

CELEBRATIONS FOR MARY MACKILLOP – PORTLAND

Saturday the 8th August was a time of great celebrations in Portland as we remembered Blessed Mary MacKillop on the anniversary of the 100th year since her death in 1909.

Our celebrations commenced with 6.00 pm Mass at All Saints Church and the main celebrant was Bishop Peter Connors with myself assisting as a concelebrant. In this Mass to honour Mary MacKillop the parts of the Mass were sung in Latin by Music Glenelg Aquarelle. This included also the Gloria. The Aquarelle is a group of singers/musicians who sing at many gatherings around the district, and are an Ecumenical group with the members coming from various Christian traditions. They led us also with the other hymns sung at this Mass. The music for parts of the Mass was by Giovanni Grossi (1612-1684) known as the "Messa a 4 Vocci".



Bishop Peter gave an eloquent homily remembering Mary MacKillop's life here in Portland from 1862-1866 where she taught at what is now known as Bayview Christian Community College. It was from Portland she left in 1867 to commence the Josephite Order with Fr. Julian Tenison Woods. The Bishop also outlined her great trust in God whether in times of triumph and especially in times of great distress, with Mary never becoming resentful to those who hurt her and always offering them forgiveness.



At this Mass we had a number of special guests attending including four sisters of St. Joseph from Victoria and four from New South Wales. It was a prayerful and moving Mass.

After this Mass it was off to Portland Civic Hall to a World Premiere Performance at 8 pm. celebrating the centenary of the death of Blessed Mary MacKillop with the Mary MacKillop Mass as it is called. This is a new work commissioned by Music Glenelg Inc. and written by Nicolas Buc with a selection of texts by Andrew Wailes. This was performed as a part of an orchestral concert. This was led by the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of its conductor Andrew Wailes backed by the Australian Catholic University Choir, the Box Hill Chorale and local singers, all taking part in this concert. All in all this totalled about 100 singers. Truly it was a great musical event to honour and celebrate the life of an extraordinary Australian.

Personally I found this concert a very moving one, and one that has not been seen before. If it is offered again I would say it is a requirement to go and hear Blessed Mary MacKillop's story that was put to music and narration in such a creative way that was faithful to our historical understanding of Mary's life.

In conclusion both events on the same evening brought much joy to the people who attended. Most blessed time indeed.

Fr. Denis Ryan
Portland
13/8/2009

Bishop Connors' Homily for the Centenary of the death of Blessed Mary Mackillop follows:

**CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF BLESSED MARY MACKILLOP MASS
ALL SAINTS CHURCH, PORTLAND
SATURDAY, 8 AUGUST 2009**

Earlier today, I concelebrated Mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne with Archbishop Denis Hart and some of the other Bishops of Victoria. Archbishop Hart made mention of the fact that Mary Mackillop was born a few hundred metres away in Brunswick Street Fitzroy on 15 January 1842. Now it is a privilege and a joy for me to join with you in this act of praise and thanks to God for the great blessing that God has given to the people of Australia with the life and the mission of the woman we now recognise as Blessed Mary of the Cross Mackillop.

It is most appropriate that you the people of All Saints' Parish under the leadership of your Parish Priest, Father Denis Ryan, would wish to arrange this Eucharist in this particular church. History records that Mary Mackillop came to Portland at about the time that this church was first built. We can well imagine that she came often to this place to reflect on and discern what the Holy Spirit of God was calling her to do for the young people of this vast land. It was here at Portland that Mary carried out for the first time the role of teaching and recognised that God has blessed her with the ability to educate, to assist young people to discover their God-given talents and abilities and to respond to the call that was given them when they were baptised.

Fortunately there are no pretty images or statues of Blessed Mary Mackillop. "Pretty" is not a word that does justice to Blessed Mary. She chose the title of Mary of the Cross and there is much in her life's story to indicate that she embraced the Cross and she lived by the message that her Lord and Saviour taught from the Cross.

