

Seeking Ignatian Depth in Jesuit Education

Jesuit and Companion Schools Australia

Education Conference, Xavier College

July 6th 2016

In 1865 the arrival in Australia of Irish Jesuits signaled a significant commitment of the Society of Jesus to the provision of education in this country. While the Austrian Jesuits had been involved in the education of students and seminarians, the arrival of Jesuits from Ireland indicated a new and valuable commitment to the Catholics on the south-eastern seaboard, particularly to a largely poor and marginalised Irish Catholic community.

The two Jesuits who arrived on the 21st September 1865 went to work at St Patrick's College the following day. It suggests something of the passion and work-ethic which has been known to affect those who are involved in the Jesuit education enterprise.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer some words for your gathering here at my old alma mater, the school I left a little over fifty years ago. It provides me with the opportunity to remember and give thanks to those lay teachers and Jesuits who taught me at that time.

Let me acknowledge the traditional people of this land, the Wurundjeri people, our nation's First Teachers in this place and their gift of education to the young.

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge you the leaders in our schools, both those come under our Jesuit Province responsibility and those with whom we share companionship in our Ignatian heritage. We live in an ever changing world and we continue to face many challenges. Federal Elections are only some of them. Your faith and leadership at this period of time is critically important and deeply needed.

I would like to offer three main points for your consideration, each of which has an Ignatius link: **GRATITUDE**, **CONTEMPLATION** and a special Pope Francis link, **MERCY**.

I will frame each point with a reference to Pope Francis and finish with some invitations and challenges.

GRATITUDE

Pope Francis:

We are men (talking about being a Jesuit) in tension; we are also contradictory and inconsistent men, sinners, all. But men who want to walk under the gaze of Jesus. We are little, we are sinners, but we want to militate under the standard of the Cross of the Society conferred with the name of Jesus.

(Homily Friday January 3rd 2014, St Peter Faber's canonization).

A number of times Pope Francis has referred to himself as a sinner. As Jesuits we are reminded of GC32, Decree 2: 'What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.'

(GC 32, Decree 2, #11).

Today, I would like to focus on one aspect of human sinfulness, what David Fleming SJ describes as ‘a lack of gratitude’.

(David Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* p25).

Ignatius in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises has us focusing on sin, not sin being mired in guilt, narcissism, self-loathing and despair but sin as our turning away from the gift of God’s love and a reverence for all we have been given. We only truly know our sin ‘in the blinding light of God’s love’ (Fleming, 27).

This year, 2016, our Province and its many ministries have much to be grateful for. We can point to graduates from our schools as leaders in our Church, in the social arena of health, law, politics and much more. After 150 years of education in Australia there are many positive signs of what our education efforts have achieved.

However, Ignatian gratitude asks much more from us than listing achievements. It invites a closer relationship to the Creator and to Jesus, companion and friend. It opens up the heart ‘to receive a forgiving love and to be enabled to offer forgiveness to others’ (Fleming, 29). Gratitude leads to generosity.

Pedro Arrupe once said: ‘Our ministries and works are not good just because they are traditional, nor need one condemn them simply because they are old. Beginning with the spirit of indifference or the preference for the “Magis” of St Ignatius, and not because of an obsession with change, let us understand how to situate for ourselves

serenely and objectively this question of the works themselves and the way of undertaking them'. (*Pedro Arrupe, GC 31, 1966*)

What Arrupe puts before each of us is something that lies deeply within our tradition: what we seek to do 'for the greater glory of God' has little to do with being more active or doing more things or taking on more responsibilities. It is about the Magis of gratitude, holding and experiencing a deep spirit of gratitude in all we are and do.

Tony de Mello (*Seeking God Everywhere, 2010*)

Tony de Mello, Jesuit, writer and spiritual guide, tells the story where a Jesuit provincial invited all the principals of all the schools to make a common discernment on the question: 'Should we give up the schools or keep them?' A very reputable principal of one of the schools said, 'It is ridiculous to consider giving up our schools. We have a commitment to the people for whom we are working'. De Mello commented, 'I thought our commitment was to Christ'.

While de Mello's response might seem a bit too challenging, even simplistic, he pointed to our Ignatian tradition where we seek an inner freedom that is graced, freely given by God (hence, not earned, paid for or even deserved) and which arises out of a deep awareness of being singularly blessed and gifted. Whatever we do, whatever we commit ourselves to doing, we are invited to live deeply free and entertain the possibility of God being glorified in new and challenging ways in our lives.

The same GC32 that reminded Jesuits of their sinfulness also emphasized, in a very same breath, 'the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle

for justice which it includes' (#12). A Jesuit is on mission 'to the service of faith and the promotion of justice' and in companionship, a response arising from gratitude.

