

# Celebrating St Ignatius' Feast Day

Fr Andrew Hamilton | 17 July 2019



**Most stories of St Ignatius' life focus on the 20 years of his life from his conversion to the founding of the Society of Jesus. These were indeed rich and adventurous years of radical choices, seminal experiences, large desires and commitment to a radical way of life.**

Ignatius, however, lived for another 15 years. In these he set into the institutional ways of living and acting in the new Society of Jesus all that he had discovered. He faced new situations and had to find a way of adapting to them while being faithful to his initial vision. His way of doing this is reflected in the recently formulated Apostolic Preferences that will shape Jesuit life and choices today.

## **PRAYERFUL REFLECTION**

Ignatius' distinctive gift was to combine a passionate desire to serve God through following Jesus' way with prayerful reflection about how to adapt his service to the diverse and changing situations of his age. That required being open to change. His initial vision was for himself and his companions to place themselves at the service of the Pope in demanding missions. They were to be like a troop of lightly armed troops running solo missions behind enemy lines, travelling light and moving fast. Francis Xavier's journeys to India and beyond, Faber's work in Germany, the delegation to the Council of Trent, and the Jesuit mission to Ethiopia are some of the faces of this dream.

Key to this dream was flexibility and freedom from responsibilities to sustain large institutions. But as the number of Jesuits grew and Ignatius was constantly asked to staff Jesuit schools, he saw the importance for the church and society of forming future leaders with a gift for service and discernment.

Schools and universities spread through Europe and beyond. Jesuits spread, so did the demand for education and the opportunities for serving God through forming future leaders.

## **NEW POSSIBILITIES**

Ignatius focused on providing new schools and universities through Europe and beyond. Each step along the way involved reflection in the light of Jesus' values, recognition of new possibilities, and an enthusiastic response to the way seen best to respond to God's will. In Ignatius' word, discernment.

The four Apostolic Preferences reflect this process of discernment. Jesuits around the world were invited to pray and speak together about where they see the Society called to focus today. These conversations took place at the level of communities and ministries and then at Province, Regional and International level. The Four Preferences reflect the directions taken in these conversations and on the places where people found life as they prayed.

## **RIVERS OF THE HEART**

The preferences named are for the Spiritual Exercises, for people on the margins of society, for the young, and for the World, our home. They are not defined areas of work, but are better understood as rivers of the heart that flow into one another and carry people and ministries on them.

On them Jesuits and the people with whom they work are asked to feel carried, finding enthusiasm and joy in making them part of their lives, whether directly through their ministry, or as one aspect of their lives, or as a focus in their prayer. When they inspire individual Jesuits and communities, they will inevitably flow into the ministries undertaken by Jesuits around the world and to the way they engage in them.

Though staff at Jesuit ministries and the people with whom they accompany are diverse, all are committed to the discernment and reflection that lie at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises.

*Image: Depositphotos.com*

Taken from *Australian Catholics*