

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Mary MacKillop

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Mary MacKillop

Australian religious sister, founder of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart and Australia's first saint.

Feast day	August 8
Born	January 15, 1842, Fitzroy (Melbourne), Australia
Died	August 8, 1909, Sydney, Australia
Canonized	October 17, 2010, by Pope Benedict XVI
Era	20th century

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Mary MacKillop Place and the Saint's Tomb in North Sydney

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Mary MacKillop

Saint Mary MacKillop, known in religion as Mother Mary of the Cross, is Australia's first saint. Born in Melbourne in 1842 to Scottish immigrant parents, she founded the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1866 with Father Julian Tenison Woods, devoted to educating poor children. Excommunicated for a time by her bishop and then fully cleared, she spread schools and works of charity across Australia and New Zealand. She died in Sydney on August 8, 1909, was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010, and her feast day is August 8.

Who was Saint Mary MacKillop?

Mary Helen MacKillop was born on January 15, 1842, in Fitzroy, then a suburb of Melbourne in the colony of Victoria. The city was only a few years old, having been founded in 1835. Her parents had come from Scotland, and the large family soon knew poverty. As the eldest child, Mary had to start working very young to support her family: at sixteen she became a teacher.

Meeting Father Julian Tenison Woods, a priest in South Australia, changed the direction of her life. He dreamed of a congregation of sisters who would live in poverty and devote themselves to educating the children of poor families scattered across the vast Australian bush. Mary became its first member and its first superior.

Key dates

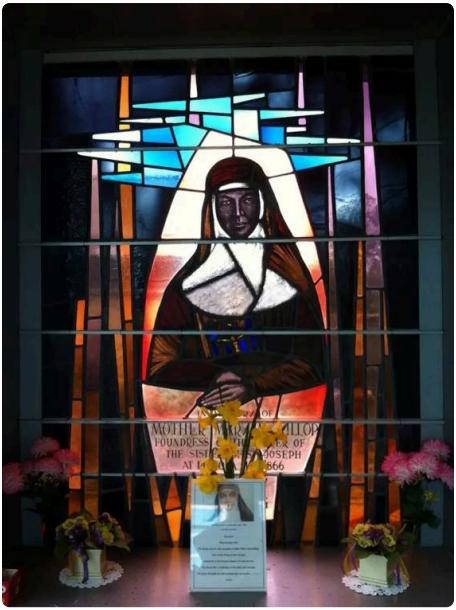
- **January 15, 1842**: Born in Fitzroy, near Melbourne.
- **c. 1858**: At sixteen, begins working as a teacher.
- **1866**: Founds the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart and opens the first school in Penola.

- **September 1871**: Excommunicated by Bishop Sheil of Adelaide.
- **February 21, 1872**: The excommunication is lifted at the dying bishop's request.
- **1873**: Travels to Rome and obtains approval for her congregation.
- **1901**: A stroke leaves her paralyzed but lucid.
- **August 8, 1909**: Dies in Sydney.
- **1914**: The memorial chapel in North Sydney, where her body rests, is opened.
- **January 19, 1995**: Beatified in Sydney by Pope John Paul II.
- **July 17, 2008**: Pope Benedict XVI prays at her tomb during World Youth Day.
- **October 17, 2010**: Canonized in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI.

A school in a stable

The congregation was born in 1866 in Penola, a small town in South Australia. For lack of anything better, Mary opened the first school in a disused stable. The sisters, soon known as the "Josephites," asked almost nothing of the families. They went where no one else went: isolated farms, mining and shepherding settlements, poor neighborhoods in the cities. The congregation grew quickly and spread to Adelaide and other parts of the colony.

Mary MacKillop did not stop at teaching. Her sisters opened orphanages and shelters for the homeless, the destitute, former prisoners and women leaving prostitution. She herself traveled enormous distances, often on horseback, from Penola to Adelaide and on to Sydney, where she eventually settled.



Penola, the cradle of the congregation founded by Mary MacKillop.