Such a response leads us those radical words of the Suscipe prayer as it also did to those who gathered at GC32 (#42).

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
to you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*

However, be careful for what you pray for! Our Ignatian spirituality leads us to Christ, seeking a freedom from what we hold and cling onto along with a freedom to take up our mission in new, exciting and more daring ways. Living the Magis is living in gratitude, something which overflows into everything we are and do.

INVITATION & CHALLENGE

- a) What is the language we use around those key values we promote when seeking to educate? Where is the sense of 'sin' in our own lives, staff and students? What does it mean to say, today, 'I am a sinner', 'we are sinners'?

- b) What does it mean to be grateful? Where does it lead in ourselves, our students and families? Where do we encounter a sense of privilege, entitlement and even elitism? What is earned, rewarded? How do we respond?
- c) Can we ‘measure’ those alternative and complementary ways we choose to educate our students? For example, for every dollar we wish to spend on a new building or project can we discover something ‘in kind’ or an alternative ‘dollar’ or quality benchmark for those other choices we see as most important eg. retreats, bursaries, immersions, arts and creativity? Can we find Ignatian methods of measurement that help evaluate what we are doing and which firmly withstand the scrutiny of other measurements?

2. CONTEMPLATION

Pope Francis:

Authentic contemplation always has a place for others.

The interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization.

(Evangelii Gaudium #281 & #288)

The call to mission within our Province is found in Luke 4: 18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

This call to mission links our desire to be companions with Jesus. It reminds us that any hunger we might seek or feel for such companionship and service can and will continue to remain a challenge in today's growing secular Australian society.

Hugh Mackay (*Beyond Belief, 2016*)

Hugh Mackay, social researcher, in his latest book *Beyond Belief* notes the large and growing group of believers in Australia: SBNR: spiritual but not religious; people who often tick the 'no religion' box in the census. This group has grown from 6.7 percent to 22 percent in the past forty years.

He notes: as church attendances have declined, enrollment at religious schools has soared. 'In 1970, only 22 percent of Australian school pupils were enrolled at non-government schools; by 2014, the proportion had risen to 35 percent and that trend appears set to continue. In the case of secondary education, the proportion of pupils enrolled in non-government schools is close to 40 percent.' (87)

'We are ripe, therefore, for the consolations of the spiritual life. We are in need of stories that will help us to make sense of what is happening to us or to recognise the causes of our underlying angst. Even in a determinedly secular society like Australia, all those non-churchgoing people who still choose to identify themselves as 'Christian' are presumably saying something about the values they aspire to, to kind of cultural heritage they still respect and possibly the kind of institutions they still want to preserve.' (48).

Our society is marked today by many things: we are more global and potentially more inter-connected while also risking being more superficial. We are busier and under pressure in ever new and demanding ways. We need to measure and compare our bodies and minds against others, to define our worth in terms of competition, benchmarks and narrowly defined set of standards and results. We wonder how large or extensive is our reach, our influence, even our own human value.

Ronald Rolheiser OMI (*The Shattered Lantern* 2015)

The Oblate Ronald Rolheiser comments, ‘We live in a culture that, for the most part, no longer imagines God’s existence’, ‘We live lives of quiet agnosticism’ (10).

He offers three main areas for consideration: **Narcissism, Pragmatism, Unbridled Restlessness**, all leading to the **Non-Contemplative Personality**.

- **Narcissism**: our propensity
- for individualism and our corresponding inability to be healthily aware of and concerned about the reality beyond our private lives,
- for self-development pursued with a sense of duty and asceticism that were formally reserved for religion,
- for a movement towards excessive privacy.
- **Pragmatism**: we take our sense of worth from what we do rather than who we are,
- we have little patience for impractical ideas,
- we only trust the scientific.

- **Unbridled Restlessness:** we feel better about ourselves when we are doing useful things,
- where greed and impatience push us towards premature and irresponsible experience such as a lack of chastity (defined as the limits and appropriateness of all experience, the sexual included),
- we suffer the loss of interiority.

Distraction is normal in our culture. Contemplativeness, solitude, and prayer are not. ‘Our consciousness is so clouded with self-centredness, practicality, and restlessness that we are contemplatively asleep’. (184)

What Rolheiser is identifying is the need to find a balance, as we might in our Ignatian spirituality, between action and contemplation. It is in the deepening of contemplation that we face the truths of who we are and the gifts we receive; it is a deepening of contemplation that promotes and provokes silence and reflective action: a faith that can live, breathe and promote justice.

