

**2. FAMILY TRAGEDIES: Faith in God's Providence**

**(a) John's Death**

Adelaide, 7 January 1868

My dearest Mamma,

May our Blessed Lord Himself be your Comforter in this new and severe trial. He has taken our dear **John**, but ah, how thankful we should be to know that the poor boy's death was so holy and happy a one. How different would be our feelings had it been otherwise. My one constant prayer for those I love is that, no matter how He is pleased to try them during this weary life, God in His mercy may grant them a happy death and give them that happiness in the next world which He knows would not be good for them in this.

Let us not mourn for John. We may safely hope that he is not far from his loving Redeemer. His wishes were always good and his life innocent. You have not got him to comfort and take care of on earth but from Heaven he and our little Alick will watch over you and of us I trust.... But confide in the mercy of God as you have always done. My heart is sore on your account, more so now than ever. God's holy will be done. Lean on Him, resign yourself to Him. Oh Mamma let us belong to Him completely and He will take care of us all.....Poor Papa, he will need all our consolation. May God comfort him.

This is a sad world. The only way we can make it happy is by resigning ourselves entirely into the hands of God, to do and suffer all he permits, and let us try find this peace by a cheerful conformity to His holy Will... I would be anxious about you if I dared distrust the infinite Mercy of our Blessed Lord. I always bring you to Him and ask Him to take care of the mother who was so good to me. Be happy in the thought that I am trying to please and serve Him, and that you were the one who, by your teaching and example, made me anxious for this holy life....Remember that I love you and feel for your sorrows perhaps more keenly than ever. May our Holy Mother, whose sorrows were so great, obtain for you the peace and consolation I desire for you. I will always be your loving and grateful child in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Mary of the Cross

**(b) Father's death 1 ½ years later**

Convent of St Joseph's Adelaide 14 September 1869 (letter is incomplete)

My dear sorrowing Mamma,

I feel that you are sorrowing and that you have been so and that in your moments of bitterest grief even I by my strange silence have added the sharpest pangs to it. But surely our good God and His dear Immaculate yet sorrowful Mother comforted you as they alone could do.

Mamma, the heart of your child is the same now as you ever knew it to be – it feels for your lonely sorrows, your severe trials, and your many cares, yes, even more now than formerly, for imagination, I trust magnifies them and makes them appear greater than they really are. Surely they cannot be as great as I in moments of anxious thought for you sometimes think they are. But great or small – my own Mamma, you have not now to learn how to bear them patiently and even lovingly, considering Who He is that sends them all to you. Oh! But my heart yearns to comfort you, yet cannot do it. Go to our good and merciful God, Mamma, and in His every holy Will, which you always taught me to revere and love, you will find your only rest....Won't you join me in humbly trying to submit to this ever blessed Will. So few give their wills entirely to God – and to submit to it in all things. ... Ah! Don't let sorrow and care dishearten you now – rather let such be a means of bringing you closer to the Cross, nearer to Jesus and our Sorrowful Mother. In her great

and bitter sorrows, and in the cruel wrongs of our merciful Saviour, won't you dearest mamma, find rest. Have you not often told me that God loved the souls He tried most. Well then, my own Mamma, think of that still when your weight of sorrow and care seems more than you can bear.... This is the month of our Immaculate Mother's Dolourous Heart, her month of sorrows. Won't you unite all your sorrows to hers and through her to the desires of the Sacred Heart of her Son? Ah yes, my own Mamma, you will do more even. You will endeavour to meet them with at least cheerful resignation, that first, and then love for them will follow.

I am but a poor consoler at best, and any effort to succeed in doing so seems vain when writing to you. May God Himself then comfort you and so draw your heart to Himself that you will always lean on Him alone, and prepare in earnest by the path of suffering which He leaves you in, for your eternal rest with Him.

Poor Papa had his time of humiliation and sorrow. So also had John, young as he was – but both of them are now happy with their God and longing I am sure for the time when you can join them. We must all try to get there. Oh! Mamma, try by every means to make my sisters and poor Peter think less of this miserable world and be more in earnest in their pursuit of the next.....(final section is lost).

**c Maggie's Death 29 years old.**

**17 Dec 1872 Kensington St. Joseph's of the Sacred Heart**

My own dear Mamma,

My letter of Saturday had not been posted an hour when Uncle Cameron's telegram with the sad news came. My darling sister is now at rest, and I trust enjoying the reward of all her patient sufferings. You must, my own dear Mamma, feel very lonely, but I am sure you would not wish her to have lived an hour longer than God's holy Will ordained. She is lost to your love here only to pray for you and to bless you in her heavenly home. If prayers can benefit her, she has a full share of them, and Holy Masses too.....The telegram arrived too late on Saturday to send word to the College, but I wrote a few lines to Father Superior on Sunday asking him to tell my poor brothers, and on Monday I wrote to them myself. Poor boys, they will feel it, but God is good. Your Christmas will be a little saddened, but not too much so, for such a death as dear Maggie's after sufferings borne as hers were, should rather fill our hearts with a holy joy and hope.... My own dear Mamma, you must not be too sad or lonely. Do write to me and tell me exactly how you feel, and with fond fond love ever believe me, your devoted child in JMJ, Mary of the Cross.

