



**Feast of St Mary MacKillop
Archdiocesan Offices, Agencies and Organisations Mass**

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 08 August 2025
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In the Roman decree for the canonisation of Mary of the Cross MacKillop, which took place fifteen years ago making Mary the first, and so far the only, official canonised saint in Australia, there is a brief passage which sums up Mary's secret beautifully. I would like to share this with you at the beginning of my reflections as we gather to celebrate Mary and as we gather to celebrate the wonderful work of Catholic Social Services Western Australia.

Mary's public achievement, says the decree, is an historical fact in Australia, but for those who knew her personally the most striking thing about her was her kindness. She was a great believer in encouragement, urging people to be kind and united. In everything she did or said, she showed respect and love for those around her, making no distinction between the rich, the highborn and the influential on the one hand, and the lowly, the prisoners and the outcasts of society on the other ... the love of God filled her heart and overflowed to all those around her, but it was especially tender towards anybody in trouble.

How beautifully these words echo those of our second reading this morning from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians: *You should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience ... and over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love.*

I don't think we could find any better words than these to remind ourselves of what lies at the heart of every agency and organisation which forms part of our Catholic Social Services Western Australia network. They are words which speak not only of what we do but of who we are, or at least who we want to be.

The many different things we do for others are important and even vital for so many people. But of equal and perhaps even greater importance is how and why we do the things we do. Feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners, housing the homeless, caring for the abused, assisting migrants and refugees, providing safe places for victims of domestic violence - all these, we might say, are



our body of work. But it is how we do these things, and why we do these things, which is the soul of our work. And as we all know, a body without a soul is a lifeless thing just as, at least this side of heaven, a soul without a body is unable to do anything much at all!

Because what we do is so important, one of our constant challenges is to remain always open to new possibilities and new needs because society is constantly changing and those changes, while benefiting some, often leave many other people behind. In the world in which we live, Christians are called to be both idealists and realists at the same time. Jesus tells His disciples that they, we, must be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. There could hardly be a more lofty ideal than this. But in one of His most famous parables, Jesus helps us to understand what heavenly perfection looks like: *I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was in prison and you came to visit me; I was naked and you clothed me.* Christian perfection is indeed a high ideal, but for the Christian the way of perfection, the way to achieve that ideal, is very practical and down-to-earth. And as we all know well, Mary MacKillop was a very practical and down-to-earth woman: her famous saying - *never see a need without doing something about it* - is as practical as you can be.

But as the passage from the decree for Mary's canonisation reminds us, Mary's practicality, her reaching out to the lowly, the prisoners, and the outcasts of society, was the outward sign of something deep within her: it was her love for God which filled her heart and overflowed to all those around her.

In recent months we have witnessed extraordinary events in Rome, with the death of Pope Francis and the election of Pope Leo. Already during his life, and even more so in the months following his death, there has been a growing recognition that Pope Francis was given to the Church by God as a precious gift to remind us of what lived faith looks like in practice. We are familiar with images of Francis washing the feet of prisoners on Holy Thursday, of tenderly embracing disabled and disfigured people, of sitting down to meals with the homeless people of Rome, and of travelling to some of the poorest and most disadvantaged places on the face of the earth. We are not perhaps so familiar with images of him rising very early every morning to give time to prayer or spending time each evening in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. There can be no doubt that it was his love for God and his unshakeable conviction of God's love for him and for everybody which was the soul which gave life to the concrete realities of his daily life of service and selflessness. Pope Francis was certainly someone who never saw a need without doing something about it. But he was also someone who embodied another phrase of Mary MacKillop's: *never forget who it is that you are following.*

It is precisely because Saint Mary MacKillop understood the essential relationship between these two famous sayings of hers that it is so appropriate that we celebrate the work of Catholic Social



Services Western Australia on this particular day. It was because Mary was a faithful disciple of Jesus that she did what she did and was what she was. May we do what we do as part of CSSWA because of who we understand ourselves to be as part of CSSWA: faithful disciples of Jesus, who know that the role of this organisation, and all its constituent agencies, is to be a sign, a bearer and an instrument of the love of Christ.