

HOMILY FOR 19th SUNDAY IN O.T YEAR B (FEAST OF ST MARY OF THE CROSS MACKILLOP)

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St Mary of the Cross MacKillop was a daughter of this land, she was born on 15 January 1842 in Fitzroy, Melbourne, in our State, but now she is a saint for the whole world. From a very early age Mary MacKillop learnt from her mother Flora to trust in the providence of God, and to foster in her heart a strong love towards those close to her or in need of help.

We have just read three beautiful readings. The first tells us of the prophet Elijah who asks a widow to provide him with food. In all sincerity, she tells him that she has only a little left, and when it is finished she and her son will die. And yet, her generous heart enables her to overcome her fear, and share what she had. From then on, her supply of food was never exhausted. Such is the providence of God. St Mary MacKillop had plenty to worry about and she had a heap of anxieties, not least of which was fighting with Bishops. Her outlook and new way of doing things gained her the admiration and praise of some, and the scorn of others. Unfortunately, she did not find enough understanding among some church leaders. You only have to read some of Mary MacKillop's numerous letters to know just how many worries and anxieties she had. She must have felt often like the woman from the Sidonian town who we heard from in the first reading from the book of Kings. She again is, as it were, crushed with worries and anxieties. Mary MacKillop at times must have read that and known exactly what it felt like. And yet the extraordinary thing, and surely one of the greatest signs of her sanctity, was that none of this crushed her. In many ways it made her. In other words the wound became a fountain.

St Paul says in his letter to the Colossians always be thankful. He encourages the Colossians to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And above all, to put on love, as if it were a cloak or a coat to hold all the other virtues together. Mary MacKillop would have heard those words, read them and have pondered them, and then she put them into practice and lived them. Beyond all the worries, beyond all the anxieties, she was, and remains, a woman who was and is unfailingly thankful.

As if to join the themes of these two readings together, we hear Jesus telling us in the Gospel today: 'I'm telling you not to worry about your life. Jesus realizes the temptations and distractions we encounter in life, but he tells us to look beyond our life to our eternal life, to store up treasures in heaven where our wealth does not fade but offers us hope and eternal joy. The allurements of the world are strong, and we can easily fall prey to the greed experienced by many, but Jesus invites us to a broader view of one life. Although we will die, we will never stop existing. By living with trust and confidence in God and building our treasure in heaven, we will die a spiritually rich person. It will be time to claim our treasure.

'Set your hearts on the kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well.' In caring for and supporting poor families and their children, Mary MacKillop endured hardship to provide food and material things for them. Mary MacKillop was truly one of these disciples. She believed that God will provide. She committed herself to their education, and became an inspiration to other women, who chose to follow in her footsteps. Responding to the needs of the time and with the help of her Sisters, she went about founding schools, orphanages, and homes for destitute and vulnerable women.

Mary MacKillop accepted all those who wanted to learn, believing that in providing them with basic education, she would give them the opportunity to overcome their poverty and have a better chance at life. She saw the image of Christ in every person and saw that each had an eternal inheritance. Her words, spoken to her sisters, will surely resonate in our hearts as well: "Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them bravely, remembering Whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you all your life. God will reward you as only He can."

Mary MacKillop met the great challenges of her time with vision, passion and creativity. She challenged the status quo and envisioned new ways of living and sharing the Good News. May she intercede for us to do the same as we face the challenges of our time. May we also follow her example of making the missionary journey to our sisters and brothers in need and by our active discipleship, witness and engagement be the leaven for the Kingdom. Let us believe totally in God and trust in his providence. May St. Mary of the Cross

MacKillop bless us all, and intercede for Australia, especially during these difficult times. Amen.