

## St Mary MacKillop – The Pilgrim

The theme of journey was never far from the thoughts of Mary MacKillop.

As the words printed around her tomb remind us, she saw life as a journey. Remember we are but travellers here, she said. The many journeys that made up her life were both actual and metaphorical. Perhaps one expressed the other. From the time Mary was a little girl moving from one relative to another to when, in her last years, she was confined to a wheelchair, she was still 'on her way' towards that intimacy with God that 'heaven' represents.

When we go on a pilgrimage, we have to 'let go' of the certainties of life as it has been. We have to be open to receive the unknown and to receive the hospitality of others. Mary MacKillop's attitude to God was like that. She learnt to be open at all times to what God wanted to do in her - she called that 'doing God's Will'. It meant letting go of personal hopes and ambitions, entrusting them into God's hands. With gratitude she accepted the hospitality of others - when she was vulnerable, as she was during her journeys overseas. Our journey, too, has involved a letting go that will continue into old age and finally at death, when we enter into our final journey. During our Mary MacKillop pilgrimage we can join with her as, following her footsteps, we open ourselves to receive with gratitude God's bounty in the hospitality of others.

A pilgrim has to 'live into the now'. Because we can't guarantee what lies around the corner, we have to learn what it means to live life fully where we are. Don't be troubled about the future of the Institute, Mary MacKillop said, I am not. He whose work it is will take care of it. The Gospel of her feast proclaims Jesus' words: Do not worry about tomorrow ... today's trouble is enough for today. (Mt. 6:34) Being alive to the moment meant that Mary was alert to the needs of her time. The aspect of God's love characteristic of the charism given her was compassion - God feeling with us in the situation of our lives. Being with another is part of being a pilgrim.

Even if travelling alone, a pilgrim is never independent. We meet others along the way, we depend on them for food and lodging, we are invited to listen to the stories of the people we encounter. In this way we learn of a God who is ever present and who, Mary knew, walks with us each step of the journey.

That we must 'travel lightly' is a lesson the pilgrim quickly learns. We cannot carry a whole lot of baggage with us if we are to make progress. Mary's readiness to step forward with few resources took the shape of what she called 'poverty'. Our current economic crisis is teaching our world that we cannot place our hope in material possessions. To differentiate between what is necessary for wholesome, dignified life and what is superfluous becomes crystal clear when we embark on pilgrimage. Likewise, we learn, we must shed the emotional baggage some of us cling to. If the awareness of God at the centre of our being is to enliven our hearts, we must clear the way of whatever inhibits us from that knowing. Mary MacKillop's pilgrimage through sorrow and the pain brought by misunderstandings and ill-will brought her to a poverty of spirit that allowed God to be plainly seen in her, and so we call her 'blessed'. (Mt. 5:3) Walking in the footsteps of Mary MacKillop will, if it achieves its purpose, enable the pilgrim to go beyond her journey into our own. May all making this pilgrimage know her as companion and friend as, like, her, we journey into our hearts and open them to God.

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