

Abiding Trust

Mary MacKillop and John 14:1

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Mary MacKillop's abiding trust in God's providence is reflected in the Scripture verse John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me."

With Mary MacKillop's canonisation now imminent, it is timely for us to reflect on her words and actions, and what it is that sets her apart for canonised sainthood. Apart from her intercessions of healings and miracles, Mary MacKillop is remembered for her eagerness to discover God's will in all things and her abiding trust in God's providence. Unwavering trust and faithful contentment is the theme of John 14:1: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." Mary MacKillop lived this Gospel imperative throughout her life.

In the late 1800's Mary MacKillop responded to the isolation of colonial families around Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and throughout the country by pioneering a new form of religious life to provide education for the children of those families. She and her sisters shared the life of the poor and the outcast, offering special care to destitute women and children. It was her unwavering faith and trust in God that kept her strong as she struggled to provide for those in need. Mary follows in the footsteps of other great saints and people of the Bible. The theme 'trust in God' is evident throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, God's people were frequently told to trust and believe in God: the Israelites wandering in the desert and entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 1:21), facing threats from their enemies (2 Kings), Hannah's unwavering faith that her prayers would be answered (1 Samuel 1:10), Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and He will direct your path", and Paul's numerous appeals to faith in God (Galatians 3; Romans 4:16; 1 Corinthians 4:16). These stories repeatedly affirm unwavering trust in God.

Mary MacKillop's unquestioning faith and trust in God was steadfast and reflects the essence of John 14:1. This passage, although short, is extremely powerful. In times of trouble and hardship, many people turn to it in faith.

The broader setting of this verse is the Last Supper, where the disciples are gathered together in the upper room for a meal. Jesus has just washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:5), and given them a new commandment to "love one another" (13:31-35). Chapter 14 then opens with Jesus' final discourse, before he is to be united with the Father. Sensing his disciples' fragility and fear, Jesus attempts to calm them by beginning his final teaching: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Despite this call, later in the Gospel the hearts of Peter (Jn 18: 25-27) and Thomas (Jn 21: 25) are troubled by confusion and fear. Jesus comforts them with his words and urges them to believe in God. Even when facing the prospect of death, Jesus does not focus on his own troubles, but comforts his disciples. His counsel in the face of pending disaster is that of faith – "believe in God, believe also in me". In the face of fear and uncertainty, Jesus calls the disciples to faith.

Jesus speaks of a new depth of intimacy with his departure being imminent. He talks about a deep intimacy with God that takes away fear and anxiety, replacing it with a sense of wellbeing and peace, even in the midst of trouble. The Greek term used here is *pisteuo*, to believe, which denotes a personal relational trust, in keeping with the Old Testament usage. Preparing his disciples for a future without him, Jesus offers words they need to hear. This is God's word for the troubled – *do not let your hearts be troubled*.

Mary MacKillop is a great example of a person putting Jesus' words into action. She shows all how to live out this passage. Her life was filled with challenges and pain: excommunication, broken friendships, betrayal, and the death of loved ones. Yet her unquestioning faith and trust in God was steadfast. She believed, in her most turbulent times, that God would provide. In 1883, she wrote, "When I could not see my way, God kept my heart full of trust to make all come right". This statement of faith demonstrates that no matter how difficult and uncertain things were, her trust and belief in God remained unwavering.

Through his words of comfort, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe in me", Jesus is showing the disciples that nothing else is needed but faith and trust. God will provide. Mary MacKillop was a woman of such faith. She placed her trust in God, believing that God would provide whatever was needed in all aspects her of her life, be it a fare on the boat from Melbourne to Sydney, food and homes for the Sisters, strength to face opposition and false accusation, or even as she faced excommunication. She wrote, "My trust in him, who I know will not let the unworthiness of the instrument he deigns to employ interfere with the carrying out of His wise designs – I feel the cause is great and much depends on it, and I know if the work is His it must succeed, and if not, I only desire His will be done" (1873).

Students can explore the life of Mary MacKillop and track her hardships and challenges, and then reflect upon her writings and her deep sense of trust that enabled her to rise above such turbulences. In catechesis, students can be challenged in their prayer life to let go and rely on God, and to turn their worries and concerns over to God. Students can also explore in depth Chapter 14 of John's Gospel and reflect upon the fear of the disciples and their uncertain future. This may resonate with senior students for whom the future may seem uncertain.

In religious education, much can be explored with this passage from John's Gospel and Mary MacKillop's fulfilment of the passage. Through both John 14:1 and Mary MacKillop's reflections, we are assured that faith and trust in God is all that is needed in times of trouble and uncertainty.