

Spiritual Work of Mercy To Instruct the Ignorant

(A Meditation on the Spiritual Work of Mercy, To Instruct the Ignorant)
excerpts from Msgr. Charles Pope – April 15, 2015



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
1774 – 1821
Feast Day – January 4

Catechism of the Catholic Church

“The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aide of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.” - (2447)

Sacred Scripture

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28: 19-20

And this is what is meant by the spiritual work of mercy “Instruct the Ignorant.” All of us can benefit from proper instruction by those who know more about a certain subject or issue than we do. And it is a work of mercy when someone takes the time to instruct us. It is an even greater work of mercy when the knowledge conferred is something essential or saving for us.

Instructing the ignorant: a great and wonderful spiritual work of mercy whereby souls are saved; the wonderful, astonishing, and inestimable gift of knowledge, given like food for the soul and light for the mind.

Be extravagant in teaching your own soul by frequent recourse to Holy Scripture and all sources of good knowledge and holy wisdom. Be extravagant in sharing what you have learned with others.

Can any of us ever really be grateful enough for all those who took the time to teach us down through the years, whether it was as young children in school, or as we grew through maturity and into a career, or even today as we learn new technologies or new issues and things that are on the scene? A patient and generous teacher is a great gift. And indeed the knowledge we gain is so enormously valuable as to be literally *invaluable*.

There is a greater emphasis from the Church on the need for parents to be equipped for their role as the primary educators of their children. Nothing is more essential for parents than to hand on the saving truths of the faith to their children. *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov 22:6).*

Yes, to instruct the ignorant is a great work of mercy, and knowledge is one of our most precious gifts.

To instruct comes from the Latin in + struere, which means to build up or (even more literally) to pile up. Thus, to instruct means to disperse knowledge or build someone up in what is learned.

Instruct the Ignorant

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Fast Facts:

Born	• August 28, 1774 in New York City
Feast Day	• January 4
Canonized	• September 14, 1975 by Pope Paul VI
Quote	• "The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will."



Her Life:

- By birth and marriage Elizabeth was linked to the first families of New York.
- Raised Episcopalian by her mother and stepmother – she learned the value of prayer, scripture and a nightly examination of conscience.
- Her father did not practice religion but was a great humanitarian – teaching his daughter to love and serve others.
- At the age of 19, Elizabeth was married to a handsome, wealthy businessman, William Magee Seton.
- They had five children.
- William became sick with tuberculosis which required a trip overseas to Italy.
- It was during this time in Italy that Elizabeth began to see the beauty of the Catholic faith.
- Elizabeth became a widow at the age of 30.
- On Ash Wednesday, March 14, 1805, Elizabeth was received into the Catholic Church.
- She started a school for young girls for poor families near Baltimore – This was the first Catholic School in the United States.
- Soon other women joined Elizabeth in her ministry of education

- After a few years they formed the first women's religious community in the U.S – The Sisters of Charity.
- Elizabeth was chosen as the first Mother Superior.
- The community moved to Emmitsburg, MD where she lived until her death.
- She died on January 4, 1821
- She became the first American born citizen to be beatified in 1963
- Elizabeth Ann Seton was canonized on September 14, 1975 in St. Peter's Square by Pope Paul VI.

How is St. Elizabeth Ann Seton a model for living out the Spiritual Work of Mercy – To Instruct the Ignorant?

The extraordinary manner in which Elizabeth lived an ordinary life flowed from the Word of God and the Eucharist in her life. These strengthened her, enabling her to love God, her family, and her neighbor. In the depth of her charity she undertook heroic works of mercy. Not only did she and her Sisters of Charity care for orphans, widows, and poor families, but they also addressed unmet needs of the poor. Elizabeth had a special concern for children who lacked educational opportunities, especially religious instruction in the faith.

Practices to Foster growth in Instructing the Ignorant

- **Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Instructing the Ignorant*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.**
 - Matthew 29: 19-20
 - Mark 16: 14-18
 - Luke 24: 47-49
 - John 20:21
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-5
 - Acts 8:30-31
- **Memorize the Act of Faith and pray this prayer each morning.**
 - O my God, I firmly believe all the truths that the Holy Catholic Church believes and teaches; I believe these truths, O Lord, because Thou, the infallible Truth, hast revealed them to her; in this faith I am resolved to live and die. Amen.
- **Catechetical Texts that speak to *Instructing the Ignorant*:**
 - “St. Paul speaks of the ‘obedience of faith’ as our first obligation. He shows that ‘ignorance of God’ is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations. Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him.” (CCC 2087)
 - “Catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible. But the Church's members have different responsibilities, derived from each one's mission” *Catechesis in Our Time*, John Paul II (p.16)
 - “It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. The most urgent task today is to lead people to discover both their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate definitive meaning of life” (*Fides et Ratio*, 48 & 102).
- **Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Instruct the Ignorant*.**
 - Examples: (St. Paul, St. Peter, Origen, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, etc.)
- **Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Instruct the Ignorant*?**