

Address to CSHE

Dear Fr Joe Arun and my dear friends,
Good morning.

To begin straightway, I thank Fr. Joe Arun for organizing this annual meeting of the CSHE. He has brought all the Province/Region coordinators for HE of South Asia together under the same roof. It is a wonderful opportunity for all of you not only to exchange views and news, but also to share your best practices and to explore better possibilities to do your mission well in South Asia.

I wish I were there with you, to be familiar with you, the architects of the lives of so many youth of South Asia, and to affirm you in your blessings and accompany you in your challenges in the ministry of Higher Education. Since I cannot make it physically, I share some of my thoughts with you online

Context: I have based my talk on the context that we live in, the challenges we face, the opportunities we encounter, and have suggested a few pathways to better the ministry of higher education in South Asia.

The World: The world we live in, along with many blessings to enjoy, has also many challenges to offer. There is an enormous growth in the number of forced migrants. The rapid change ushered in by globalization and the media ecosystem has disrupted human life and relations. The planet's ecological balance has become fragile due to the rabid exploitation of natural resources, made even worse by an exponential growth of industrialization. There is growing inequality among people. The relations in the human community are tense because of multi-faceted violence including the violence caused by the rising religious or ideological-political fundamentalisms. Finally, there is a disastrous dilution of democracy and glaring dictatorship.

South Asia: South Asia is not an isolated island. It is as much affected by the problems of the world. In addition, it has its own share of problems. It is going through a turbulent time. Besides, rising economic crisis there is growing intolerance and violence against the minorities, women and the poor. There is a deliberate attack on the constitution and the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, secularism and pluralism it enshrines. There is rampant crony capitalism, monopolising more and more of the nation's resources. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Fundamental human rights are being trampled upon, hundreds of activists have been jailed on trumped up charges, and the voices of democratic dissent have been brutally suppressed.

And the Church in south Asia, which is supposed to be a sacrament of salvation, is badly ravaged by the maladies of ethnic issues like caste, language, rites and by inefficiency and corruption.

We cannot remain mute spectators. We need to ask questions and explore responses. As Jesuits we are shepherds. We are called to lead and guide people. Hence, the Society provides a prolonged formation to us so that you and I may grow as good leaders.

JESUS the CEO: Recently I read a book called: Jesus CEO, which tries to describe the leadership style of Jesus. I believe that the characteristics of Jesus' leadership can be guidelines for us as we craft our own leadership as shepherds, servants and stewards.

As you know, Jesus did not follow the crowd. He led it. He did not report the news. He created it. In other words, he charted a different pathway.

It is true that initially at least his identity and mission was not clear to Jesus. However, once he had a glimpse of it, he did not doubt it. He built his edifice called the 'kingdom of God' on the foundation of love. Consequently, he perceived situations and acted on them differently. He resisted the use of the word, "dead" with reference to people, e.g., the little girl, Lazarus and others, and raised them to new possibilities.

The discovery of his identity and mission made Jesus leave home, form a team and go on doing good. Through the work of preaching, teaching and healing he made a difference. Did he face challenges? Certainly! However, whenever he encountered problems, he did not kick the donkey as prophet Balaam did but discovered the angels. He became creative and remained passionate till the end.

Six Pillars: The leadership style of Jesus rests on six pillars. They are vision, mission, plan, action, team, and celebration.

Vision: Every leader has a vision, a dream to respond to the situation. Jesus had a heavenly perspective. He declared himself to be the son of God and others children of God. Despite all the pulls and pushes, beginning with the temptations in the wilderness till the death on the cross he held on to his perspective and identity. This vision gave him a comprehensive and positive outlook about self and others. Nowhere did he put himself or others down. Jesus' words are full of self-knowledge and self-love.

Visionary leaders are those who look at reality as resources, as gifts to them. Jesus too looked at the world and the people in it as his gift, an inheritance and his heritage. Hence, he loved and cared for them till the end.

Mission: Mission translates a vision into a reality. It makes the dream understandable. It identifies, articulates, summarises the dream to guide the process and motivate others.

Jesus knew his mission and declared it to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. He held on to his mission till the end. In the wilderness, in and through temptations, he was given several options – distractions and temptations - that did not relate to his mission. He faced them squarely and came out victorious. His opponents accused and attacked him. However, he did not backtrack. He went on doing good to the weak and they felt good about themselves in his presence. In the light of this unconditional acceptance, people tried harder to be better, and do the good and right thing.

Great leaders have a mission to fire their mission, energize the spirit and channelize their capacities. Jesus had a mission to better the world.

Plan: A good leader has a plan. Jesus too had a plan to actualize his vision and mission. People gathered around him as he had a vivid sketch of how something should or could be done.

He was endowed with limitless power. He could have done literally anything. Yet he did not do many things: did not build a temple or a synagogue, did not write books, did not even heal all the sick people in the world, did not raise everyone from the dead.

He was willing to stand alone. It must have been difficult for Jesus to say 'no' to people. But he did say 'no'. He said no to his mother when she was trying to interrupt his teaching. He said no to the temptations in the wilderness. He said no at times to himself. He accepted the cup of suffering in Gethsemane.

Great leaders have a plan to translate their vision and mission into an action plan. Jesus had one. He realized this through activities of teaching, preaching, healing etc.

Action: Leaders act on a plan. Jesus did not have a fool proof plan. Yet, he took his message and hit the road going wherever there was fertile ground. He looked at the whole territory and saw it as a field right for sowing and reaping.

