

LEARNING TO FORGIVE

GRADES 4-6 – Lesson 2

GOAL: Students will understand how wide and long and high and deep God's love is for them and because of that He is all-merciful. Our sin is never too great for God's mercy and He desires for all the lost sheep to be reunited with the flock. Students will be introduced to Church teachings regarding dignity in prisons and how as children of God we are called to minister and pray for those in prison.

Lesson:

The prison system in America is characterized by its emphasis on punishment and retribution. But, the Church rightly recognizes that mere punishment is not justice. In particular, long unfair sentences, solitary confinement, and the death penalty can be used in vengeful ways rather than helping the offender to correct the wrong done. Restorative justice emphasizes repentance and repairing the harm done. It allows for victims and families to forgive the offender and allows the offender to seek that forgiveness.

Bible Story: [The Prodigal Son \(Luke 15:11-32\)](#)

The story of the Prodigal Son shows us how God wants us to come back to Him when we've turned away and He will always forgive us. Jesus died on the cross so that our sins would be forgiven and we could be with Him forever in heaven. All we must do is be sorry for our sins, try our best to do good, and love God and our neighbor with all of our hearts.

Discussion:

- What is this story about?
- What did the younger son do wrong, what did he do right?
- Leaving his family and squandering his inheritance, coming back to ask for forgiveness.
- What did the older son do wrong, what did he do right?
- Can you recall times when you've felt like the younger son? Older son?
- Why did the father react with mercy instead of anger?

- God always reacts with mercy when we come to Him asking for forgiveness. We experience this mercy in person as often as we wish in the sacrament of confession. Have you felt God's mercy in confession?
- What are some reasons people are nervous to go to confession? Do you think people can feel like the younger son and be scared to go because they are ashamed and think they'll receive anger instead of mercy?
- God gives mercy to all of his children. Are there any crimes you think God wouldn't forgive? Robbing a bank? Killing someone? No, God forgives us for all of our sins when we ask forgiveness and He wants us to ask forgiveness so we can be in right relationship with Him.

Watch:

[Confession is a Place of Victory](#)

Discussion:

- Confession offers us an opportunity to return to the Father like the Prodigal's Son.
- How do you feel about confession? Scared? Great? How did this video change your perception of confession?
- In the Our Father we pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." How do you think this relates to God's mercy in confession?
- God offers us endless mercy but He also asks us to extend that same mercy to others who have wronged us. If God offers us this mercy for wronging Him who we should love above all else then who are we to reject mercy to someone else?
- Giving mercy as Christians does not just apply to those who have wronged us personally but also systematic mercy and recognition of the dignity of criminals. Criminals have fallen away from God but God still wants them to come back to Him like the Prodigal's Son. We are called to visit those in prison and minister to them. Have you ever done prison ministry? Do you know anyone who has?
- Prisons are a place where the dignity of the criminal is often not recognized. The Catholic Church takes a strong stance on the treatment of prisoners when it comes to punishments like long sentences, solitary confinement, and the death penalty. Why do you think criminals' dignity is often disregarded? Why do you think the church speaks out against practices like these?

Activity:

Students will research either a Saint that did prison ministry or current prison ministry. If choosing a Saint, students will make a poster about them, their life, and what they did. If choosing a ministry, students will find an organization and make a poster about what they do and how it was started. Students should focus on themes of forgiveness and how God's mercy was shown through their chosen subject.

List of a few prison-related Saints:

- St. Maximilian Kolbe (Nazi concentration camp)
- St. Dismas (on the cross beside Jesus)
- St. Adrian of Nicomedia (guard who converted after seeing the faith of Christians)

List of a few prison ministries:

- [Catholic Prison Ministries \(CPMC\)](#)
- [Dismas Ministry](#)

Prayer:

*Merciful Father,
Thank you for giving me my mind to reason and think.
I ask your blessing on all those who have made wrong choices.
Help them to recognize what they have done and to ask for your forgiveness. Teach me to be fair and just
with those around me.
Show me how to be merciful and to forgive those who offend me as you did.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*