The trial of excommunication

The independence of the young congregation worried some of the clergy. In 1870 the sisters learned that a priest in Kapunda, north of Adelaide, was abusing children. They reported him, and he was sent back to Ireland. A fellow priest, who had influence over the elderly and ailing bishop, then spread rumors against the sisters, particularly about how they handled money. In September 1871 Bishop Laurence Sheil of Adelaide excommunicated Mary MacKillop for insubordination, and most of her schools closed.

Cut off from the sacraments, Mary was taken in during these months by a Jewish family and then by Jesuit priests. She did not rebel and kept her trust in God. On his deathbed, the bishop himself asked that the sentence be lifted, which was done on February 21, 1872. A commission of bishops later cleared

her completely, and it was established that the excommunication had been contrary to Church law. Mary MacKillop is one of the very few saints who were excommunicated for a time.

A founder ahead of her time

In 1873 Mary traveled to Rome to present her congregation. The pope approved it in principle, and the Josephites kept their autonomy: they were governed by a superior general rather than by each local bishop. This choice brought her lasting opposition, from some bishops and even from Father Woods, who disagreed with the way the work was developing. Mary held firm, leading her sisters throughout Australasia at a time when Australia was still a group of separate colonies.

Her health was fragile. In 1901 a stroke left her paralyzed. She nevertheless remained clear-minded and continued to follow the life of the congregation until her death in Sydney on August 8, 1909. Her sisters keep from her a motto that sums up her life: "Never see a need without doing something about it."



Mary MacKillop photographed in 1869.

From popular devotion to canonization

From the moment of her death, Mary MacKillop was honored in Australia as a founding figure of the country's Catholic Church. Her body rests in the memorial chapel opened in North Sydney in 1914. Her cause for beatification was opened in 1973. On January 19, 1995, during his visit to Australia, Saint John Paul II beatified her in Sydney, making her the first Australian to be declared blessed. On July 17, 2008, in Sydney for World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI prayed at her tomb. After a second miracle attributed to her intercession was recognized, as announced in December 2009, she was canonized in Rome on October 17, 2010.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph are still present in Australia and New Zealand, as well as in Ireland, East Timor and Peru. They work in education and among the disadvantaged, migrants and Aboriginal peoples.

Who prays to Saint Mary MacKillop, and why?

Mary MacKillop has no official patronage, but Australians and New Zealanders turn to her as the great saint of their Church. Because she opened schools for children no one else would teach, she is invoked by teachers, Catholic schools and students. Because she protected abused children at the cost of her own reputation, she is prayed to for victims of abuse and those who stand by them. And because she suffered an unjust excommunication without breaking with the Church, she is a companion for all who are falsely accused or pushed aside.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Mary MacKillop in art

Mary MacKillop is usually shown in the brown habit of the Josephites, which earned the sisters the affectionate nickname "Brown Joeys" in Australia. Images are often based on her photographs, especially the portrait taken in 1869.



The memorial chapel in North Sydney, where Mary MacKillop rests.

What her holiness teaches

Mary MacKillop combined a pioneer's courage with deep humility. She chose children no one was schooling, protected victims at the cost of her reputation, and bore an unjust sanction without breaking with the Church. Her religious name, Mary of the Cross, describes the path she followed.

To pray with her, you can say the prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop or follow the novena to Saint Mary MacKillop from July 31 to August 8.

Where to pray to Saint Mary MacKillop

- **North Sydney**: her tomb in the memorial chapel at Mary MacKillop Place.
- **Penola** (South Australia): the town where she opened the congregation's first school in 1866.
- **Fitzroy** (Melbourne): a plaque recalls her birth in this neighborhood.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop for Children and Victims

There is no ancient prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop, who was canonized in 2010. The Sisters of Saint Joseph she founded, however, keep from her a motto that sums up her whole life. You will find it below, followed by an original prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop by Saintspedia.

A motto to ponder

> *"Never see a need without doing something about it."*

Source: a motto handed down by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart as the legacy of their founder, Mary MacKillop. It expresses the spirit of a congregation born to reach the poor children of the Australian bush.

Prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop for children and victims

Saint Mary MacKillop, you opened a school in a stable so that poor children could learn to read and come to know God. Pray for those who teach and for children who have no access to school.

You had the courage to protect children who were being abused, even when it cost you your reputation. Help us never to look away from harm done to the little ones. Comfort victims and strengthen those who defend them.

You were unjustly cut off from the Church you loved, and you never stopped being faithful to her. Support those who are falsely accused, pushed aside or misunderstood. Keep them in peace and in hope.

Teach us, like you, never to see a need without doing something about it. I also entrust to you my own intention (name it in silence).

Mary of the Cross, you carried your cross with trust. Obtain for me the strength to carry mine and to remain joyful in the service of others. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On her feast day, August 8, the anniversary of her death in Sydney in 1909.
- At the start of a school year, for Catholic schools, teachers and students.
- For victims of abuse and for those who accompany them on the road to healing.
- When you or someone you love has been falsely accused or treated unjustly.
- For the Church in Australia and New Zealand.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Mary MacKillop from July 31 to August 8, and read the life of Saint Mary MacKillop. Her tomb is in the memorial chapel at Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Mary MacKillop

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Mary MacKillop. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, begin on July 31: it ends on August 8, the anniversary of her death in 1909. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for a child, a school, a person who has suffered abuse, or someone who has been treated unjustly.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. The nine days follow Mary's path, from her poor childhood in Melbourne to the cross she carried at the end of her life.

You can pray it alone, as a family, or with a class or staff at a Catholic school. Many schools in Australia and New Zealand bear her name, and this novena can be a way to prepare her feast together.

Day 1: A poor childhood

Mary grew up in a family of Scottish immigrants who were often short of money. At sixteen she was already working to support her family. Poverty did not extinguish her faith: it taught her solidarity.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the families who struggle to make ends meet. Give them what they need and faithful friends.

Today: Do something practical to help a family in difficulty.

Day 2: Answering the call

Meeting Father Julian Tenison Woods showed Mary what God wanted of her. She agreed to become the first member of a work that existed only as a plan.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me attentive to God's call, even when it asks me to set out without knowing everything.

Today: Take a moment of silence to ask what God is asking of you today.

Day 3: The school in the stable

In Penola, in 1866, the first Josephite school opened in a former stable. God's beginnings are often humble, as at Bethlehem. From that stable grew a congregation that has taught generations of children.

Prayer: Lord, teach me not to despise small beginnings, and to do my best with what I have.

Today: Begin, even in a small way, a good deed you have long put off.

Day 4: Going where no one goes

The sisters set out for isolated farms and bush settlements, on horseback and on foot. Mary wanted the most distant children to have a school as well. She herself covered huge distances to visit her sisters, accepting fatigue, heat and long journeys as part of her mission.

Prayer: Lord, send me to those who are forgotten, starting with those who live near me.

Today: Call or visit someone who is lonely.

Day 5: Protecting the little ones

In 1870 the sisters reported a priest who was abusing children. They knew they were risking a great deal, but they chose the victims. Their faithfulness to the truth would cost them dearly.

Prayer: Lord, comfort the children and adults wounded by abuse. Give your Church the courage of truth and justice.

Today: Pray for victims of abuse and for those who accompany them.

Day 6: Unjustly rejected

In 1871 Mary was excommunicated. She found refuge with a Jewish family, then with Jesuit priests. She did not take revenge or break away, but waited in trust for the truth to come to light.

Prayer: Lord, support those who are falsely accused or pushed aside. Keep my heart free of bitterness.

Today: Forgive in your heart an injustice you have suffered.

Day 7: Persevering through trials

Even after she was cleared, Mary still faced opposition, including from friends. She went as far as Rome to defend her congregation and continued her work with patience.

Prayer: Lord, give me perseverance when discouragement threatens, and gentleness in times of conflict.

Today: Take up a difficult task again with patience.

