



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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Homily at Mass 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C – 11 August 2019

Our little kids in Prep at St Anthony's School were very excited to learn that St Mary MacKillop's mother was named Flora. Why? Because there happens to be a Flora in their grade! We share their excitement when we make some other connections with Australia's first saint, born here in Melbourne in January 1842. Flora arrived on the migrant ship the "Glen Huntly" – our suburb took its name from the fact that the Glen Huntly was moored at the bay end of what we now call Glen Huntly Road when it was discovered that many of the passengers on board were very sick. They were kept away from the small colony in Melbourne. Many survived, including Flora. Those who died are now buried at St Kilda Cemetery.

Flora and Mary MacKillop's father Alexander met, and married at St Francis' Melbourne where they went to Sunday Mass and where their children were baptised. It is said that when Flora and Alexander told Melbourne's first priest Fr Bonaventure Geoghegan that they were expecting a baby, Fr Geoghegan reached into his pocket and produced a relic of the true Cross. Flora wore this throughout her pregnancy and when little Mary was born, Flora placed the relic on a chain around her baby's neck. The life of St Mary of the Cross had begun.

How often do you hear or see the word 'journey' these days? It seems to be very common now for advertisements even about cars. The French 'jour' is related to the English word 'journey'. 'Jour' means day – a journey is the travel that we undertake during the course of a typical day – from the moment we get up in the morning, until we go to bed at night. What does your typical day, your typical journey involve? We travel to work or uni or school; we have our job and our interaction with others; we have our home and family life; we have our duties and chores and responsibilities, as well as initiatives and opportunities that pop up from time to time. A heart filled with charity will always try to respond to the needs of others, from simple courtesies to great acts of kindness. Perhaps Mary MacKillop learnt from her mother the essential rule she taught the Sisters of St Joseph: "Never see a need without trying to do something about it".

Today the Word of God presents us with the heroic example of 2 Old Testament figures: Abraham and Sarah. After many years of marriage they remained childless, until one day 3 mysterious figures – were they angels or perhaps the Trinity – visited them, promising that within a year they would be the parents of their pride and joy, a son named Isaac.

The story about Abraham and Sarah is not so much a journey as a pilgrimage – a journey with a goal, a destination, a purpose, a journey where every step is a step in faith, where the whole experience is open to God, his providence, his guiding hand. In a pilgrimage every experience is filled with God's presence and grace; every experience – even the oddest and most unexpected – is a sign that God walks alongside us, God – is – with – us.

On his long pilgrimage – the Bible tells us Abraham lived for 175 years! – Abraham learnt the way of faith and to see things with eyes of faith. “Look up into the night sky and count the stars” God told Abraham. This was a sign of Abraham’s countless descendants: men and women who share his belief in God including you and me. “Set out now and walk until I tell you to stop” God told Abraham. God was leading Abraham, Sarah and their clan to a land of milk and honey, a land of blessing and peace a land where the children of Abraham would settle and thrive as God’s people, God’s nation, Israel. From this nation, this people, would be born Mary and Joseph, and our Saviour, Mary’s son, Jesus. The people of God would give birth to God’s Holy People, you and me, the Church.

Today we sang: “Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own”. Our Psalm today seems to pick up the last words from the first reading from the book of Wisdom: “The saints would share the same blessings and dangers alike”. Blessings and dangers seem to characterize the life or journey or pilgrimage of St Mary MacKillop: a less than perfect family life and upbringing; battles with bishops and priests, notably excommunication; a lifetime of period pain and in her last years struggling with debilitating strokes, which she overcame by teaching herself to write again so that she could keep up regular contact with her Sisters across this wide continent. Mary MacKillop’s pilgrimage on this earth ended at North Sydney on August 8 1909 where pilgrims like you and me can pray at her tomb today. Inscribed along the side of her tomb are words of encouragement from one of her letters. Thoughts which may have occurred to her over and over again as she travelled Australia by train and Cobb & Co Coach, in the early days on horseback; sometimes by ship, and in the last years perhaps in the new-fangled motor car:

“We are but travellers here”.