**d Flora MacKillop's death by drowning at Green Cape, near Eden, May 30 1886)**

**MMK to Annie McK,**

**St Joseph's Providence, Sydney, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1886:**

My dearest Annie, God help us all. The hand of God is heavy upon us, but his holy will must be done. Oh, Annie, I had so yearned to see her again and all the sisters were planning to make her visit a happy one. Poor, dear, long-suffering Mamma. I am sure she has gone to a well-deserved rest and will no longer feel her dependent position.

God grant that our darling mother's body may be recovered. Captain Trouton telegraphed at once to the authorities to spare neither care nor expense in trying to recover it, and if they succeed, Jack will go for it. Poor dear Mama. Oh, I do hope we find her body yet.

How are you, my poor Annie? I hope you will bear up under this severe affliction. Was it my letter to you that decided her to come? I fear it was, and this adds to my bitter sorrow. The Bazaar opened yesterday. The sisters got me home, and then got good Father Murlay to break the sad news to me. I am like one in a dream since. Now my own dear Annie, accept this heavy bitter trial as our dear

departed mother would counsel were she alive. Write and tell me how you are. I shall send news as soon as it comes. All I can say is that I hope for the best.

With fondest love, my dearest Sister, ever believe me, Your poor sister in JMJ, Mary of the Cross.  
What a blow for poor Donald!"

**Mary McK to Donald McK, who was overseas at the time of flora's death, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1886  
St Joseph's Providence, Cumberland Street, Sydney**

My dearest brother,

How can I write? You must ere this have heard from Adelaide of our sad, our terrible loss. Everything was too bewildering at first, then the efforts to recover the dear remains, the funeral, and then came the reaction. Between all, you, for whose sorrow my heart ached, have been seemingly neglected by me. But don't think so, dear Donald. Our darling unselfish mother, true to her character to the last, has gone to receive her well-earned reward. It was sad, very sad, that she should go as she did, but we must hope that her reward is great in proportion. I cannot now attempt to describe the dismay with which I heard the sad news. It was too terrible to be true, but its truth was too soon proved. Fortunately, cousin John was here and he went down. He found the dear remains awaiting him. Hers was the only body picked up by the pilot boat, and the only body found anywhere without being injured by either the rocks or the sharks. The scapular she had so loved was on her neck. How it remained on seems miraculous and is, I believe. John says she looked as if she were asleep.

I had sent lead down with him, so he was able to have a proper coffin prepared and all that remained of our darling mother was brought back to us. The Office for the Dead and the Requiem were beautiful. 40 priests attended and did all the singing. I had to break the news to dear Uncle Donald, only telling of her death and that John had gone to bring her to us to be buried in our own ground. His mind is now so weak that he does not ask questions. I believe the knowledge of the true kind of death she had would kill him. He felt what he did hear terribly, but bore up well – was able to attend Mass and funeral (we took him out during the sermon) and has visited the grave once since. I have been very ill and only up to write this, but next mail will tell more... Now, my dear Donald, bear up. You have a sweet consolation, you can offer the Holy Sacrifice for her. I don't think she needs prayers; still, we wont forget them. Longing to hear from you and with fondest love, believe me, your sister in JMJ, Mary of the Cross.

***Scripture:***

***Whoever does not take up the Cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37)***

### **3. Being Peaceful in the Face of Persecution**

#### **Mary McKillop to Flora McKillop 10 October 1871**

My own dear Mamma,

By this time I suppose the public papers will have given you some explanation of the things that have taken place in Adelaide. A friend informed me that a copy of last week's "Harp" was sent to you. That vindicates me, but oh! at a terrible cost. It was written without my sanction and against my express wish, but I am told that parties of influence in the Church insisted upon an explanation being given. Do not ask me to dwell upon this. It is much too painful. All I can say is that some of the holiest and best priests say I have only done my duty and that our dear old Bishop has made a terrible mistake. Even the very ones who are most about the Bishop remain silent when the Sisters ask them if what has been done is right. Let us pray that God may be glorified in all this. His ways are not ours, and He can and will bring good out of all this, but it is terribly trying at present on account of the scandal.

