

CONVERSATIONS WITH MARY

MARY OF THE CROSS (1)



Early Australia was a mix of tribes with their own languages and traditions. As development increased by predominately Anglo-Saxon and Celtic peoples, tensions of Christian sectarianism between English Protestant and Irish Catholicism developed. The MacKillops and MacDonalDs had strong Scottish Catholic backgrounds, and had suffered persecution and survived, looking to Australia for a freer practice of their faith.

So the unifying factor was “We are Australians” and helped develop the Australian identity. One could call it a sense of independence, yet a feeling of mateship, giving a bloke a fair go. Mary respected religious diversity and one of her strong devotions was to the Cross. Her mother had worn a relic of the true Cross during her pregnancy, and Fr Words insisted she be called Mary of the Cross at her profession To her Mamma in 1867 she wrote:

“My name in religion is Mary of the Cross. No name could be dearer to me, so I must endeavour, not to deserve it, for I cannot, but at least I must try not to disgrace it.”

Following Jesus in early Australia was to live in hardship:

1. Tensions between Protestants and Catholics often excluded Catholics from jobs.
2. Scattered Churches and few priests made attendance at Mass either difficult or impossible. Travel by wagon or buggy could mean hours and fasting from midnight meant few received Communion. Mass became an opportunity to “put the billy on” and have a chat.
3. Education on faith for children by parents who knew very little themselves, often folk-lore.
4. The Poverty of Catholics held them back in society and business.
5. The struggle to survive, the harshness of the land, droughts, fire, of “going it alone” bred a certain type of mateship, tolerance and need to help each other in the difficulties of life. The stories of “Dad and Dave” and other similar writings and cartoons, depicted all of these. Poets like Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson also depicted life in this land, capturing its essence.
6. Mary developed during these years as her family moved from place to place. I counted 19 homes Mary lived in before leaving the family. It was obvious she learnt skills, as during a time in New Zealand she built a chicken pen so the Sisters would be able to have eggs.

REFLECTION: With Mary about how these tensions and times affected her growth.

The cross has long been a symbol for any form of human suffering, but we need to concentrate on Jesus, the “person who was Crucified”, whom we are called to follow. Christ also endured the limits of our human condition, seeing the struggles of others, the death of loved ones. So an unbalanced view would be to see the acceptance of every “cross” in our life as an opportunity to be “like Christ”. We can say Christ was “like us” in our humanity in the sense he also had “crosses” to bear just as we do. His death as a criminal on a cross was the result of his teaching about God’s love in peoples lives and how he lived out that belief.

REFLECTION:

This sculpture is at the Interpretive Centre Penola.

Spend some time reflecting on it:

1. What do you see?
2. What is Mary holding?



3. What is she saying to you?
Let your intercessions flow from your reflection.

[PRAYER: Almighty God, in your love you sent your Son to redeem us by his life and death. Help us to be generous in taking up our own cross, by following him in the work of bringing the Kingdom of God on earth, so that many will be drawn to follow Jesus in all their struggles. May St Mary of the Cross pray for us in our need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen