

Solemnity of St Mary MacKillop

Ballarat Cathedral, August 8, 2021

The prayers and readings in this Mass are from the feast of St Mary MacKillop. We celebrate her feast each year on August 8th, the final day of her earthly life, the day of her birth into eternal life. I'd like to highlight two lessons from the Scriptures – the lesson of trust in God and the lesson of care for people in need. These were lessons that Mary MacKillop took to heart and put into practice. They're key lessons for us as well, as we seek to live our lives in a truly Christian spirit.

From the First Book of Kings, we have the story of the prophet Elijah meeting a widow and her son. In a time of drought, the widow is in a desperate situation. She has only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug. Yet Elijah assures her that this will be enough. The jar of meal will not be spent and the jug of oil will not be emptied until God sends rain to break the drought. The prophet encourages her to trust in God and her trust proves to be well-founded.

From the gospel according to Matthew, we have another lesson about trust in God. Jesus says to his disciples, "I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field, will he not much more look after you?"

Just as God looks after the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, so God will look after us day by day. This was a lesson that Mary MacKillop took to heart. Even when her plans were not working out as she'd hoped, she continued to trust that God would look after everything in God's own way. I pray that we might all have this kind of trust. Even when our plans don't work out as we'd hoped, may we have the gift of continuing confidence in God. May we have the grace to entrust ourselves and all our plans to God's care.

Another lesson in the Scriptures today is the lesson of care for those in need. In his letter to the Colossians, St Paul speaks first of God's love for us and then of our call to show love for one another. We're called to show compassion for those in need. "As the chosen of God, the holy people whom God loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience."

We see these words fulfilled in the life of Mary MacKillop. She had a strong sense of God's love for her and she was wonderful in showing love and compassion for people in need. She was constantly looking for ways to help others. One of her sayings was, "Never see a need without doing something about it." Mary MacKillop devoted herself to teaching children and caring for families, particularly families in great need. I thank God for the example that Mary MacKillop has given in showing compassion and kindness and I pray that we might follow in her footsteps in the compassion and kindness that we show.

In October this year, we'll have the first assembly of a Plenary Council. This will involve 282 people – lay people, religious, priests and bishops from all around Australia. Because of the pandemic, we won't be able to gather in one place as was originally planned. Much of the gathering will be online. However, we will be gathering in spirit and, we hope, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The challenge before us will be to develop practical proposals for a more missionary, Christ-centred Church in Australia. In this task, we can draw on the example of St Mary MacKillop. She strove constantly to know God's will for her and she devoted herself to putting that will into practice. May our Australian Plenary Council follow her lead. May we strive to know God's will for us in Australia today and may we devote ourselves to putting that will into practice. May we live each day with trust in God and with compassion for all those in need.