Saint Junípero Serra

Always Forward | Leader guide

Ages 6-10 | About 20-30 minutes | Film: 5 minutes 54 seconds

The lesson in one sentence

Following Jesus means persevering in goodness, respecting every person and asking for mercy without pretending that wrongdoing is right.

Prepare

Watch the film first. Bring pencils and the student sheet that best suits the group. Younger children may draw and dictate; older children can read and write independently.

1. Welcome and wonder (3 minutes)

Ask: What makes a good task hard to finish? Explain that perseverance can include resting, accepting help and changing an unsafe plan. It does not mean ignoring pain or danger.

2. Watch together (6 minutes)

Listen for Siempre adelante, Spanish for “Always forward.” Ask children to notice a hard journey, an effort to protect others and a request for mercy.

3. Talk together (6 minutes)

What made Serra’s journey difficult? Why should we listen respectfully to people with different languages and traditions? Why did Serra ask that the attackers be allowed to live? How can mercy and fair consequences belong together?

4. Respond and pray (5-10 minutes)

Choose Draw & Tell or Read & Write. Invite each child to name one safe, practical act of kindness. Pray: Jesus, help us listen, protect those who are hurt and take the next good step with you. Saint Junípero Serra, pray for us. Amen.

Teach the history honestly

The film acknowledges that Native communities had families, languages, traditions and ways of life before Spanish missions arrived. It also acknowledges disease, harsh mission rules, punishments and mistreatment. Do not describe the land as empty or suggest that becoming Christian erased a people's culture or dignity.

Mercy, justice and safety

Forgiveness does not excuse cruelty, cancel fair consequences or require a child to trust an unsafe person. If someone is being hurt, get help from a trusted adult. Prayer for a wrongdoer and protection of the person harmed belong together. Allow children to pass rather than share personal experiences of harm.

Vocabulary

Franciscan: a member of a religious community following Saint Francis of Assisi. Missionary: someone sent to share the Gospel. Dignity: the worth every person has. Mercy: compassionate care that seeks another person's good, including a chance to repent and change.

Suggested answers

Serra's painful leg made travel difficult. Native families deserved respect and protection. His request for the attackers' lives expressed hope that they could repent and change; it did not call the killing good. Children can persevere by doing a kind task, listening, asking for help or speaking up safely for someone hurt.

Scripture and further study

Read Matthew 5:43-48, especially 5:44, about loving enemies and praying for persecutors; see also Luke 6:27-36, especially 6:36, on mercy. These are Gospel teachings, not claims that people must remain in danger.

Matthew 5 - USCCB | Luke 6 - USCCB
Pope Francis: Serra canonization homily, September 23, 2015 - Vatican
The canonization homily emphasizes sharing the Gospel and mercy. The story's historical complexity should remain part of the discussion.