



Jesuit Global Network of Schools

Inauguration of the Jesuit Global Network of Schools
The Feast of St. John Berchmans on the 400th Anniversary of his Death
Church of Saint Ignatius, Rome, 26 November 2021

Homily by Fr. General Arturo Sosa, S.J.

We are now celebrating the Ignatian year, the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the transformation of Ignatius of Loyola from a soldier and knight wounded while defending his king and his convictions in Pamplona, into St. Ignatius, the founder and inspirer of the Society of Jesus, who together with his friends came to see all things new in Christ. It is precisely this process of conversion and profound transformation that has inspired many men and women over the last 500 years to experience the compassionate and merciful God who is revealed in his Son Jesus.

Today we celebrate a man who was deeply touched by Ignatius and his spirituality. St. John Berchmans died 400 years ago. Although he was only 22 years old, he produced abundant fruit with his ordinary life as a young man, lived in an extraordinary way, as he himself urged. Extraordinary not because of great deeds but because he lived day by day with a great depth that inspired his contemporaries to deepen their own lives, to experience peace, friendship and hope. Berchmans truly embodied what St. Paul encourages in the first reading we heard today, to live "everything that is true, noble, just, pure, lovable, praiseworthy, everything that is virtuous or honorable."

Berchmans wonderfully embodies the very thing that we seek in Jesuit education: a formation of the whole person that develops the potential of the person in the service of the community, of the common good, of a better world for all people. Berchmans embodies well what Fr. Arrupe wanted from our education: to be persons for and with others who understand service and generous dedication to others as part of their faith and their human fulfilment. Berchmans was able to integrate his academic excellence with a human excellence that was appreciated and acknowledged by his companions and by all those around him. In him, intellectual excellence was in harmony with the holistic excellence that we want. His life witnesses to what we know today as the 4Cs: a person of competence, conscience, compassion and commitment, along with that other C that is so important today, consistency. His life bears splendid witness to consistency between what he says and what he does.

Also today, we remember Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach on the fifth anniversary of his death. Father Kolvenbach introduced us to the concept of the 4Cs during his fruitful generalate. In his life and his service he also became a model of authentic formation in which the 4Cs are admirably united in a life of integrity and dedication. We ask God that the testimony of Fr. Kolvenbach continue to encourage us and that he now enjoys the life promised in the Gospel to every faithful and prudent servant.

It is a happy coincidence that the Jesuit Global Network of Schools is being formally inaugurated on Berchmans' feast day as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of his death. The network desires to be an expression of the commitment of the schools to work as a universal body with a universal mission and so to develop their full apostolic potential. This is a new step in a process that began when St. Ignatius and the first Jesuits discovered that the schools offered a special and even unique apostolic platform from which to share their spiritual experience and "to bring people to God". In the ongoing process of apostolic discernment in this field, the Society has achieved important milestones to ensure that educational institutions remain mission-centered. Some of these milestones are worth mentioning. The Ratio Studiorum of 1599 (the same year in which Berchmans was born) provided the schools with a common framework that integrated the best practices of the time with those elements that had been successfully implemented in the early decades of the Society. The Ratio remained in force for several centuries. It was within this framework of integral formation that Berchmans studied when he entered the Society of Jesus, and through it he was able to develop his human and spiritual potential.

New historical conditions after the restoration of the Society in 1814 meant that the Ratio was gradually replaced by local initiatives responding to new challenges and national contexts. More recently, Fathers General Arrupe and Kolvenbach proposed a general framework to ensure unity within the diversity of local circumstances. The documents Characteristics and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm responded to this dynamic and have served as a framework for an important process of renewal to enable our educational institutions to live with the creative fidelity that is proper to our charism. Even more recently, the document A Living Tradition and the cycles of global meetings have given new impetus to this process, especially in response to the calls of General Congregations 35 and 36 to develop the apostolic potential inherent in new technologies and historical circumstances. GC 36 in particular calls for networking as part of our way of proceeding in the present context. In response to these movements, Jesuit institutions of higher education formed the International Association of Jesuit Universities in 2018.

Today, the schools want to go a step further in this process of networking in order to be able to respond to challenges that demand a global response. Since the middle of the 20th century, our schools have progressively developed local and regional networking that has brought immense benefit to our education and has made possible important programs and projects enabling our schools to meet the challenges of quality education today. The scale of some of today's problems in the ecological, social and technological fields requires a cooperation that goes beyond the local or regional level. The current experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to work together as a human family and to create a new culture of international cooperation that responds to today's challenges.

The network that we are founding today is inspired by this desire to walk together and cooperate to better meet the challenges of our time. We act in the context of Pope Francis' call for a New Global Compact on Education that can help to build a new model of humanity that goes beyond consumption, profit and the predatory attitude that has led us to the current socio-environmental crisis. UNESCO has also just published a document calling for a [*new social contract for education*](#) that raises many of the same concerns and orientations articulated by the Pope. These calls, together with the recent document of the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education - ICAJE: A Living Tradition (2019), constitute a framework for walking together as a global network and responding with generosity and creativity to the

enormous challenges of our time so that new generations coming to our educational institutions can experience from today a more hopeful future.

Berchmans' own life has an important message for this hopeful future: "The most important thing in life is not to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way." This message is very important because our young people can contribute significantly to building this hopeful future through a different way of doing ordinary things, especially in the way they relate to each other, to God and to the environment. Berchmans spent much time and energy at the side of his sick mother, sharing household chores, and explaining academic tasks to others... nothing extraordinary, but done in a way that touched the hearts of those who knew him by kindness, humility and availability. His nickname (hilaris - the cheerful one) portrays him very well. With his presence he was able to convey peace, joy and hope... so needed in our world today so that new generations do not fall into depression and hopelessness in the face of the challenges they confront. Berchmans achieved what St. Ignatius proposes to us: to seek and find God in all things, even in the routine, the ordinary and the small. He achieved this through a deep spiritual life centered on Jesus that led him to develop an extraordinary love for others, and so he touched the hearts of many. Berchmans understood today's gospel well, he gave up everything, in order to gain everything in Christ.

Berchmans is also an important witness for educators in our schools, for we need a deep spiritual life if our efforts are to touch the hearts of our students and to model by our example what we want to teach. Many educators are called to experience in the routine of their work the extraordinariness of their lives as they dedicate their best years to touching the hearts and minds of the young people they serve through their teaching. There is nothing more extraordinary than the ordinary life of an educator.

The Jesuit Global Network of Schools has in Berchmans not only an inspiring example but a tangible way to achieve the holistic education that we seek, an education that leads to true human excellence that is reflected in the 4Cs and that allows us to build the hopeful future that we desire, a hope that in many cases requires living with depth and dedication the ordinary, the small things of life. Berchmans' great achievement is to have done well what he had to do. When he died at the age of 22 it seemed that he had achieved nothing remarkable... but in truth he had: he had made his ordinary life truly extraordinary, a real witness of service to God and neighbor... in spite of his young age he had touched the lives of many people and left a great legacy of human depth and spiritual transformation. His life is a demonstration that to be a saint it is not necessary to do great deeds but to do what we must do with depth and meaning... This testimony to the leadership of service that Berchmans leaves us is an inspiration to the Jesuit Global Network of Schools to contribute meaningfully to the building of a hopeful future that brings people closer to God, leading us to care for our common home and to walk alongside the world's discarded in a mission of reconciliation and justice.

As the young saint, John Berchmans, would do, we entrust the Jesuit Global Network of Schools to Our Lady of the Way. She will lead it by the hand, following her Son Jesus, on the path of greater service to the youth of our time.

(Original: Spanish)