

Eucharist at the Heart of Mary's Life

"Mass, Holy Communion in the Convent ... visit to the Blessed Sacrament ..."

Mary MacKillop—Diary, Rome—July 18, 1873

"Mass, Holy Communion in the Convent, then Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament ..."

Mary MacKillop—Diary, Paris—September 6, 1873

Mary MacKillop lived in the second half of the nineteenth century, when devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was the hallmark of the faithful Catholic. Mary loved nothing better than be in the presence of her Lord, and invited her Sisters to do likewise. It appears that many who knew Mary testified to the many hours she spent in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, and the frequency of her visits, both before and after she became a Sister of St Joseph.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was a more familiar practice for Mary and her contemporaries than for most of us today. But then active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy was not possible for Catholics for several hundred years before the middle of the 20th century. Even the way Mary never wrote about 'hearing' Mass without separately naming the times that she also received Holy Communion signifies this. The difference between Eucharistic practice before and after Vatican II, between the period in the life of Julian and Mary and our own time, is the ability of the faithful People of God to participate in the Mass.



Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has remained the practice of the followers of Mary MacKillop. The reserved sacrament is still to be found in our convents and retreat centres. But as with Mary, the presence of Christ, while strongly experienced through faith in the reserved species, is also recognised in all of God's creation and especially human life. Especially did Mary find the suffering Christ in the poor and in the destitute. Like Mary we are called to serve the poor. Like Mary we are called to recognise the trials and difficulties of our lives as blessings. We are invited by her inspiration to accept hardship as a share in the passion and death of Christ. It is our gift however, to recognise that the source of our call to service of the poor, the source of our recognition of daily deaths in our lives is the Sunday Eucharist. We come to the table Sunday after Sunday not as individuals, but as God's people, the church. As the Body of Christ our individual sufferings become one in Christ's sacrifice. From the table we go out and seek Christ in the poor. In this way we live the Memorial in a way that is prophetic, in the way that God required when Jesus challenged us to 'do this in memory of me'.

The words of our [Josephite] Constitutions remind us of our legacy: "God's compassionate love for people, the Eucharist as source and summit, and the mystery of the Cross provide for us, as they did for Mary MacKillop, a context for our service of others."

(Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, #5)

"The Eucharist is central to our lives. It gives expression to our unity and reconciles us to one another. From it we draw strength and courage to give ourselves in service of others. We celebrate Eucharist daily where possible."

(A Future and a Hope: Constitutions of the Australian and New Zealand Federation of the Sisters of St Joseph, 20)

"Today we commit ourselves to you as we recognise your presence in every person we meet and reach out to the suffering and the poor."

(Prayer of the Associates of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart).

The Eucharist ... 'source and summit' of Mary MacKillop's life ... 'source and summit' of MY life?

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