

The Eucharist and a Life of *Sanctity*

Every Sunday, and in many countries also on Saturday evenings, during the celebration of the Eucharist we affirm the faith which binds us together as a community of disciples. Sometimes the Apostles Creed, the more ancient version of the Creed, is used while in many parishes and other communities it is the words of the Nicene Creed which we use to give expression to our faith.

Among the many things which we acknowledge in the Apostles Creed to be essential to our faith is our belief in the *Communion of Saints*. This is an important reminder to us that communion and unity are at the very heart of who we are and who God is calling us to be. As the

Second Vatican Council reminds us, *"the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament - that is a sign and an instrument - of communion with God and of unity among all people"* (Lumen Gentium 1).

As the Council reminds us, this communion and unity extend across time and space because they are grounded in Christ. It is in and through our communion with him that we are drawn into communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. *"No-one can come to the Father,"* says Jesus, *"except through me"* (John 14:6). And equally, it is in and through our communion with Christ that we become one with all those who, together with us, form the Body of Christ. As Saint Paul reminds us so powerfully, we are

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"all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This profound truth, which encompasses all our sisters and brothers in the faith, both living and dead, finds its expression in the lives of all those who seek to take seriously the words of Jesus who describes himself as *"the Way, the Truth and the Life"* (John 14:6). It is his way we seek to follow; it is his truth to which we seek to commit ourselves; it is his life which animates our life. One of the many reasons why it is so important for us to gather together each week to celebrate the Eucharist on the Lord's Day is that this enables us to draw strength from the faith, the commitment and the witness of our brothers and sisters.

Similarly, it is the witness of those who have gone before us and whose faithful following of Jesus has been formally recognised by the Church which also strengthens us in our own journeys of faith.

This concrete witness, which has existed in the Church from its very beginnings and which is present in every time and in every culture constitutes, in the words of

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Pope St. John Paul II, the lived theology of the saints (Novo Millennio Ineunte 27). As the Church in Australia prepares to celebrate the International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney in 2028 we are invited to look to the lived theology of Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, so far our only canonised saint, as we seek to understand what faithful discipleship of Jesus looks like in our part of the world.

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extraordinary things. In some respects, her ordinariness lies in the fact that she is one of us. Like so many Australians Mary MacKillop was born in this land - in the inner-Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy in fact - to an immigrant family. She knows what it is to grow up under the Australian sun, to wander the streets of Australian cities and towns, to smell the scent of Eucalyptus in the bush, and to recognise in the accents and faces of Australia the presence of the living, and often suffering, Christ.

As a woman of her time, and as a faithful Catholic of her time, Mary MacKillop knew that one of the privileged places to encounter the presence of Christ was in the Blessed Sacrament reserved in every Catholic Church. Her younger sisters Annie and Lexi, we are told, often referred to the hours of silent vigil Mary spent in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. It was in this time of silence and prayer that Mary's dream took root in the depths of her spirit.

But Mary had a profound understanding that the Christ with whom she was united when she received the precious gift of the Eucharist, and the Christ whose presence she sought in intimate prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, was the Christ who commissioned his disciples to *"go and bear fruit, fruit that will last"* (John 15:16). She understood that the Christ who was calling to her to *"come away and rest awhile"* (cf. Mark 6:31) with him in Eucharistic prayer was also calling her to feed him in his poor ones, to clothe him in his naked ones, to visit him in his lonely ones, to love him in his unloved ones - for she had heard him say to her, *"Whenever you do this for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it for me"* (cf. Matthew 25:35-40). Devoted as Mary was to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, her missionary spirituality is summed up in these words: *"The heart of Jesus in the Eucharist is large enough to hold all our hearts in unity and is the dynamic factor that breaks open our hearts to include the poor"*.

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This profound understanding of the link between the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the presence of Jesus in his suffering people is surely the deepest origin of Mary's most famous piece of advice: never see a need without doing something about it, and also of a lesser-known but equally significant piece of advice which Mary gave to the Sisters of her Congregation: never forget who it is you are following. It is in the holding together of these two aspects of our faith that we are, and to be seen to be, faithful disciples of Jesus,

As we look to the International Eucharistic Congress as a unique and precious opportunity to renew and deepen our understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist which, as the centre of our liturgical life, is the source and summit of our Christian life and vocation (cf. CCC 1324), we are invited to reflect ever more deeply on the Christ whom we encounter in the Eucharist and who sends us out to encounter and love him in his people, and especially in those who are poor, abandoned or in need. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the Words of Institution which are at the heart of our Eucharistic Prayers. *"This is my body, given up for you. This is my blood, poured out*

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for you. Do this in memory of me". We celebrate the Eucharist, and are drawn into a profound communion of intimacy and love with the Lord so that, united with him and in memory of him, we too may give up our bodies and pour out our blood - make of our lives a gift for the life of others as he did - and so become the members of his body that we are called and empowered to be.

This is precisely the way St Mary of the Cross MacKillop lived her life. It is the gift she has given to the Church in Australia. May we, as faithful disciples of Jesus, *"never see a need without doing something about it"* and *"never forget who it is we are following"*.

