Saint Maria Goretti

The Courage to Forgive | Leader guide

Adult preview and parent guidance recommended. The 6:29 film includes threats, violence described in narration, and the death of a child. No graphic violence is shown. Preview it before using it. Suggested ages 8-11 are a starting point; decide by the readiness and circumstances of your group.

The central lesson

Maria loved Jesus in ordinary family work and in the Eucharist. After she was gravely harmed, she freely forgave Alessandro and hoped that he would repent and turn toward God. His actions remained wrong. Years later, he sought forgiveness from her mother, Assunta. God calls us to charity and mercy while every child deserves care and protection.

Learning goals

- Name one way Maria served her family and one way she grew close to Jesus.
- Explain that forgiveness does not make wrongdoing acceptable or remove the need for safety and justice.
- Identify asking a trusted adult for help as a good, courageous choice.

A simple 20-25 minute lesson

Before viewing (3 minutes): Explain that this story has a sad part. Children may step out with a responsible adult or use a gentler activity instead. Say: "Everyone deserves to be safe. Someone who hurts another person is responsible for that choice."

Watch (6:29): Keep the discussion age appropriate. Do not add graphic details or ask children to imagine themselves being attacked.

Discuss (5 minutes): How did Maria help at home? Why was Holy Communion so precious to her? What did she hope would change in Alessandro? What should we do if someone frightens or hurts us?

Respond (5-8 minutes): Choose Draw & Tell or Read & Write. Use a fictional, everyday example when discussing an apology, making amends or boundaries. Let children pass on any question.

Pray (1 minute): "Jesus, teach us to love with courage. Help us seek help when we need it, care for others, and trust in your mercy. Saint Maria Goretti, pray for us. Amen."

Teaching mercy with care

Leader guide | Discussion notes and adaptations

Helpful answers

Ordinary charity: Maria cooked, cleaned and cared for younger children. Small acts of service can be real acts of love.

Holy Communion: Catholics believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. Maria prepared to receive him with faith and joy.

Forgiveness and repentance: Maria wished for Alessandro to be sorry, change his life and come to God. Repentance includes taking responsibility and choosing differently. An apology does not automatically restore trust.

Safety and boundaries: Forgiveness does not require pretending harm did not happen, keeping an unsafe secret, meeting an unsafe person or remaining in danger. Getting help and seeking protection do not conflict with mercy.

Keep the conversation safe

- Do not ask for personal stories of harm, pressure a child to forgive, or set a deadline for feelings. Use fictional examples and allow quiet participation.
- Say plainly: a child is never responsible for another person's abuse. Maria had done nothing wrong.
- If a child shares a concern, listen calmly and take it seriously. Do not invite a public retelling. Follow your parish or school safeguarding procedures and involve the appropriate responsible adults.

A gentle practice example

Sam tears Lee's group-project picture. Sam says sorry and offers to help repair it. Ask: What would taking responsibility look like? Could Lee ask the teacher for help? Could Lee need time before trusting Sam with the picture again? **Guide:** Mercy can wish for another person to choose well while keeping sensible boundaries.

Adapt and extend

Draw & Tell: Invite a picture of helping, prayer or Communion preparation. An adult can scribe the child's explanation. **Read & Write:** Discuss choices and explain the difference between forgiveness and approval. **For younger or sensitive children:** Teach Maria's family service and love for Jesus without showing the difficult portions.

One small act: Choose a safe, ordinary kindness: help clear a table, include someone in a game, or pray for someone who needs God's help.

Sources for adults

Film: *Saint Maria Goretti: The Courage to Forgive*, Servus Dei. Further reading: Vatican News, "St. Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr" (July 6); Saint John Paul II, message for the centenary of her death (6 July 2002). Adult sources discuss mature details; preview before sharing.

vaticannews.va/en/saints/07/06/st--maria-goretti--virgin-and-martyr.html
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