

Caption:

WELCOME

BROTHER RALPH FITZPATRICK

Director, Province 20 Western Australia

Chairman of Central Council

Text:

Today, with the whole Church, we celebrate the feast of St Mary of The Cross Mackillop.

For the Sisters of St Joseph this is a particularly joyful celebration as it falls in the tenth anniversary year of the canonisation of the founder of their Congregation.

For Catenians it is not only a celebration of the holiness and heroic virtue of a woman who lived the Gospel in a uniquely Australian way, but also a celebration of reaching a milestone on our Association's journey, which next year reaches yet another milestone - the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation in Australia.

While Mary Mackillop has become a part of the faith journey of many Australian Catenians, usually through their experience of her charism in the Josephite way of living the Gospel in ministries including education, pastoral works, health and aged care, it was not until her beatification in 1995 that she became part of The Catenians journey in Australia.

By the end of that year most, if not all, Circles in Australia had spontaneously included Blessed Mary Mackillop in the intercessions that conclude the Prayers at every meeting.

In the years since then many Circles have had the benefit of at least one dinner at which a Josephite Sister had spoken eloquently of the life, charism and ministry of Blessed Mary and, after her canonisation, St Mary of the Cross Mackillop.

These encounters while we gathered in Christ's name have enriched the spiritual life of our brotherhood and opened us to the possibility that our lives as Catenians could be lived with a uniquely Australian spirituality within an international context. That, like St Mary Mackillop, we can be truly Australian and strive to be genuinely holy.

Our individual and collective spiritual life was further enriched by having placed before us the example of her faith and trust in a loving and provident God, her response to God's call to provide for those in need, her reverence and respect for the dignity of all and her affection for her Sisters and for those she served. We were prepared for the period of discernment on which we were to embark by her example of attentively listening for the movement of the Holy Spirit in her life.

Our journey to discerning that uniquely Australian Catenian spirituality began in earnest at the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian National Conference held in Sydney during 2014. That conference commenced the process of discerning the direction of the Association in today's Australia by reflecting on and responding to the questions posed by Pope Francis in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Through successive Australian National Conferences, workshops, surveys, discussions and prayerful contemplation the journey has woven its way through and into the wider currents of discernment and renewal within the Association. A renewal that has brought us new Constitutional Documents enunciating the Catenian Principles and establishing the Central and National Councils and, more recently, the future focused Woodford Report by the Strategic Work Group of Central Council.

It is the discernment of our Australian national response to that Report that brings us to the latest milestone in our Association's Australian Journey.

The Catenian experience has always been one of friendship in faith and respect for our Catenian brothers. The Spirit moves us to provide practical support for brothers in difficulty, our departed brothers' widows, young Catholics, the clergy and the wider community.

It is in our experience of faith based friendship that we discern the spiritual dimension of the Catenian experience.

In Chapter 15 of St John's Gospel Jesus speaks to his disciples about his relationship with them. It is a relationship as intimate as that of a vine and its branches, it is a relationship of divine and perfect love, it is a relationship in which His disciples are His friends. It is a relationship which, He commands, they are to have with each other – a relationship of interdependence in which each is as dependent on the other as a branch is to its vine.

The milestone that we celebrate today is our acknowledgement that our Australian expression of Catenian spirituality is a spirituality of interdependence, one lived through faith, friendship, respect and service, a spirituality that reflects the charism of St Mary Mackillop.

That acknowledgement calls us to its proclamation by placing our brotherhood under her patronage as our Australian patron Saint.

During the Mass celebrating her feast today we will gather at her tomb and make that proclamation in the presence of the Congregational leaders of the Sisters of St Joseph who, by their ministry, live the charism of St Mary Mackillop before the Church and, particularly, the people of Australia. May our Catenian brotherhood reflect her charism as authentically.

On behalf of the Australian National Council and our Catenian brothers in Australia, I welcome you to today's celebration.

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