Day 8: Never see a need without doing something about it

Orphanages, shelters for the homeless, for former prisoners and for women in distress: Mary's sisters responded to the needs they met. Charity begins by opening our eyes. It does not wait for perfect conditions: it does what it can, today, with what it has.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the needs of those around me, and my hands to meet them.

Today: Notice one need around you and do something about it.

Day 9: Carrying the cross in peace

Paralyzed by a stroke in 1901, Mary lived her last years in weakness, yet kept a clear mind and a trusting heart. She died on August 8, 1909, faithful to her name, Mary of the Cross.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Mary MacKillop, help me carry my cross with trust. Amen.

Today: Visit or support someone who is sick or elderly.

Closing prayer

Saint Mary MacKillop, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for children, for those who teach them, for victims and for those who are rejected. Obtain for us an attentive and courageous heart, always ready to respond to the needs of others. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Mary MacKillop and pray the prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop.

PILGRIMAGE

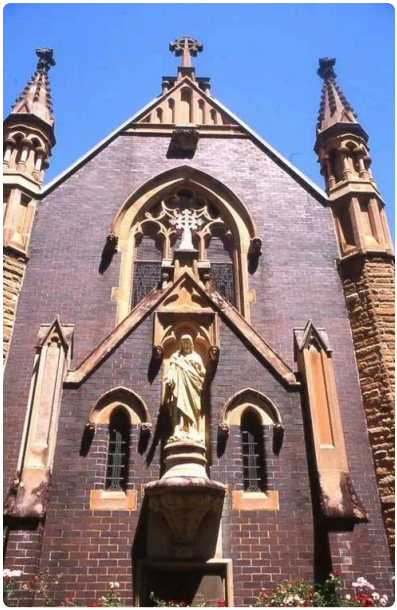
Mary MacKillop Place and the Saint's Tomb in North Sydney

Saint Mary MacKillop rests in North Sydney, in the memorial chapel that bears her name. Opened in 1914, five years after her death, this chapel is part of Mary MacKillop Place, a complex tied to the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart, whom she founded. It is the main pilgrimage site of Australia's first saint.

A chapel for the foundress

Mary MacKillop died in Sydney on August 8, 1909. The sisters of her congregation, who already venerated her as a saint, had a memorial chapel built in North Sydney, on the north shore of the harbor. It opened in 1914 and received her tomb. Throughout the 20th century, the faithful came to pray there, long before the official opening of her cause in 1973.

On July 17, 2008, during World Youth Day in Sydney, Pope Benedict XVI came there to pray. Two years later, on October 17, 2010, he canonized her in Rome. The North Sydney chapel then became the shrine of the country's first saint.



The Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel, in North Sydney.

Visiting Mary MacKillop Place

The complex includes the chapel, where the saint's tomb is located, and a museum devoted to her life and to the history of the Josephites. Visitors discover Mary MacKillop's journey, from her poor childhood in Melbourne to her canonization, by way of the foundation at Penola and the ordeal of her excommunication. The place is run by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, who welcome pilgrims and visitors there.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you may wish to read the life of Saint Mary MacKillop. At her tomb, you can entrust to her children, educators, victims of abuse, and all those unjustly accused, and then say the prayer to Saint Mary MacKillop.

Those who come around August 8 can join in the novena to Saint Mary MacKillop. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places connected with Saint Mary MacKillop

- **Penola** (South Australia): the small town where in 1866 she opened the congregation's first school, in a former stable.
- **Fitzroy** (Melbourne): a commemorative plaque marks her birth on January 15, 1842.
- **Adelaide**: the city where the congregation grew and where Mary endured the ordeal of excommunication.

Practical information

Mary MacKillop Place is in North Sydney, on the north shore of Sydney Harbour, easily reached from the city center. The hours of the chapel and museum, visiting conditions, and scheduled celebrations, especially around August 8, should be checked on the official website of Mary MacKillop Place or of the Sisters of Saint Joseph before you come.

Credits and sources

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