

At first glance Ignatius is not easily identified as a mover and shaker in the world. As a simple pilgrim he sought simply to follow the Lord; he gathered a small group of nine university students together, who shared a dream of service of the Lord, and these friends would form the basis of a new small group, the Jesuits. He would then spend years at a desk in Rome guiding this group through its early years. Not a very dramatic story.

Yet by the time he died there were almost a thousand Jesuits, and the name of Ignatius was known throughout the world. And we gather here, representatives of eleven schools across Australia whose story is linked in various ways to that of Ignatius. The rather short man who sat behind a desk in a rather small room had changed the history of his world, and he continues to exercise influence on a very different world today.

Ignatius' spirituality is the key to understanding his impact on the world. It goes to his understanding of the kingdom of God. His spirituality was a mindset, a way of looking at reality, informed by his faith in God. He believed the world was of God, and thus God could be found in all things, and especially in the hearts and activities of humankind, and that discerning this was the key to finding real happiness and meaning in life.

This could have remained simply a romantic way of looking at things, held by an individual, quickly lost in time, but for the fact that Ignatius was able to en flesh his spiritual ideas in a group, the Jesuits, and in the church. Ignatius knew that to have lasting impact, to be real, spirituality has to be en fleshed – he started an order that would have a constitution and a structure, the Jesuits. And our schools, Jesuit and companion alike, similarly seek to en flesh something of our sense of the kingdom in the 'whats', and 'whys' and 'hows' of education.

And so we look to Ignatian spirituality as an ongoing source of inspiration and reflection. We seek to embrace the world, seeking the service of God in a multitude of ways. Because of its essentially positive spirituality the results have been diverse and creative: when we gaze at the moon we might be looking at any one of the 35 features on the lunar surface that are named after Jesuit astronomers; when we study physics we may be surprised to discover that a Jesuit produced the first developed atomic theory; when we study geography we discover that Jesuit explorers first mapped the Mississippi and Amazon rivers; when we go the arts we find that Jesuits played a part in the development of modern theatre and ballet; we go medicine and quinine was first named 'Jesuit bark' after those who introduced it to Europe. In education, we learn that

Jesuit schools and universities produced the first modern curriculum and school system. The project of Jesuit education helped give us amps, volts and ohms, the measures of electricity that are named after teachers and graduates in Jesuit schools. Fr Georges Lemaitre, who first articulated the big bang theory, a friend of Einstein and priest, was a graduate of Jesuit education. And in many areas of social justice, Jesuits and their collaborators have been present, from early opponents of the slave trade to activists for indigenous peoples today. You, we, are part of this story.

So we seek to encourage our communities to have an adventurous sense of the world, to see the world as gift to be explored and enjoyed. We speak about the formation of the whole person and encourage all to use their talents well. The world is our home. But this world also has its darkness and its shadows. In big and small ways we face constantly choices in life, the choice between love and hate, between generosity and meanness of spirit, between service and self-seeking. Ignatian spirituality offers a guide in discerning these choices between life and death. What are our deepest desires? Where do we find God's will for us? What is the magis?

The Lord commissions us as builders of the kingdom.

Ignatius' insight that 'love is shown more in deeds than in words' is never more true than in our school communities. We seek to model life to the students entrusted to us. Herein surely lies our shared vocation and our challenge. Time and time again I am reminded of the impact and power of the small things we do, for good or ill. In a school we are all witnesses, whether we like it or not, because we all model something of ourselves. May we also model something of Christ and His call, and in doing so we assist in bringing about the Kingdom