Although she was born to faith filled parents, Mary experienced much pain and hardship. She was brought up in the school of hard knocks. Her father at one stage thought that he had a vocation to the priesthood but instead decided to leave his native Scotland and come to Australia. History records that he was no expert with the use of money and on more than one occasion became bankrupt. The family had to move from place to place as a result. But from her father she received her love for education and her knowledge of theology and her thirst for justice. From her mother who was typical of the pioneer women of Australia, Mary learnt the equally important lesson of patience in the face of adversity, a warm and sensitive heart and great strength of will. On one occasion Mary shared with one of her advisers her memories of growing up in the various districts around Melbourne. She wrote: "My life as a child was one of sorrows, my home, when I had it, a most unhappy one".

As I reflected once again on the story of Blessed Mary, it occurred to me that there is a strong similarity with the story of Mary Ward, the founder of the Loreto Sisters, for as you know this year we have celebrated the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the first community of Loreto Sisters.

Both women came to understand that God was calling them to do something great for young people at a most difficult time. And both women experienced difficulty in obtaining official approval for what they felt God was asking of them. Fortunately they persevered and they established something wonderful for the people of God.

In the case of Blessed Mary, many young women were captivated by the charism, the special grace that God had given to Mary. They wanted to join her in providing Catholic education for the poorest of the poor in rural Australia. She wished that her Sisters would come under the direct supervision of the Pope. Sadly the Bishop of Adelaide at the time excommunicated Mary for her failure to take

instructions from him on the kind of rule of life that she wanted for her Sisters. We can imagine the pain that Mary experienced during the five months that she had to live away from her Sisters.

This year, Archbishop Wilson, the present Archbishop of Adelaide apologised for the sad if not tragic decision of his predecessor. Now all the Bishops of Australia hold their meetings at North Sydney where the administration of the Sisters of Saint Joseph is located. Every day we gather to celebrate the Eucharist in the chapel where Blessed Mary is now buried and which is a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people every year.

Our Gospel reading for today is taken from the instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples at the commencement of their long journey to Jerusalem where he was to suffer and to die, but then rise from the dead. He wanted them to know that God would always watch over them and take care of them.

Blessed Mary experienced many difficulties in giving a firm foundation to a Congregation of women that would bring great blessings to the people of Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and in more recent times to Peru, East Timor, Brazil and Scotland. She had to part ways with Father Julian Tenison Woods who had been her guide in drawing up the rule of life for the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. After she did receive the blessing of the Pope for her Congregation, she was not allowed to remain as the Leader of the Congregation, but had to hand over the role to others. And then she suffered a stroke some eight years before her death which confined her to a wheelchair.

During the forty years that Mary Mackillop shared the life of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, her constant message to them was to put their trust in the goodness of God. "Never see a need without doing something about it"; "May the spirit of unity and love reign amongst us"; "Let no obstacle deter us from proceeding with courage"; "Believe in the whisperings of God"; "Seek first the poorest most neglected parts of God's vineyard".

Today there are thousands of women and men who are joining with us in thanking and praising God for inspiring a young woman of Australia to do something great for them. If I may speak personally, I am certainly one of those who are indebted to the Sisters of Saint Joseph. My second name is Joseph because the Sisters of Saint Joseph in my hometown of Lancefield prayed with and assisted my mother when she was expecting me after having lost her first born a year or so previously. My primary education was with the Sisters of Saint Joseph, one of whom was the best teacher that I ever had. And in my first appointment as an Assistant Priest some forty seven years ago, I was instructed by a Sister of Saint Joseph to devote an hour and a half every Friday afternoon to religious instruction in three classrooms in the parish primary school. I am forever grateful.

We can be confident that in a year or so we will gather once again to invoke the intercession of Mary Mackillop as a canonised saint in the Calendar of the Church. As we recall today the day one hundred years ago, when God called Mary of the Cross home to be with her chosen patrons, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist and all the saints, the words of the then Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Patrick Moran are worthy of our reflection: "I believe this day I have assisted at the death bed of a saint. Her death will bring many blessings on you, on your Congregation and on the whole Australian Church". How true were the Cardinal's words?