

This week we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, which began last Sunday, January 27th, and will run until Saturday 3rd February. The theme for Catholic Schools Week this year is:

Celebrating the Work of Our Local Catholic Schools.

As Irish society changes, it is important that we reflect on the unique contribution of Catholic schools to our collective goal of education. Each Catholic school shares an ethos that is inclusive, welcoming and vibrant. Each school works towards a vision of each student as made in the likeness and image of God (*imago Dei*). This means that we work towards helping each child, irrespective of background, ethnicity or creed, reach their full potential academically, spiritually and socially. To be in the likeness and image of God means that we have the capacity to truly care for ourselves, each other and the environment around us.

While each Catholic school shares this profound commitment to this vision, every school does this differently. Clongowes is a Catholic School set in a Jesuit tradition, which means that we might flavour things differently. The language we use around animating our ethos is unique and common to all our Jesuit schools around the world and this is **very** special. However - like all Catholic Schools - our Jesuit animation is merely a pathway to the Gospel values i.e. the message of Christ.

Can we talk about Jesus?

I was very much reminded of this last week when I attended and participated in a Jesuit European Chaplains Conference in Manresa, Spain. The conference was attended by over 100 people representing 15 Jesuit schools across Europe and the theme of our four day congress was '*Can we talk about Jesus?*'. A strange question you might think for a such a conference, but as we moved through this gathering with presentations, reflections and group sharings it became apparent for all of us that there is a growing concern that perhaps we lose sight of the person of Jesus Christ. By losing sight of him (not just a historical person, but son of God) we risk losing sight of his message and values, which should inspire and lead us in all that we do as a school.

It was mentioned many times that there is greater reluctance to reference Jesus more so than God, one might say a dumbing down of Jesus. It is important to remember that Jesus is the Image of God: it is summed up in him. So - Yes - we are Jesuit but more importantly we are Catholic. After all, The Society of Jesus is not called after its founder (as with Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans etc.) but after the person of Jesus. Nor is it called the Society of Christ but rather the Society of the historical Jesus. It was said that when Ignatius and his companions were asked what their group was called, they determined that they should say that 'since they had no head except Jesus Christ, whom alone they desired to serve' they were of 'the company of Jesus'.

Turning towards the sun

The core of our Jesuit story is to be found in Manresa, where Ignatius spent 11 months (1522-1523) withdrawn in a cave (*la cova*) over the Cardoner River and it was amongst these rocks that the [Spiritual Exercises](#) were composed. This was my fourth time to visit this very special place but the first time my attention was drawn to the mosaics on the floor of the cave. On the floor is an image of a sunflower with the words '*Vertitur ad solem*' meaning that it turns towards the sun. This image was

placed here to signify what Ignatius discovered of himself during this period of contemplation and discernment. Like a sun flower that follows the sun and grows taller Ignatius found that turning toward Jesus Christ in his prayers, works and whole being that he grew and flourished. There is a message here for us too. The Gospel values should transform us, offer us a different type of beauty, freedom and happiness - after all it was such beauty that made Ignatius turn his prestigious life around to follow Christ as a result of which we are all here today, celebrating our Catholic ethos in his footsteps.

A vital member of the one community

And so back to our theme of this special week of Catholic Schools. Each Catholic school is influenced by the community it serves - be it large urban schools, small rural schools, schools with a wide variety of ethnicities and every school in between. For this reason, every Catholic school works in a unique and distinctive manner in educating each child to holistically develop their talent, skills and potential. Saint Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians; 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.' Each Catholic school is a vital member of the one community, which is called to work towards the Kingdom of God. Each Catholic school contributes to this mission in a unique way. So this year let us celebrate the unique contribution and work of our own Catholic school set in that very unique Jesuit tradition but all the time like the image of the sunflower - turning towards the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel values.

There are daily themes for Catholic Schools Week:

Monday	Living Tradition
Tuesday	Welcoming Diversity
Wednesday	Grandparents' Day
Thursday	In Service of our Community
Friday	Supporting Faith

Morning Prayers throughout the week will address the theme for the day and will include Fr. Paul O'Boyle, the local parish priest in Clane on Thursday morning in keeping with the concept of 'Service of our Community. Other activities during the week will include

- 'Contemplative Meditation' - Friday lunchtime in our *Manresa* Prayer Room,
- Transition Years 'Life Works' presentation on Friday
- John Paul II Awards Activities.

Throughout the week there will be an interactive prayer space beside the Chaplaincy Board in the concourse to celebrate our Catholic, Jesuit Identity. We encourage all students to get involved so please take a moment at this space.

Towards the end of the week a special painting from the cave at Manresa in Spain will be blessed and presented to our own Manresa Prayer Room to mark special Jesuit Identity during this celebratory time of Catholic Schools Week.

A fuller account of Ms Dolan's experience at Manresa in Spain will appear shortly.