



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF MOTHER MARY MACKILLOP**

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

*Randwick Racecourse, Sydney
Thursday, 19 January 1995*

"But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We are celebrating an extraordinary event in the life of the Church in this land: *the beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop, the first Australian formally declared to be among the Blessed in heaven.* I rejoice with all of you: with Cardinal Clancy and my Brother Bishops, with the priests, Religious, all of you, lay men and women, families, young people and children, who offer a radiant and authentic sign of the Church's vitality. I give thanks to God for being able to celebrate this Beatification right here on Australian soil. Indeed, Australia itself forms a kind of background for the reflections which I would like to share with you.

Just a few weeks ago, the Church celebrated the Solemnity of the Lord's Birth, and today's Liturgy still echoes that saving mystery. The first reading from the Prophet Isaiah recalls the Liturgy of Advent and it has certain images which are quite applicable to your own Continent. Isaiah writes: *"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"* (Is. 40: 3). The Prophet speaks of the contrasts of valleys and mountains, of rough terrain and level ground (Cf. *ibid.* 40, 4). In all of this, of course, he is referring to *the geography of the Holy*

Land. But do not these same images also call to mind *the geography of Australia*? In the centre of Australia is there not an enormous desert, only the outer edges of which are rich and fertile? Are there not rugged plateaus and deep valleys? Along with harsh terrain do we not also find pleasant and hospitable countryside?

2. The contrasts go beyond mere topography; they are evident also in the ethnic origins of the people. Due to its history of receiving immigrants, Australia has come to be *a land of encounter between very different cultures and civilizations*. Even before the first Europeans arrived here more than two centuries ago, the aboriginal peoples had been present for tens of thousands of years. In fact, ethnologists tell us that the original inhabitants of Australia are among the most ancient peoples on earth. These contrasts in peoples and culture make your nation a marvellous blend of the old and the new, such that Australia today is a land of diversity and unity, enriched by the contributions which these various individuals and groups make to the building up of society.

The Prophet Isaiah's exhortation takes on a special relevance for those assembled here and *for all the Catholic people of Australia*. It is here in your own land that the way of the Lord should be prepared, so that Australia will be a place "where the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together" (Ibid. 40: 5). In fact, this glory has already been abundantly revealed in Mary MacKillop, and the Church, by declaring her "Blessed", is saying that the holiness demanded by the Gospel is as Australian as she was Australian. This is the message which I wish to address in particular to Mother MacKillop's spiritual daughters, the members of the Congregation which she founded. Be assured, dear Sisters, that the Church needs your witness and your fidelity. Australia too values your presence and your dedicated apostolate.

3. It is significant that Mother Mary MacKillop gave to her Congregation the name of Saint Joseph, one who *committed his whole being and life to God's loving Providence*. Joseph of Nazareth was *a man of boundless trust*. Only in this way was he able to live out the unique calling he had received from God, to become the spouse of the Virgin Mary and the guardian of God's own Son. In the history of the Church Saint Joseph has always been a special *model of holiness*. Without a doubt, in giving Saint Joseph's name to her Congregation, Blessed Mary MacKillop was expressing a quality of her own spiritual life, a quality which then became *a charism* for her followers and for those of us today who would learn from her example.

In the Gospel the Lord says: "*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*" (Mt. 6: 25-26). Joseph the "just man" lived by these words. These words give us an insight into what must be the fundamental attitude of every spiritual life: openness, trust and serenity in the certainty of God's special love for every human being, "who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24).

4. The Lord concludes his teaching on trust in Providence with the invitation: "Do not worry... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6: 31-33). In the history of Australian Catholicism, this "striving for the kingdom of God" has been realized in an eminent way by Blessed Mary of the Cross.

In the vastness of the Australian continent, Blessed Mary MacKillop was not daunted by the great desert, the immense expanses of the outback, nor by the spiritual "wilderness" which affected so many of her fellow citizens. Rather she boldly prepared the way of the Lord in the most trying situations. *With gentleness, courage and compassion, she was a herald of the Good News* among the isolated "battlers" and the urban slum-dwellers. Mother Mary of the Cross knew that behind the ignorance, misery and suffering which she encountered there were people, men and women, young and old, yearning for God and his righteousness. She knew, because she was a true child of her time and place: the daughter of immigrants who had to struggle at all times to build a life for themselves in their new surroundings. Her story reminds us of the need to welcome people, to reach out to the lonely, the bereft, the disadvantaged. To strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness means to strive to see Christ in the stranger, to meet him in them and to help them to meet him in each one of us!

