

The works of mercy are broken up into two categories: the corporal works of mercy and the spiritual works of mercy. The spiritual works of mercy are designed to meet the spiritual needs of others: Instruct The Ignorant, Counsel The Doubtful, Admonish The Sinner, Bear Wrongs Patiently, Forgive Offences Willingly, Comfort The Afflicted, Pray For The Living and The Dead.

Fr. Jim's note: All of us have encountered people whom we label as ignorant, which we define as someone who should know better. We look down on them for their stupidity...yet we are called to Instruct the Ignorant. Does it mean that we are supposed to teach those whom we think are stupid? Read on you may be surprised!

Instruct The Ignorant

What does it mean to share your story? What if my story isn't very exciting? It's not always about the depth of our knowledge of the Catholic faith. Instructing the ignorant is about reaching people's hearts. Sometimes to open someone's heart to instruction, what we really need to do first is share our story. No one can argue with your testimony.

From our point of view, life isn't all that exciting. It's easier for us to reach people's hearts by listening to them talk about their pain and then offering ways to solve their problem—without necessarily referencing our personal experiences. We have been learning about the beauty of the Catholic faith our entire life, and it holds all the answers. But people need deeply personal answers to deeply personal questions. There is a difference between saying, "God loves you," and being vulnerable to share the incredible things God has done for you. Which meets the person where they are better?

People need to know that they are not alone. People need love. People need someone who is willing to meet them where they are—not just by acknowledging their pain, but by being willing to walk with them through it and try to better understand their pain. This is where we can share our own stories, to let them know that we share their struggles, that we want to hear about them, and then love them however they need it. We may struggle with sharing our story because it does not have any dramatic journeys into or out of darkness. Have I made bad choices? Yes, but nothing extraordinary. Have I suffered? Yes, but again, nothing I would call extraordinary. But I have failed. I have suffered. I am battling my own demons. I have wrestled with countless questions. I have felt alone, used, rejected, worthless. I have been confused, angry, exhausted. I have felt like I couldn't bear any more. But I have also laughed, and I have loved. I have delighted in the people and the world around me—and in my savior. I have experienced a love that pierces, heals, and transforms. I have been embraced in my deepest pain. And I have been given joy that makes it all seem so small. And so have you.

God is working in your life and in your heart. You can testify to that. How have you struggled? What are the doubts you have faced? How have you experienced the incredible mercy of God? How have you found freedom in the genius of Catholicism? Wherever you are in your journey, you have a story worth telling.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein