

20 May 2021 in St Francis Xavier Church, Gardiner St

500th Anniversary of the Conversion of St Ignatius

Archbishop Dermot Farrell

I am delighted to celebrate Mass this evening in the Church of St Francis Xavier to open the Ignatian year which celebrates St. Ignatius' spiritual journey from the 500th anniversary of his conversion in 1521 to his canonization in 1622. The cannonball injury was a pivotal moment in his life which began a conversion process. Of course, the conversion of Ignatius was not completed instantly, following his injury in Pamplona. This incident, however, set a new course for his life. It turned his life upside down and forced him into self-examination. Out of this spiritual awakening, Ignatius had a burning desire for holiness and a zeal to do great things for God, which ultimately led him to a lengthy process of self-surrender. While we think of him now as the finished article, we should remember that before he was declared Saint Ignatius, Iñigo Lopez de Loyola, he was a proud young soldier. Ignatius' story is one of grace. God was present in his whole story.

I am sure that Ignatius never imagined what his unremarkable life became after the personal encounter with Christ. Change came from that encounter. The lesson for us today is that, if we open ourselves to deepen our relationship with Jesus, things will become new to our eyes, and new dimensions of our life's mission will be renewed in a way we cannot plan or even plan or imagine. In Ignatius of Loyola, we see the grafting of one person's life into the story of Jesus. May we not be impervious to the surprising promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The underlying invitation related to this conversion is to "See everything new in Christ." (2 Cor 5:17). To see "perfectly," or to see everything new, like St. Paul, is to first acknowledge some form of shortcoming or blindness. It is difficult for me to ascertain my own needs, to cut through

the self-delusions and blindness I harbour when it comes to myself. Under these circumstances, to say to Jesus, "I want to see," seems not only bold but brave. Do I really want to be pulled out of a comfortable darkness into light? Do I really want to see the world as it is, and myself as I am? You can only meet God when you are broken, not on equal terms. God is in every situation and where He is there is joy, there is hope, there is light.

When I acknowledge my blindness, then, once inspired by Ignatius' experience and spiritual tradition --I will be able to let God console me, and so embrace my present and future with renewed hope and faith. To see all things new is to renew my commitment to Ignatius' original vision of spiritual depth, love and service of the church and society.

The appeal of this conversion in 2021 is that when confronted with a hopeless situation, Ignatius created greater intimacy with God. As he renewed his relationship with God, he was able to refocus his life. Ignatius put God at the centre of his life. He could look at the world not with fear, but with hope and the desire to set it on fire with the love of Christ.

The Jesuit worldwide community and the Church remains indebted to the rich Ignatian tradition, which, though rooted in medieval Christianity, boldly embraced the modern world. The opportunities offered by the world of Ignatius' time shaped the Society of Jesus, which in turn helped transform the church and the way it reached out to the world where they have shown a great capacity of concern for the poor, for suffering, for education, and for joy. In fostering those ministries some members of the Society of Jesus have paid the ultimate price. This evening we thank God for Saint Ignatius' life and for the members of the Society of Jesus, who down the centuries, have been searching, creative and generous in the service of the church and society.