Who is Mary MacKillop?

Mary Helen MacKillop was born in 1842 in Victoria to Scottish immigrant parents and grew up with seven brothers and sisters. At the age of twenty-four, she dedicated her life to God and took on the name "Mary of the Cross."

Mary was an ordinary woman with an extraordinary dream and a big heart. Her dream was to give the poorest families and most neglected children access to education and safe shelter by opening schools. With what little resources they had, Mary and Father Tenison Woods turned an old stable into a school in Penola, South Australia.

In 1866 Mary and Father Tenison worked together to set up the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart (the Josephites). This was the first religious order to be founded by an Australian.

As a passionate educator, Mary broke through the prejudice of the early 19th century to educate all — regardless of gender, race, faith, or wealth. She and the Sisters of St Joseph went wherever the need was greatest. They gave up everything to live and teach amongst the people they served.

What is a Feast Day?

All Saints have dedicated Feast Days when they are remembered with special mention and prayers. Mary MacKillop's Feast Day is on 8th August, which is the day she died.

Mary's Feast Day is a wonderful time to reflect on the qualities and actions that set her apart, and how her legacy continues to be relevant today.

Mary MacKillop fiercely believed in the power of education to lift communities out of poverty.

Education in Australia is what it is today, thanks in large part to the dedication and determination of Mary and the Sisters of St Joseph.

What does it mean to be a Saint?

One of the most inspiring things about Saints is that they are people who lived in the world just like us. As we can see with Mary's life, Saints dedicated every day to honouring God and sharing His love by serving others.

Canonisation is when the Pope declares that a person, who has died, practised heroic virtue and devotion to God during their life. The act proclaims that the person is now with God in heaven, intercedes for us before the Lord, and is to be publicly recognised by the whole Church.

On 4th August 1909, Cardinal Moran visited Mary MacKillop as she was preparing for death. He gave her his blessing and, as he left, said, "I consider I have this day assisted at the deathbed of a Saint."

Mary died a few days later on 8th August 1909. At her funeral Mass, people rushed to touch her body with rosaries, which was a practice very unusual in Australia. When she was laid to rest at Gore Hill, many people even took samples of earth from her grave as a precious reminder. Her remains are now in the Mary MacKillop Memorial chapel at North Sydney.

Mary MacKillop was canonised on 17th October 2010 at Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome.

How can we learn from Mary today?

Today, over 10 years on from the recognition of Mary MacKillop's holy work, we continue to find hope in her values, character, and actions as a remarkably strong female leader.

Mary fiercely believed in the power of education to lift communities out of poverty.

Mary taught everyone — regardless of gender, race, faith, or wealth — while serving with love and compassion.

In the face of trials, Mary persistently stood by her convictions to help those in need, no matter their situation. She wasn't afraid to question authority to seek justice – while also modelling forgiveness, insisting no ill be spoken of those who wronged her.

> **This August, let's walk in the footsteps of Australia's most loved Saint.**
> **Just like Mary MacKillop…**
> **Let's be fierce in the face of adversity.**
> **Let's be fair and act when we see injustice.**
> **Let's give love to those we encounter each day.**
> **Together, let's be Fierce for Fair.**