August 8: St Mary MacKillop

**CHANNELS OF HOPE**

Bishop Vincent Long believes that one of the critical challenges for the Church today is the ability to read the signs of the times and interpret them in a way that offers fresh and hopeful vision for the future, despite appearances to the contrary. Mary McKillop knew of God’s promises in the past, but she knew also how to interpret God’s Word in her own life and to speak that word to others that would lift them up.

One of the stories that has a feminist touch and a relevance to us today is the story of the Hebrew midwives Puah and Shiphrah (Ex 1:15). Their courage, imagination, and daring are highlighted in the very first chapter of Exodus. It was a critical situation about the future of a people. Yet Puah and Shiphrah were up to the task of reframing a harsh reality into a vision of fresh hope. They did so by refusing to obey Pharaoh’s command and by showing faithfulness to God in delivering new life, thus securing a vital future for the People of God.

Today, amid many situations of seeming hopelessness, it is easy for us to be overwhelmed and numbed. We feel unable to meet the challenge of delivering new life on behalf of those who feel hopeless and disenfranchised. Yet like Puah and Shiphrah, we are challenged to present an alternative vision of fresh hope.

When we are on the side of the poor, the vulnerable and suffering people, and when we stand in solidarity with those without hope and act together, we can be channels of hope. In opening our eyes and hearts to the sufferings of our world, hope can be awakened, a hope that allows us to see things from the perspective of God.

This was what Mary MacKillop did when she rallied her Sisters behind the poor and vulnerable in colonial Australia. She took a prophetic stance not simply in providing affordable quality Catholic education and health care to the poor, but fundamentally in meeting the great cultural challenges of their times. Her motto? “Never see a need without doing something about it.” In acting out of a strong passion for the Kingdom of God and a visceral compassion for the suffering, she brought about a fresh hope for others.

Like St Mary of the Cross, we are called to be channels of hope and to meet the challenges of our times. In what ways can we follow her prophetic vision and apply it to our context? Who are the people without hope and how can we reframe the harsh realities that they experience into a hopeful future?