

**WELCOME**

**VIGIL CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF MARY MACKILLOP**

**16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2010**

**AUDOTORIUM CONCILIAZONE**

**ROME**

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Your Eminence

Your Excellencies all

and in particular Archbishop Lazarotto, Apostolic Nuncio to Australia,

Members of the Official Australian Delegation

Hon Kevin Rudd

Sisters of St Joseph

All friends of Mary MacKillop

Welcome to this first official gathering in honour of Mary MacKillop and for the glory of God.

All of us have come to Rome at this time because of one woman:

- A woman of extraordinary faith and heroic virtue
- A woman of Scottish heritage and Australian birth
- A woman whose mission took her far and wide across the great south land of Australia and across the seas to New Zealand
- A woman whose story and legacy have crossed further oceans to Peru, East Timor, Brazil, Ireland, Scotland and other countries

- A woman who tomorrow will take her place among the proclaimed Saints of God in the Universal Church.

One hundred and thirty seven years ago Mary MacKillop as we know also came to Rome. Before leaving home she wrote to the Sisters

“I am going to Rome to the feet of the Holy Father, there to implore his sanction for our Holy Rule and I go full of hope ..”

As a young 31 year old woman she arrived after six weeks on the sea without knowing anyone here, without speaking the language and with no return fare to Australia.

Mary MacKillop made the arduous journey because she needed the Holy Father to understand that a new way of religious life was needed to bring the good news of God’s love to the poor, struggling families of the colonies.

We see this in the famous words she wrote to Monsignor Kirby here at the Irish College

“It is an Australian who writes this, one brought up in the midst of what she tries to describe”.

Within only two weeks of being here Mary met Pope Pius IX.

To her mother she wrote of that meeting:

What he said and how he said it when he knew I was the Excommunicated one are things too sacred to be spoken of – but he let me see that the Pope has a Father’s heart, and when he laid his hands upon my head, I felt more happy than I will attempt to say.”

3 June 1873

With the help of many kind and charitable people here whom Mary found ‘truly friendly to the work’ of the Sisters of St Joseph in Australia she finally returned home 21 months later with the sanction she came to seek.

137 years later we are in Rome from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, from East Timor and Peru, from Ireland and Scotland, from Canada and France, from England and the United States and perhaps from other places – all because of that 31 year old who travelled across the world in 1873.

The Sisters of St Joseph, the Australian Church and the Australian nation rejoice in our first Canonisation. We are indeed proud at this moment.

Mary MacKillop in her Sainthood continues to do what she did in her lifetime – lead people to God – just as did the 5 other women and men who will be canonized with her tomorrow and as do all the holy women and men of God in the Communion of Saints.

The call of God is for us all to be saints – to live with extraordinary faith and live lives of heroic virtue,

This evening we have gathered to prepare our hearts for tomorrow's Canonisation through drama, music, prayer and song as we pilgrims now celebrate the life of Mary MacKillop.

On behalf of us all I thank the Australian Catholic University and the Mary MacKillop Canonisation Liturgy Committee for preparing this evening's celebration.

Australian Catholic University has a strand of its story beginning in the very teacher training program set up by Mary MacKillop in North Sydney in 1884.

As both the ACU and the MMCL committee have worked towards today I have witnessed the same 'unbounded generosity' that characterized Mary MacKillop.

I also thank Sr Maria Casey as Postulator for ensuring that we had this celebration and for all she has done to bring it together in this beautiful auditorium.

On behalf of the Sisters of St Joseph I wish each of you many blessings over these days as you too make this part of your sacred journey of faith.

Sr Anne Derwin

Congregational Leader