrest Valjean and bring him to the Bishop for justice.

Bishop Myriel responds with astonishing mercy. Instead of confirming the theft and condemning the thief, he simply tells Valjean that he forgot to take the silver candlesticks as well. The Bishop shoves the expensive candlesticks into Valjean's knapsack. After the authorities leave, Myriel urges Valjean to become an honest man.

The criminal receives a gracious opportunity to live for God instead of evil. Though Valjean deserved death for his crime, Myriel showed mercy and over-the-top generosity. Because of the Bishop's actions, Valjean began an honorable life of generous public service. His experience is a wonderful example of what Christ does for us—extending both mercy (not receiving the punishment that we do deserve) and grace (receiving special favor that we do not deserve).

Discussion:

- How did the bishop show mercy to Jean Valjean? Why do you think he did that?
- How do you think the experience changed Jean Valjean? (You can explain to the students the rest of the story, how Jean Valjean becomes a great man and goes on to touch many people's lives through works of mercy)

Activity:

1. Discuss the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.
2. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a specific work of mercy.
3. Have the students organize a 30 second skit to represent that work of mercy.
4. Give them 5 minutes of preparation and then have each group perform in front of the class.
5. (For homework, have students choose one work of mercy to do (using the service opportunities in the New York area found on the [Respect Life Office website](#)). Encourage students to pick one of these to carry out during the week, either alone or in small groups. Ask them to create a short video of what they did and what they learned from the experience.) hyperlink of Respect Life Office does not work...so I am not able to see activities

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.