



Jake Agelopoulos – Spinola House President

Spinola House Mass Reflection

Good evening parents, staff and fellow Spinolians,

Having the opportunity to stand up here tonight and reflect on my Xavier journey is an honour for which I will be eternally grateful. To be 'the salt of the Earth' is to have an impact upon people and the wider world through your actions and good deeds, allowing you to 'let your light shine before others'.

I believe this Gospel is especially relevant due to our recent Covid experience last year. For many in this room, 2020 was perhaps the toughest year that they have had in their lives. Cut off from extended family and friends, losing their support network and social connection through school, sport and other varied face to face interactions, covid-related financial challenges of parents, indeed many struggled.

We lost our agency, our ability to do things that made us happy, we were no longer able to 'let our light shine before others'.

I know for me, being deprived of a season of footy, most likely playing in the fifths with the same group of guys that I had shared the field with since year 8 was something I dearly missed. Putting on the red and black jumper and running out with some of my best mates is something I take enormous pride and joy in, and to lose a year of that was truly dispiriting.

Just the little moments that made me feel part of the Xavier community were also dearly missed. From conversations around the lockers with my fellow Year 12's, to something as simple as a head nod to one of my mates walking between classes, or even Ned Lyons' voice bellowing down the E level hallway. It is only when I wasn't in the school environment that I realised how these little things add up to make my day just that little bit better.

Again, to be 'the salt of the Earth' is to take action, to have agency, and to 'let our light shine' is to make a positive impact on those around us, and thereby, ourselves.

I came to Xavier in Year 5, arriving at Kostka Hall completely naïve, having no idea what to expect. One thing that has always been drilled into me since that first day, and I'm sure many of you will have heard the same message over and over, was to take the opportunities that such a school as Xavier will grant me. Now, I don't want to meld into the various voices that have said this to you in the past, but hopefully speaking from personal experience as one who has lived through what you did, may have some impact.

Personally it took me a while for this message to click. Yes, at Kostka I was committed to my sport and studies, but it took only one injury to derail my entire competitive ambition. I took the easy route, not working to get myself back into the top team.

At the senior school I chose to miss many opportunities in Years 9 and 10. A key aspect of a Xavier education is the Ignatian service programs, yet in Year 9 I did a grand total of zero Ignatian service hours. In both 2018 and 2019 I didn't apply for any of the immersions or tours that the school offered. It is only now, after hearing and seeing the incredibly enjoyable and enriching times the boys who engaged with these programs had, that I can say my inaction is a significant regret of mine.



It is only in the past couple of years that I can truly say I've sought to reverse this inaction and tried my best to take up opportunities - I am certainly better for it. Engaging in Ignatian Service has given me enormous fulfillment and helped me further appreciate the fortunate position which we are all in at Xavier. I've also engaged in programs such as the Kairos retreat which was an incredibly formative experience, one that allowed me to understand so much more about myself, and one that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

I have even committed this year to take part in the World's Greatest Shave, to raise funds for Leukaemia, hence the unkept "afro" you see here tonight. Fortunately, for my parents, there is only 6 more days to go.

Perhaps the key message in what I'm trying to say, is do not make the assumption that inaction does not come at a price. Inaction usually seems like the easiest path to take. Taking action now may be frightening or difficult. However, I'd ask you to overcome this inclination. I have a simple method for doing this; I think about the long-term consequences of my inaction. They are actually much more frightening. Think of this in terms of our studies, just as one example. So for the remaining days of 2021, let us consider juxtaposing the forced inactivity of 2020, and make it a year of acting and doing.

Tonight's Gospel reading ended by telling us to 'let our light shine before others'. I think in 2021, especially for us Year 12's in our final year of school, through action, through having agency of our own lives, we may just achieve that.

Thank you.

