

**HOMILY**  
**ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE**  
**CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN**  
**ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL**  
**SUNDAY 8 AUGUST 2021**  
**SOLEMNITY OF ST MARY OF THE CROSS MACKILLOP**  
**AND MASS ONLINE**

**Readings**

**1 Kings 17: 8-16**

**Colossians 3: 12-17**

**Gospel Matthew 6: 25-34**

We will suspend our normal routine of Gospels from St Mark and St John for today. It is the Solemnity of our own Australian Saint, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop (1842-1909). Normally this day falls on a week day but, today it falls on a Sunday and therefore takes precedence over the normal Sunday Readings.

You will be aware that the first, and at this stage the only, Australian Saint received the Gold medal of canonisation on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI! It was not for sport but for holiness! I had the great honour of being in Rome at that time for the canonisation ceremony with so many of the Bishops of Australia. I remember it with great clarity as a wonderful day were the picture of the Ausie Saint, along with other Saints who were also canonised at the same time, was showcased to the entire Catholic world. Talk about Olympic pride!

I also recall the next day. The large Australian contingent in Rome, at the time, celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving at the Basilica called *St Paul Outside the Walls*. It was one of the most beautiful Masses I have ever had the honour of participating in. I particularly remember the wonderful coming together of so many Australians from different migrant backgrounds being led, in a wonderful way, by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia who participated prominently in this Mass.

Since her canonisation in 2010, still much has been published about the life of Mary MacKillop that we didn't know before. This is mainly because Mary MacKillop, most fortunate for us, was a prolific letter writer. So many of her letters have now been catalogued and progressively are being published over these years.

The first impression from reading some of these letters is just what an extensive traveller Mary MacKillop was around Australia. Before planes and fast trains, Mary MacKillop travelled all around Australia mainly on horse and buggy, Cobb & Co coaches and regional trains wherever she could access them. When we read today from the First Reading from the book of Kings we hear Elijah being commanded by God to "Up and go." We hear in today's Reading the encounter Elijah had on his journeys with the faithful widow of Zarephath.

It is a beautiful story but the point I want to make is, like Mary MacKillop, both the prophet Elijah and the widow are noted for their immediate response when they knew that God was calling them to some mission. This is a real "Mary MacKillop" characteristic. Let's hope it is also a characteristic of our lives too. Even though we are in Covid times, where everybody feels unable to move around, we still can hasten to our next door neighbours and our families either on foot or by phone ensuring that they are in a safe place and that they are not lonely or despairing. In other words, that they hear the closeness and tenderness of our voice and practical charity to them.

You will be interested to know that yesterday I travelled down to Eden in the Southern part of the Archdiocese. I will tell you why I went down there in just a moment. But can I say that travelling from Canberra down to Eden and back I travelled through or near many towns that Mary MacKillop herself travelled to and stayed in. Towns like Cooma, Bombala, Nimmitabel, Pambula, are all towns that Mary MacKillop travelled to at least once or more times over her apostolate of hastening to do God's Holy will.

And why was I in Eden? Eden is a place extremely important in the life of Mary MacKillop. It is on the coast outside the township of Eden where Mary MacKillop's mother, Flora (MacDonald) MacKillop (1816-1886) drowned.

Through the extensive cataloguing of Mary MacKillop's letters we now have a real insight into her relationship with her mother Flora.

In 2012 one of the Josephite sisters distinguished for her apostolate in this Archdiocese over many years, Sr Bernadette O'Sullivan, wrote a book about the life of Flora MacKillop. When I read it I thought that it might not only be Mary MacKillop who was the Saint but also her mother.

May I read to you just a few lines from this book about the life of Flora MacKillop.

"Flora (MacDonald) MacKillop (1816-1886) arrived in Melbourne from Scotland in 1840 and in July of that year she married Alexander MacKillop. St Mary of the Cross was the eldest of their eight children. From promising beginnings family and fortunes declined demanding of Flora courage, patience and forbearance. Her deep faith and trust in God sustained her through the poverty, hardship and times of homelessness when she and her family depended on relatives for a home. While St Mary acknowledged her mother's example and influence, Flora was able to call herself 'a truly blessed mother', as she said herself, she had 'raised all her children for the glory of God'."

But tragically this wonderful saintly mother of Mary MacKillop drowned in the sea not far from Eden on a terrible stormy night on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1886. She was on the steamer (ferry) *Ly-ee-Moon*. Seventy one people died tragically including Mary MacKillop's mother. She was on the steamer travelling from Melbourne to Sydney to assist her daughter Mary at a bazaar.

We now have a letter from Mary MacKillop about this event. Mary MacKillop wrote the following about her mother. She said, "Mamma, was the only body found anywhere without being injured by either the rocks or sharks. The scapula she had so loved was on her neck. How it remained on seems miraculous and is, I believe. John (John MacDonald her cousin) says she looked as if she were asleep....The preservation of the body with the scapular still intact was indeed miraculous when one views the wild and treacherous seas and rocks at Green Cape."

At this time of the year over the past five years I have been travelling down to Eden to celebrate a Mass not only for Mary MacKillop but also for Flora MacKillop. Although it might be a long way off, I do believe there are solid grounds for an investigation into the possible canonisation of Mary MacKillop's mother, Flora. When we now read so much remarkable material about her faith filled and courageous life.

Finally now, Mary MacKillop's letters to her mother Flora give us a real insight into what really was important in the life of Mary MacKillop. If you were to write to your own mothers you would only say the important things and not the superficial.

Three things come to mind when I read these letters.

Firstly, Mary MacKillop totally relied on the providence of God. Today we might call it God's Grace or blessings. She saw everything as a tremendous gift from God in her letters.

She really was a woman of today's Gospel. In today's Gospel from Matthew Jesus says "Do not worry...Your heavenly Father knows you need. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Mary MacKillop lived out these words in total trust of God and saw everything as total abundant providence from His grace.

Secondly, it is quite clear from her letters the joy that she experienced in doing the Holy will of God. Doing the will of God is not an expression we hear too much about in these days. Instead, perhaps we use the term: "Discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying." For Mary MacKillop and so many of the Saints in the Church's history, responding totally and surrendering to the Holy will of God was the absolute essence of walking the life of faith.

Thirdly, in her letters I read so often of her recognition explicitly of the little kindnesses other people show to her. The letters, mainly coming from her trip to Europe and writing back to her mother, illustrated continually how people showed kindness to her in different ways. She did not take this for granted and was able to articulate to her mother precisely what kindness people gave her. She saw God's will and providence in their kindnesses.

She herself of course was kind to others. More so than kindness she was also extraordinarily forgiving. When we know of her life and her excommunication ordeal, we understand what forgiveness means. She lived out the line from the Second Reading where St Paul tells the Colossians, "You are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another." Again Mary MacKillop's lifestyle echoed these words fully.

I conclude with a little prayer that has often been prayed to Mary MacKillop over the years. It is where we place our own intentions to God through her loving intercession.

In part the prayer goes, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, "who in her living of the Gospel witnessed to the human dignity of each person. She faced life's challenges with faith and courage. We pray through her intercession for our needs..."

We have an Australian friend and Saint in Heaven! Make sure we speak to her with our own needs on this her Feast Day.

Another expression from her that may be helpful is: "Lean more on God than yourselves."

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop pray for us. St Joseph, to whom Mary MacKillop had such a deep devotion with all the Josephites, pray for us.