Mary MacKillop, Australia’s first saint, was born to Alexander and Flora MacKillop on the 15th of January 1842 in Fitzroy, Melbourne. She was the eldest of eight children. At the age of 16, Mary became a governess and it was said that she showed a great desire to do God’s will and to help those in need.

At age 18 she moved to Penola in South Australia to work as governess for her cousins. This work inspired her to do more for the children of poor families, and it was during this time she met Father Julian Tenison Woods, who shared her concerns for these children. The establishment of the first St Joseph’s School in a disused stable heralded the beginning of the work of the Sisters of St Joseph of Sacred Heart.

On the 19th of March (the Feast of St Joseph) 1866, Mary became the first Sister of St Joseph, and took her vows as “Sr Mary of the Cross” on the 15th of August 1867.

Mary and the sisters of the new Australian Order (Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart) focused on those in need and worked in many country areas around Australia. As a woman of great faith and inner strength, Mary overcame many obstacles that threatened the work of the Order. She had great compassion for the poor and the needy, and her endurance and perseverance, in the face of many trials and much opposition, ensured the legacy she left for Catholic Education in Australia and New Zealand, and that continues to this day.

By August 1871, 120 women had taken vows to become Sisters of St Joseph. This continued to grow through the years, and the Josephite Sisters founded many schools contributing greatly to both the primary and secondary education of countless students.

Mary MacKillop died on the 8th of August 1909 in North Sydney, and her tomb there has become a place for pilgrims to visit, pray and be inspired by this great Australian.

Our First Australian Saint
Mary MacKillop was canonised on the 17th of October 2010 at St Peter’s Basilica, Rome by Pope Benedict XVI.

As we celebrate 150 years of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, we reflect on the work of Mary and the many dedicated Sisters who have faithfully followed in her footsteps, and still today heed her words:

“Never see a need without doing something about it.” 1867

www.sosj.org.au
www.marymackillop.org.au
www.mackillop.foundation.org.au
http://www.marymackilloppenola.org.au