5. Just as in Mother MacKillop's time, so too today the Christian community is faced with many modern "deserts": the wastelands of indifference and intolerance, the desolation of racism and contempt for other human beings, the barrenness of selfishness and faithlessness: *sin in all its forms and expressions, and the scandal of sin* magnified by the means of social communications. If the Church continually recalls God's law, inscribed in the human heart and revealed in the Old and New Testaments, it is not because of some arbitrary attachment to past tradition and outmoded views. It is that man detached from his Creator and Redeemer cannot fulfil his destiny and will not have peace. Everywhere the Church must be *"a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person"* (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76). By *defending life* against the evils of abortion and euthanasia, by encouraging strong *family life* in the face of old and new threats to its stability, by advancing justice at every level through her social doctrine, the Church is a true Gospel leaven in every sphere of human activity (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40). The great document of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World has given the Church's members a reminder which is timely in every age: "Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men and women of the modern world ever more generously and effectively" (Ibid. 93).

6. How do we go about this? Saint Paul's clear and unambiguous answer is contained in the Second Reading of this Mass. His words to the Colossians indicate what is *at the heart of every Christian vocation*. He says: *"Above all, clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony"* (Col. 3: 14). What does it mean to "clothe ourselves in love"? Saint Paul explains: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other" (Ibid. 3: 12-

13). Here Saint Paul draws his inspiration from the Beatitudes, and in that same spirit he writes about the peace of Christ, to which we have all been called (Cf. *ibid.* 3: 15), and the need for *giving thanks in all things* (Cf. *ibid.* 3: 17).

7. In this solemn Liturgy the Church expresses her thankfulness to Mother Mary of the Cross, to the Religious Community she founded and to all Religious Communities. The recent *Synod of Bishops* dedicated to the life and mission of the consecrated life fully recognized the *great contribution made by Religious Communities* to the Church and to culture and civilization throughout the world. Responding to Saint Paul's call to "be thankful" (*ibid.* 3: 15), we, on the occasion of this Beatification, express our thanks to Christ the Lord for the great service that consecrated men and women render in Australia in the fields of education and healthcare, and through so many other activities on behalf of the common good. Let us pray for a new springtime of religious vocations so that these Communities will continue to be a vital sign of Jesus Christ's presence in your midst!

It is very well that you are clapping for the Pope kindly this time.

Thank you very much.

8. Yes, *Christ is present in Sydney, and throughout Australia!* Through him, all creation, and in particular all humanity, is made capable of giving thanks to the Father for the gifts of Creation and Redemption and for the good things that come from human hands. Christ confers on the whole of life a "Eucharistic significance". Men and women of today often forget this; they think that they themselves are the creators of these goods and they easily lose sight of God. As a result they fail to strive for the kingdom of God and too often have no concern for his righteousness.

The Saints, on the contrary, teach us to see Christ present in Australia, in Sydney. They teach us to see Christ as the centre and summit of God's lavish gifts to humanity. For this reason the Church honours them, raises them to the altars and proposes them as models to be imitated. They are heralds of the true meaning of human life. Blessed be God in his saints!

9. "*Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" (Mt. 6: 33).

With these words I began this homily, and with them I wish to conclude.

The Beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop is a kind of "consecration" of the people of God in Australia. Through her witness the truth of God's love and the values of his kingdom have been made visible in this continent – values which are at the very basis of Australian society. May your whole Nation remain true to its Christian heritage! And may the Church which makes her pilgrim way in Australia continue to carry out her mission, proclaiming God's kingdom and his

righteousness!

And on the last day, the days I still think about pilgrims. I see the young people of Manila, of so many nations of the whole world... All representing the Pilgrim Church, the pilgrim people of God. And all singing with us, *Te Deum laudamus*. We are singing, then, of this celebration, of God we praise you. All pilgrim Church sing, rejoice, rejoice in Australia. Christ is here in Sydney and everywhere. Christ is here.

Thank you very much.

Alleluia.

Holy Father's greetings at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Celebration:

I greet all Australians, beginning with all Aboriginals of Australia and New Zealand. And then all who made their contribution to the entire work of prayer: Irish, Ireland, all Irish-Australians, all British-Australians, all Italians, all Croatians, Polish, Ukrainians, and Vietnamese. All together..., mexicanos también, Polaków,...

We all praise the Lord! All of you, once again, thank you very much! And our congratulations to Blessed Mary MacKillop and the Congregation of Sisters founded by her, here present. Once again, thank you very much for your patience and perseverance.

And the last word about Cardinal Clancy... Cardinal Clancy desired the rain tomorrow, only tomorrow...

The Pope for today, Cardinal Clancy for tomorrow.

Praise be the Lord!