

**Mass to celebrate the feast of Mary MacKillop and the  
Tenth Anniversary of the Beatification  
St Mary's Cathedral Sydney, 07.08.05  
Homily: Sr Judith Sippel.**

**When he came here to beatify Mary MacKillop ten years ago, Pope John Paul spoke of Mary as embodying “all that is best in your nation and in its people ...” He spoke of Australians as being marked by:**

- a genuine openness to others;**
- a generous hospitality to strangers and to the needy;**
- a strong sense of justice to those unfairly treated;**
- a rich kindness and compassion for the suffering; and**
- an ability and willingness to persevere in the face of adversity.**

**He expressed the hope that Mary MacKillop's example would inspire Australians to take pride in their Christian heritage and to work for a better society for all.**

**During this time of reflecting on the Beatification and its meaning for us, I find myself asking: Are we really that people, that nation who holds such hospitality and openness, such generosity and perseverance, such justice and compassion as our deepest values? For better or worse Australia has seen many changes in these past 10 years:**

- Ten years ago REFUGEES recently fled from war and massacre in Timor would have believed that we were genuine in our offer of refuge. What are they thinking today as some of them await yet another reprieve from being sent home to possible starvation,**

**pervasive unemployment and minimal education opportunities?  
Are we still that people of whom John Paul spoke – hospitable to  
strangers and generous to those in adversity?**

- **Ten years ago our INDIGENOUS PEOPLE could have held on to the hope that with the Bringing Them Home Report, Sorry Days and Bridge Walks some sort of attitude change was taking place among us. What do they think now that political disinterest and opposition have just about ground the Reconciliation movement to a halt? Now that opinion has been tamed to the point that public conversation and discourse have been silenced? It isn't so easy to recognise ourselves as that people who in John Paul's words, "Do justice to those unfairly treated".**
- **Ten years ago, political leaders and concerned Australians actually talked about NARROWING THE GAP between the very rich and the very poor. Today not even a Vincent de Paul report exposing shoddy statistics and showing that the tax reforms of the last budget widen rather than narrow the gap – not even this can get the conversation restarted. It is an unfortunate example for a people who persevere in the face of adversity.**
- **And what of the ASYLUM SEEKERS who, ten years ago, may have believed that they had the right to flee oppressive regimes, war and torture? Asylum seekers who, ten years ago, may have believed that we would uphold the UN Charter on Human Rights? What do they think now after ten years of detention, after the**

**ongoing exposure of human rights denied, wrongful deportation and the incarceration of mothers and their children? In John Paul's words we are supposed to be a people with a strong sense of justice for those unjustly treated.**

- **Ten years ago the REALITY OF TERRORISM had not yet dawned on us here in this land.**
  - **In just a few years we seem to have been willing to alienate our own responsibility in favour of powerful leaders of our own and other nations;**
  - **It may not be long before we allow ourselves to become so threatened by our brothers and sisters that we begin to see each other as potential enemies against whom we require protection.**
  - **It seems that we have lost our confidence in the values we held as basic to who we are, and pride in our Christian heritage has turned into defensiveness and suspicion against those of other faiths.**

**2 Today's Gospel, however, puts before us a very different vision of how life might be. "Do not worry about your life", Jesus says "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"**

**Is not life**

- **more than the mindless gathering of possessions, the undue desire to be surrounded by all that the heart desires, whether we need it or not?**
- **more than the hapless use of the earth's resources to ensure our own comfort and security – as if it were not there to be shared among all, both rich and poor and our children of generations yet to come?**
- **more than protecting ourselves, our property and our lifestyles at the expense of those who have nothing?**
- **more than appropriating the riches of another's land, of another's culture and story as if we had it by right of domination?**
- **more than the creation of unequal power structures and the submission of those less powerful?**

**Today's gospel puts before us the question:**

**Can we not be satisfied with what is basic to our human need so that there may be life with dignity for all – in which all our brothers and sisters are invited and able to participate?**

**Can we not trust in the goodness of a God who names himself in today's gospel as Father – and names us as daughters and sons – a God whose loving Providence will supply all our needs?**

**And the answer which the gospel gives:**

**Life IS about more than what we are to eat, what we are to drink, what we are to wear. “Seek FIRST”, Jesus says, “the KINGDOM OF GOD and GOD’S JUSTICE”**

**3 WHERE do we seek this KINGDOM and its JUSTICE? Matthew’s gospel, from which we read today, is at pains to assure us that it is already among us; we need only stay awake and be attentive. Given the experience in our country over the past ten years we may want to claim that this Kingdom of God and its justice is very difficult to recognise! But have not our eyes been opened and our ears unstopped by God’s gift to us – in the person of Mary MacKillop, and in the lives of all who share her spirit? We know her story and**

- we recognise in it the depths of her love for God and humanity, expressed in her life of service, especially of the powerless, the needy and those on the margins;**
- we hear the all-pervading certainty that what she was doing was God’s work, and her unfailing trust was that God would provide.**
- we are heartened and encouraged by the very humanness of her seeking the Kingdom and its justice, of her failures and the weight of her burdens at times, of her courage and determination that whatever the opposition God’s will would be done in her.**

**On this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her beatification let us thank God for the gift of this woman who provides for us an Australian window on the gospel; whose life and words and example keep us attentive to the reality of the Kingdom among us; whose story teaches us that whenever we choose:**

- **to give away rather than to accumulate possessions**
- **to serve rather than to dominate**
- **to share our resources rather than to compete**
- **to free each other rather than to hold each other in fear**
- **to love, freely and warmly, rather than to judge and condemn**

**then truly we are SEEKING THE KINGDOM where God will provide for all his daughters and sons.**

**When we put ourselves on the line:**

- **to help the needy or to go out in generosity and compassion to those on the margins;**
- **to denounce injustice and question oppressive systems;**
- **to stand with those who are powerless and without choices;**

**then truly we are ‘ACTING JUSTLY’.**

**4 All of us gathered here today,**

- **who hold dear the spirit of Mary MacKillop as God’s gift to the Australian people, and**
- **who treasure her intercession and her example,**

**have every reason for confidence in the Provident God of today's liturgy. Following her way we do strive**

- **to be attentive to God's Spirit among us**
- **we do take to ourselves the story of the cross so dear to her, the suffering and failure, the resurrection and life which are integral to it;**
- **we do believe that God is at work among us; that whatever we do, however we serve, it is God's work and he will take care of it.**

**Now, more than ever, perhaps more than at the time of the beatification, Australia needs the witness of our lives. We CAN make a radical difference in this land of ours by translating our goodness, our faith and trust in our God, our commitment to the gospel into living flesh by the lives we live, lives made compelling and attractive by the sorts of people we are. As we prayed in the Opening Prayer this afternoon: May we, like Mary MacKillop, learn to live by the power of the Cross that in our lives we may embrace what she pioneered – new ways of living the gospel, of seeking the Kingdom, that respect and defend the dignity of all in our land.**

**Amen.**