

Seventh Meditation: That the care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church

First Point

God, having chosen and destined Saint Paul, as he himself says to preach the Gospel to the nations, gave him such knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, that he was enabled like a good architect to lay the foundation for the building of the faith and of the religion which God raised up in the cities where Saint Paul announced the Gospel, according to the grace which God had given him; he was the first of all to preach in these places; that is why he says quite justly that those to whom he announced the Gospel are his work, and that he has begotten them in Jesus Christ.

Without comparing yourself to this great saint (and keeping in mind the due proportion between your work and his), you can say that you are doing the same thing, and that you are fulfilling the same ministry in your profession.

You must, then, look upon your work as one of the most important and most necessary services in the Church, one which has been entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers.

This means that you are called to lay the foundation for the building of the Church when you instruct children in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ when he was on earth.

For, according to Saint Paul, without faith it is impossible to please God and consequently be saved and enter the homeland of heaven because faith is the foundation of the hope that we have. The knowledge, then, that each must have of the faith, the instruction that must be given concerning the faith to those who are ignorant of it, is one of the most important things in our religion.

How much, then, you must consider yourselves honored by the church, to have been assigned by her to such a holy and exalted work, to be chosen by her to procure for children the knowledge of our religion and the Christian spirit.

Pray God that he will make you fit to fulfill such a ministry in a manner worthy of him.

Second Point

The importance of this ministry is seen in the fact that the holy shops of the early Church looked upon it as their main duty and even considered it an honor to instruct the catechumens and new Christians and to teach catechism to them. Saint Cyril, patriarch of Jerusalem, and Saint Augustine have left us catechisms which they wrote and taught themselves, and which they also caused to be taught by the priests who helped them in their pastoral duties. Saint Jerome, whose knowledge was so profound, testifies in his letter to Leta that he considered it a greater honor to teach catechism to a young child than to be a tutor to a great emperor. Gerson, the great chancellor of the University of Paris, had such high esteem for this ministry that he practiced it himself.

These great saints acted this way because teaching was the first ministry Jesus Christ gave his holy apostles, a fact Saint Luke reports when he says that as soon as Jesus had chosen his apostles, he sent them forth to proclaim the Kingdom of God. This is also what Jesus Christ requested of his apostles very clearly just before he departed from them, telling them, Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This is likewise the first thing Saint Peter did in the temple of Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit, with the immediate result that three thousand people began to embrace the faith in Jesus Christ.

This was also the special work of Saint Paul, as is evident in his discourses in the Areopagus and those that he gave before Felix and Festus as reported in the Acts of the Apostles. Saint Paul testifies to the Corinthians that it would even be painful to him, if he had to come to them without being useful by instructing and catechizing them.

But Jesus Christ did not limit himself to entrusting to his apostles the work of teaching catechism. He did this work himself and taught the principal truths of our religion, as reported in a great number of places in his Gospel where he tells

his apostles, I must announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God because this is why I have been sent.

Say the same thing, that this is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the Church, whose ministers you are, employs you. Bring all the care needed, then, to fulfill this function with as much zeal and success as the saints have had fulfilling it.

Third Point

There is no need to be astonished if the first bishops of the early Church, and if the holy apostles, had such an esteem for the function of instructing the catechumens and the new Christians, and if Saint Paul especially gloried in being sent to preach the Gospel, not with learned words, for fear that the cross of Jesus Christ would be destroyed, since God turned the wisdom of the world into folly. Saint Paul, enlightened by God's wisdom and inspiration, says that the world did not recognize God through its wisdom, so it pleased God through the folly of the preaching of the Gospel to save those who accept the faith.

The reason that Saint Paul gives for this is that God's secret plan was unveiled to him, and he had received the grace of unveiling to the nations the incomprehensible riches of Jesus Christ so that those who previously were deprived of Jesus Christ, and were strangers to the covenant of God, without hope in his promises, now belong to Jesus Christ, and are strangers no longer, but have become fellow citizens with the saints and servants of God's household, they are the structure which has been built on the foundation of the Apostles and raised up by Jesus Christ; they have become the sanctuary where God dwells through his Holy Spirit.

Such is the result accomplished in the Church by the instructions given after the holy apostles by the great bishops and pastors of the Church who devoted themselves to instructing those who wanted to become Christians. This is why this work seemed so important to them, and why they devoted themselves to it with such care.

This is also what ought to engage you to have an altogether special esteem for

the Christian instruction and education of children since it is a means of helping them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. This is the very foundation and support of their piety and of all the other good that takes place in the Church.

Thank God for the grace he has given you in your work, of sharing in the ministry of the holy apostles and the principal bishops and pastors of the Church. Honor your ministry by making yourselves, as Saint Paul says, worthy ministers of the New Testament.