

Mary MacKillop on Pilgrimage

*"God's presence seems to follow me everywhere
and makes everything I do, or wish to do, a prayer."*

Mary MacKillop 28/3/1870—Aged 28

A Pilgrimage is both an inner and an outer journey. It is traditional in many religions, where it often serves as a rite of passage. A sacred Pilgrimage, real or symbolic, has many facets. It is intentional, characterised by a sense of Presence and community. It takes us into a sacred space and time, but encourages us to remember who we are on that journey. A life pilgrimage is not only a linear journey, but a deepening of our contact with God and a spiritual awakening. The idea of "Pilgrimage"—as a *real* journey, and symbolically as a *life* journey—is often used today by writers of both spiritual and mainstream literature. General Peter Cosgrove described his visit to Gallipoli as a Pilgrimage—a journey made to honour the memory of those who died, and to honour the sacred icon that is Gallipoli itself.

Mary MacKillop is both a guide and mentor on our life pilgrimage, because she knew the joy and sorrow common to all humanity. Mary's pilgrimage was for others and towards God, whether she walked on Australian or New Zealand soil, or on the Continent or in the British Isles. Like most pilgrims, she drew others into her company, and they struggled together to keep on the path that Christ, their compass, indicated for them.

Pilgrimage can be a sacred journey undertaken by a group to reach a particular place, such as Lourdes, and to go there for a particular reason. But it can also be a deepening of our understanding of the created world, or a journey of recognition of our own value and worth to the God who loves us unconditionally.

The notion of Pilgrimage in the Christian tradition has its roots in the scriptures, beginning with the wanderings of the Jewish people, and including the movements of those who followed Jesus through the length and breadth of Galilee.

A Pilgrimage then, is a sacred journey which draws the Pilgrim back always to the place where God is most constantly present to them—within themselves, within creation and within others. The heart of a pilgrimage is always awareness of the other/Other. By definition, a Pilgrimage is always a long journey—a journey made in many ways—in sorrow and joy, in difficulty and ease, in loneliness and companionship. It is made, as T.S. Elliot says, with the drawing of love and with the voice of its calling. It is an exploration and:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (Four Quartets)*

Life is a pilgrimage—a constant movement from the known to the unknown. Our spiritual journey cannot be separated from any other aspect of our life journey. Pilgrimage is a journey through Presence to Presence, that is, into deeper mystery and a deeper awareness of 'the' Mystery. It is, however, a journey that must be made intentionally. A Pilgrimage is not a simple wandering in the desert—it is a movement in the desert towards a promise that is only vaguely recognised at times, but is never really lost sight of on the journey.

In some ways, Mary MacKillop is an *archetypal pilgrim* as she moves through loneliness, rejection and desert experiences, always towards a future hope grounded in God.

How aware are you - as Mary was - that God
is a faithful, loving companion on your life's Pilgrimage?

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