

150 YEARS CELEBRATION OF MARY MACKILLOP "PORTLAND TO PENOLA'S PLAIN"

A program of walking tours, open houses and a visit by Bishop Paul Bird marked the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Mary Mackillop's departure from Portland to Penola; where with Fr Julian Tenison-Woods she founded the Sisters of St Joseph in March 1866, eventually leading her on a path to sainthood.

The celebrations marked Mary's four years in Portland which have been described by local historian and author of *Mary Mackillop's Portland Years – 1862-1866*, Bernard Wallace, as pivotal in her eventual path to setting up the first Australian Women's Religious Congregation; the Sisters of St Joseph.

Mr Wallace said during her time in Portland, Mary gained her first experience of formal teaching and established her first school, the Catholic Bay View House, Portland Establishment for Young Ladies. "Mary was confronted by great challenges and adversity during her Portland years. "She made many momentous decisions about her future whilst in Portland. Decisions that saw her lead an extraordinary life and become Australia's first saint," Mr Wallace said.

A highlight of the 150th celebrations was Sunday Mass at All Saints Catholic Church celebrated by Bishop Paul Bird. During Mass Bishop Paul blessed a new shrine in the Parish Church containing the image of St Mary of the Cross Mackillop.



In his homily Bishop Paul acknowledged the many hours Mary spent in prayer at All Saints Church at significant crossroads in her life seeking guidance in dealing with the problems of the present and asking for direction for the future. Reflecting on the scripture readings of the day the Bishop noted that Mary shared the experience of Christ himself who was 'hustled out of Nazareth' when she also felt pressure to leave Portland because of tensions and disputes at the time.

Bishop Paul said Mary's message for the people of her time was to care for the poor, to have compassion for those in



need and to have respect for everyone. In St Paul's beautiful passage about love (1Cor 13), the Bishop said St Paul spells out what real love means. "Mary put into practice St Paul's words by being patient and kind, never jealous or boastful or conceited, not rude or selfish. She did not take offence. She took no pleasure in other people's sins but delighted in the truth. She was always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever came." Bishop Paul concluded.

All Saints Parish Priest, Fr Gregory Tait congratulated all organisers of the event, especially Bernard Wallace on the success of the week-end and for the many people who took the opportunity to take part in the events including Sisters of St Joseph and Parishioners of the Penola Parish who visited Portland over the week-end. At the end of Mass those who came gathered in the Presbytery for morning tea.

The Parishioners of Portland look forward to travelling to Penola in March to join in the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of St Mary's Congregation of Sisters.

Fr Gregory Tait – Parish Priest

Photos from top to bottom:

Interior of All Saints Church ready for 150th Celebrations of Mary MacKillop

St Mary of the Cross Shrine All Saints Church Portland January 31, 2016

Bishop Paul with All Saints Parish Priest Fr Gregory Tait blessing the new Mary MacKillop shrine inside the church

Bishop Paul meets with one of the visitors to Portland during the Mary MacKillop celebrations.

Bishop Paul Bird's Homily:

Fourth Sunday of Year, Portland, January 31, 2016

Mary MacKillop and Portland

One of the prayers for the feast of St Mary MacKillop begins with these words: "In your loving providence, O God, you raised up in our midst Mary MacKillop as a blessing for those in need." Mary MacKillop lived in our midst. This is true for everyone in Australia in the sense that Mary MacKillop was an Australian and lived in this great south land. It is true in a special sense for the people of Portland in that Mary MacKillop spent four very significant years in this city. She lived in our midst here in Portland. It is also true in a very particular way for all of us in this church this morning.

Bernard Wallace has made a careful study of Mary's years in Portland and he notes the time that Mary spent in prayer right here in this church. He writes: "At a significant crossroad in her life, Mary spent many long hours in All Saints Church seeking guidance in dealing with the problems of the present and direction in regard to what she should do in the future." As we gather in this church this morning, we can rightly feel very close to Mary MacKillop. We are praying in the very place where she prayed. We might well follow her example in seeking guidance in dealing with the problems of the present in our own lives and direction in regard to what we should do in the future.

As we reflect on the Scripture readings set down for our Mass today we find various verses that resonate strongly with the life of Mary MacKillop.

There is a verse in the gospel that we could link to the particular anniversary we are celebrating this weekend. We are marking the 150th anniversary of Mary's leaving Portland to travel to Penola. Overall, we are remembering the years Mary spent in this city but the precise anniversary is the anniversary of Mary's leaving Portland.

In the gospel we heard of Jesus leaving the town of Nazareth. There was some pressure for Jesus to leave. In fact, the gospel says that a crowd of people "hustled him out of town".

As far as I know, Mary Mackillop was not exactly hustled out of Portland but there were some pressures prompting her decision to leave. She had tried to bring her family together in Portland but after some time they suffered financial troubles. There was also tension over the dismissal of one of the teachers at a school. It seems that Mary Mackillop's father was an argumentative type. He had disputes with a number of people and this caused tensions between these people and the Mackillop family. All in all there was some pressure for Mary to leave Portland. In this, as in many other ways, Mary shared the experience of Christ himself when he was pressured to leave Nazareth.

In the reading from the prophet Jeremiah, God warns the prophet that he will face opposition but he also assures the prophet that he will give him all the strength he needs. This message certainly finds echoes in the life of Mary Mackillop. In her own way she was a prophet, with a message for the people of her time. It was a message of care for the poor, a message of compassion for those in need, a message of respect for every person. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Mary met opposition. As the years went by, Mary set up schools in many places and also set up communities of Sisters. There was opposition from various people, including some priests and bishops. But like the prophet Jeremiah, Mary was given the strength she needed to persevere in her service. She was sustained by God. In the reading from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians there is a beautiful passage about love. It is a passage that tells us what true love means in practice.

Love is always patient and kind: it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

In these words St Paul spells out what real love means. When we look at the life of Mary Mackillop we can see how she put this teaching into practice day by day. In fact, we could apply these words of St Paul directly to Mary to describe how she lived her life.

Mary Mackillop was patient. She was kind. She was not jealous or boastful or conceited. She was not rude or selfish. She did not take offence. She was not resentful. She took no pleasure in other people's sins but delighted in the truth. She was always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever came.

A saint is a living gospel. When we look at the life of a saint we see what the gospel means in a flesh and blood example. Here today we give thanks for a saint who lived in our midst, a saint who prayed in this very church, a saint who showed us what the gospel means in practice.

We give thanks for Mary Mackillop and especially for the years she lived in Portland and we pray that we might follow her example in our own lives.

Mary Mackillop has shown us that it is possible to be a saint in Portland. May we follow her lead. May we live with patience. May we live with kindness. May we live with love, day by day.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR