

Mary MacKillop (Aug. 8th)

- Imagine this passage sounding in the ears of someone starving without warm clothing or shelter or asylum seekers locked in a limbo between the home they have escaped & a place of refuge providing freedom.
- I don't think it could be piously proclaimed to comfort them.
- It could sound callously indifferent to the suffering of so many people.
- 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' is a great song but not in that context.
- But this Gospel is directed to you & me as disciples of Jesus, so we have to check what does it actually say? Rather, what does it *not* say?
- It doesn't say we shouldn't worry about what *others* eat or drink or have to wear.
- In fact, we know that Jesus was moved with compassion when he saw hungry crowds & told his disciples: 'Give them something to eat'.
- The Gospel calls us to move beyond the constraints of individualism – of just thinking about our own concerns & to how we can address the needs of others.
- People, especially in the West, accumulate money & possessions, because they give the illusion of security.
- Then when they start to lose some of these, they get anxious & worried.
- People of faith don't rely on these for security, but on God, who they have experienced as unbounded love.
- God is their security, & their chief concern is being aware of God's presence & activity & living a life responsive to how God calls them to be.
- This is what gives them great trust in life & enables them to live the present moment free from attachments & worries.
- When Jesus says "Do not worry about tomorrow", he isn't condemning human resourcefulness & planning; what he condemns is the fretting & worrying that keeps us from lifting up our gaze beyond material values & the cares of this world – he pleads with us not to be distracted or consumed by these concerns, otherwise we are in constant danger of becoming immersed in the affairs of the world & of becoming enslaved to material things.
- Jesus reminds us that we are precious in the eyes of God & that we are never abandoned by God who meets our daily needs.
- But what about the needs of others?
- I believe that we will be judged on whether we gave 'the Least' food, shelter, companionship, in short, the necessities of life, to those in need.
- And we should be anxious that we do so, otherwise we will not hear God say to us: 'good & faithful servant'.
- In mid-late nineteenth century, a young woman was very concerned with the plight of the poor & the marginalised in the colonies of Australia.

- What were the necessities of life that so many were lacking?
- Perhaps the most obvious was schooling of the young, as education is a proven path out of poverty.
- So, this woman, whose most famous saying was 'never see a need without trying to do something about it', set about remedying that situation.
- Mary MacKillop established the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart as bands of women who took the traditional vows but who broke out of the confines of enclosed convent life to educate the poor.
- She set up throughout the colonies a network of schools, orphanages, refuges for the homeless, ex-prisoners & ex-prostitutes who wanted to make a fresh start in life.
- She exhausted herself & her Sisters in this task, not anxious about food or clothing she or they might have, totally devoted to relieving the legitimate anxieties of others for the necessities of life.
- This is well-known - what is less well-known is a key factor in her excommunication from the Catholic Church.
- Why did Bishop Sheil of Adelaide in 1871 move so drastically against this woman now recognised as a Saint?
- It was because she reported that a priest, Father Keating, was molesting children at a local church school.
- The response to his paedophilia led to his being disciplined by the local church authorities but was sent back to Ireland to minister as a priest.
- This infuriated many of the Irish priests who were bent on the destruction of Mary MacKillop & her Order & they manipulated Bishop Sheil to get rid of them.
- Despite all of this, & with the full personal backing of Pope Pius IX for her Order, Mary MacKillop & her Sisters went on to educate hundreds of thousands of children in the colonies & the later federation of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- She & they lived this Gospel passage in their personal & community lives.
- She & they set their hearts on building the kingdom of God.
- Bishop Sheil revoked the excommunication five months later, but the fact remains that Australia's saint was dealt so unjustly by the clergy.
- Mary MacKillop's education provision is itself an extraordinary achievement & legacy in Australia & N.Z., but more should be made of Mary MacKillop's response to clerical sexual abuse of children.
- She suffered grievously because of her courage in doing so in the face of a clerical culture which could not abide such revelations.
- In today's world, she stands as a model of great courage, prophetic vision & trust in a loving God who empowered her to exercise a compassionate care for those in need, despite opposition.