Leaders often use innovative means to deliver a message or accomplish a goal. Jesus, in order to share His message, did multiple things like feeding, healing, driving out evil spirits, and raising the dead. One of the important works Jesus did was teaching and preaching. He spoke from the mountain tops. He spoke in synagogues, streets, temples, common gardens and everywhere he went to. He did not mumble or whisper his message. Rather, He spoke out. He crashed into people's consciousness with deeds, attitudes and actions that had never been done, seen, or even heard of before. If you track the result of Jesus' energy it was stupendous: everything bloomed, was healed, or came to life in his presence. The only exceptions were the fig tree, the pharisees, and Judas.

The great leaders choose activities to actualize their vision, mission and plans. We know the activities Jesus employed.

Team: the first step toward attaining a goal is to create a team. Once Jesus began his work, he wasted no time in forming a team. He quickly began recruiting workers to help him with this task. The fishermen formed major part of his team. Although he was a recruiter of sorts, he never wasted energy begging or manipulating others to follow him. In fact, he trained his disciples to wipe the dust from their feet and to keep moving if people were resistant to their ideas.

Jesus trained and formed his team. He clearly and consistently conveyed to his disciples the significance of what they were doing. He spoke long and often about the calling, and they could feel and see the long-lasting benefits of their work with him. They were changing people's lives for the good. They were working for something beyond themselves. Of course, some of them failed Him. But he did not fail them. His faithfulness bore results. Most of them gave excellent witness to his vision and mission.

Great leaders are team players. They are consultative and collaborative. It is their capacity to work in a team maximizes their outcome.

Celebration: Jesus loved celebrations. As his fame and popularity grew, he was constantly invited to dinners. The night before he was arrested, he gathered his disciples for a festive meal. Jesus loved celebrations because he came from a

very happy place, and he was returning to a very happy place. Hence, he was constantly in a state of celebration.

One of his first miracles was to turn water into wine. Wine is a sign of joy. People had wine till they were fully satisfied. When crowds gathered to listen to him, Jesus was adamant that nobody would leave with an empty stomach. He always managed to locate food for them.

Great leaders are men and women of celebrations. They are happy with what they are and what they do. They celebrate not only their achievements but also the achievements of their team mates. Hence, here is celebration around them. The core of Jesus' leadership is Jesus himself. His personal traits can be summarized under these heads

- **Jesus led by example.** Leaders must have not only vision but also communication skills. He communicated not only through words but also through his life. Jesus was an effective leader with internal anchors. He did not get approval from external mechanisms.
- **He believed in himself.** Jesus was one of the most confident beings who ever lived. He envisioned himself as a vital opening for the people. He called himself the gate, the door, the shepherd. He believed that his role was to nurture others.
- **He stayed focused.** He was not deterred when John the Baptist began to doubt him. He did not care whether Caesar smiled or frowned. Jesus even knew that calvary was a gate to another form of living. He had a tremendous personal resolve.
- **He was creative in the face of problems.** Jesus believed everything and everyone was alive and full of possibilities. He did not consider anyone 'dead'. Hence, he could create and recreate people.
- **He used innovative means.** Creativity was his hallmark. He used stories, miracles, questions to communicate his message.
- **He delegated authority.** Jesus gave his disciples authority to act in his name even before they seemed ready for it. By giving them authority to act he delegated power. He kept on believing in his disciples despite their failures. He kept on giving them chances.
- **He enlisted women.** There were women among his followers. He made use of their creative, intuitive ways. He received their generous contribution and also helped them grow. Some were the first apostles, and some others witnesses of his resurrection.

- **He was aware of his energy leaks.** He avoided many real and potential energy leaks. For example, he refused to engage in meaningless debates with people. Even at his trial he did not waste time or energy in what he knew would be a meaningless defence.

Conclusion: History has repeatedly shown that people who hunger for something larger than themselves find followers and make a difference. It is the story of Jesus. In and though his creative vision and consistent mission he made a difference not only during his life time but also after that. In fact, he is our master and Lord. This is the story of every movement. The Society of Jesus is no exception. St Ignatius with a dream larger than himself, found followers and left a huge legacy. I think it is an invitation to us as well. Let us think big and make a difference wherever we are. The world and the Church need good leaders. We have a model in our Lord and Master. Let us listen to him, learn from him and make a difference as he did.

I thank Fr Joe Arun and his team for organizing this beautiful event and experience. It is not only this programme Joe has also ushered in a revolution in the Secretariat of HE. The following is a short list of some of his achievements: attended IAJU Board Meeting in Rome. Organized JCSA NEP Task Force Meeting at St. Xavier's, Kolkata. Conducted a training programme to PCSE & PCHE on the New Education Policy (NEP) in XIM University, Bhubaneswar. Organized the zonal meetings of HE institutions & finalized Province NEP Task Forces. Conducted studies of St Xavier's College, Ranchi, Loyola Academy, Secunderabad and St Paul's Belagavi. Published 3 JHEASA newsletters & developed JHEASA website. Created Social Media handles for JHEASA - Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn. Planned an Online Meeting on A Way Forward in Our Response to NEP and ToTs for Province NEP Task Forces in Four Zones.

I also thank the Nepal region for supporting this unique venture. This is indeed a great service of renewing, re-orienting, and reconstructing the Higher Education in South Asia.

I take this opportunity to thank the Province/Region coordinators of higher education in South Asia. You are our foot soldiers. It is through you the Society of Jesus is known and loved. I know that the ministry of Higher Education is not easy. Accompanying and caring for others, especially the youth, can cause much fatigue, which can drain your energy. Moreover, you encounter challenges almost daily. However, you do it with utmost devotion, delight and dedication. Hence, I salute you, and wish and pray all success in your mission.

I am sure the Godavari Convention of HE will surely enable and empower and make you beacons of hope to many. I pray that God may continue to bless all of you and achieve great things in and through you. May a thousand flowers bloom! Thank you and God bless you.