‘We are in contemplation when we stand before reality and experience it without the limits and distortions that are created by narcissism (our headaches and heartaches), pragmatism (our pressing tasks), and excessive restlessness (our dreams and distractions.’ (23)

INVITATION & CHALLENGE

- a) How do we address this world of increasing busyness, the attraction of immediate rewards and the pleasures of instant distraction? What does it

mean for ourselves, our students and families to be more deeply contemplative? Where are the opportunities to deepen experiences as found in the exercise of 'repetition' in the Spiritual Exercises?

- b) What are the symbols we use to explore the sacred? Do we engage the boundaries of belief and non-belief? Who are our prophets of the sacred? Where do our students teach us about faith and the sacred?
- c) Where is the depth of Ignatian spirituality to be found and nurtured in our staff, our senior student leaders, our sporting and other influential leaders and teachers? How do we know it is there? How do we nurture it?

3. MERCY

Pope Francis:

The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up.

We live in a wounded society: within our own country we face high rates of youth suicide and unemployment, increasing rates of imprisonment of Aboriginal men and women, domestic violence and so on. One of the graces of this present Royal Commission is that it has humbled the Church, uncovered taboos around sexual abuse but also alerted us to some deeper fault lines in our present Church and culture. We are now ever more aware of male violence, its damage and its sources.

Miserando atque Eligendo (to be shown mercy and chosen)

Pope Francis chose a motto to describe how he would go about being a bishop: *he* would be a bishop, chosen in mercy to lead but by showing compassion in his decisions... *miserando atque eligendo* (to be shown mercy and chosen). We are no different. We have been shown mercy and we are chosen to lead.

Service (what we might describe as the face of mercy) lies at the heart of Ignatian mission. As in the Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love in the final week of the Spiritual Exercise, we are reminded that love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words (Sp Exs #230).

Now, more than ever before in history, we are aware of the long-term effects of abuse on children and within the Province we have moved very intentionally to review, improve and live out of our values and protocols.

In our Province *Policy for Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults*, you may note Commitment 2: The creation of a safe and nurturing vulture in Province communities and ministries.

It includes the following aims:

‘... to help children and young people develop an awareness and understanding of their own rights and a respect for the rights of others ... [to] provide children and young people with information as to how, where and from whom they can seek help if they are experiencing serious problems’.

Our Province Policy is ambitious. It seeks to make our communities and ministries safe from harm and abuse but it also seeks more. It seeks to provide a culture where all children feel loved and valued and where they know they can be supported and helped when their lives are damaged, hurt and suffering.

Bessel van der Kolk one of the world's trauma experts in *The Body Keeps the Score*, 2014) refers to the ACE Study.

The ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Study. This was a large study of 50,000 patients looking at a wide range of 'adverse childhood experiences, including physical and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and family dysfunction, such as having parents who were divorced, mentally ill, addicted or in prison.' (144) The Study found the higher the ACE Score, the greater the risk of experiencing poor physical and mental health, and negative social consequences later in life.

'The study revealed that traumatic life experiences during childhood and adolescence are far more common than expected ... only one third of the respondents reported no adverse childhood experiences.' (145) The effects of childhood trauma first became evident in school, seen in learning and behavioural problems. What is evident in childhood is accentuated in adulthood: smoking, obesity, unintended pregnancies, multiple sexual partners and sexually transmitted diseases'. (147)

Eradicating child abuse (in America) 'would [in adults] reduce the overall rate of depression by more than a half, alcoholism by two-thirds, and suicide, IV drug use, and domestic violence by three quarters.' (148)

Child abuse (he argues) is the largest public health problem, where ‘what one sees, the presenting problem, is often the marker for the real problem, which lies buried in time, concealed by patient shame, secrecy and sometimes amnesia – and frequently clinician discomfort’. (148)

Our Ignatian mission, as in Luke 4:18-19, takes us ever into new places, peripheries and spaces to proclaim good news to the poor.

INVITATION & CHALLENGE

- a) Where is depth to be found in our programs of service? Where do we intentionally return to where grace being offered? How is this grace shared beyond students and schools? How does it impact on families?
- b) Where do we intentionally and in-depth face the violence of men in our community? How are we addressing this?
- c) Where will a new depth of mercy be found in our students, families and staff? Who are the most vulnerable now in our community? How do we identify those on the peripheries and reach out to them, now? How might we know we have done so?

CONCLUSION:

Our mission invites us to be open to the future and with:

A deeper freedom and gratefulness invited by Tony de Mello and prayed in the
Suscipe,

A richer contemplative spirit suggested by Mackay and Rollheiser,

A generous and merciful heart encouraged by Pope Francis.

Over the next twelve months we will look at our forms of governance in our schools and explore how we can develop new structures which remain faithful to our long Jesuit tradition but also faithful to the needs and challenges of our times. As we do so let us seek to grow in Gratitude, Contemplation and Mercy. Let the Magis take us into new depths of imagination, creativity and spirituality.