The poor bishop has been our friend, and would be so still, but there are some about him whom God permits to be bitterly opposed to Fr Woods and in a manner to myself. I do not blame the Bishop for taking the convent. It is in perfect accordance with our Rule that he should have done so when it was evident that the Dominicans required more room. But some of the priests at West Terrace have spread the report that he had to do so on account of its being in debt. There was a debt on the building but in itself that was nothing, only they have mixed it up with the debts on some other churches in the diocese for which Fr Woods was responsible - putting the whole down to the convent....Several more sisters are dispensed from their vows but quietly and patiently waiting for the storm to blow over...Pray for our Bishop. Pray for me. As for my Sisters, they truly astonish me by their cheerfulness and trust in God.

#### **Mary had later written of this experience:**

"I do not know how to describe the feeling but that I was intensely happy and felt nearer to God than I had ever felt before. I can only dimly remember the things that were said to me, but the sensation of the calm, beautiful presence of God I shall never forget...I did not feel alone, but I cannot describe the calm beautiful something that was near."

#### **MMK to her Mother 22 November 1871**

"...I tell you these things, dear Mamma, not that they may go further, but simply to ease your mind as my own loved mother. It is in the sacred cause of duty that I am now suffering, and as I certainly have done nothing to deserve to be so favoured, I must at least try not to abuse God's love by speaking ill of, or making known the faults of his servants. Remember that even good and holy servants of God have been used by the same God as instruments in proving and trying the strength and fidelity of many workers in His Church. We look upon our Bishop and a few of the priests as merely such instruments, and I am sure that some at least of them must feel great pain at what they are doing. ...Yet we hope that things can be settled quietly. Though from expressions in the "Harp" you might imagine that I was badly off for a home. I assure you I am not. This week alone I have received two kind invitations to make their houses my home during this painful trial... There are now a great number of Sisters out of the Habit, living in community together in a house kindly lent to us by a Jew. They are supported by sewing and by the kindness of people.

...My movements are well watched, but as I have frequently to change my style of dress, the most absurd stories as to where I am living have gone about. Indeed the Sisters were on one occasion told by several that Sister Mary was dead and actually buried the previous Sunday. If it were known that I went near the convent, the Bishop would be terribly incensed and very likely order the Sacraments to be refused to all within it. He thinks that I am the cause of the Sisters refusing the

new Rule, and will not believe to the contrary, but he will soon, dear Mamma, and I am sure he will be sorry to the late hasty acts. I am sure he would not willingly be unkind to anyone, much less to the poor Sisters to whom he promised to be a Father. ..

#### **MMK to her mother 19 December 1871**

...It is very hard for me to write to you as I would speak were I now near you. I am so mixed up with concerns that belong to the Church that it is not my place to speak of them, and then it is hard for me to ease your anxious heart or to satisfy the natural wishes of near relations who wonder at all that is happening now in Adelaide.

#### **MMK to her mother 15 February 1872**

...I feel sure that my present trials will in the end be a source of comfort to the mother I love....I wish I could comfort or help you, but if we are patient, God will do all and much more than I could do even were I with you. It is hard to say how soon our common sorrows may end, but this I am sure of - they will end and in a way much to your comfort my own dear Mamma. ..There is at any rate some deep lesson to be taught and, as our good God Himself in His holy Will is the Teacher, we may be sure that it is one that will do all our souls good. All will be for our good in the end - Let us try to leave this mystery in the hands of God until He is pleased to reveal the truth. In the meantime, no matter what the common opinion of those who do not know all the facts may be, let us be careful not to condemn or judge one whom God perhaps looks upon with much love....I would like you to leave all to God and always to remember how He permits His most chosen servants to be persecuted and despised.... And now, with regard to myself, do not be uneasy and do not think that I am anything like a Victim. I am far from that, indeed I get too much sympathy and marks of true kindness from those I most esteem to make the sufferings anything but a mere name. Has not God been good to me, and what have I done to deserve it? It certainly would be a painful cross to me if those I most esteemed and loved should have the pain on thinking that I had merited the public censure of the Church, but since our own loving God has spared them that, how can I be but happy in submitting to all that He has permitted to happen?

#### **MMK to her mother 26 February 1872**

... You have ere heard of the change in our poor Bishop and what he has done for me. The poor Bishop is indeed sorry for all now. I was sent for on Friday but only got half-way to where the Bishop was when a good priest met me - and in the Bishop's name removed the sentence from me. It was he who prepared him for death and who had to see that as much amends could be made as possible. Dearest Mamma, he told me also much that was good and consoling. Mine was but one part of much that the poor Bishop had to undo, of much that caused intense sorrow to good and holy priests....The Bishop has acknowledged the injustice of his conduct to all, for priests as well as Sisters, have been wronged, but God wisely permitted it for a hidden and mysterious end.... The Sisters whom you have so often been told would never be reestablished will indeed, and more firmly than ever...Does God ever allow a soul that hopes in Him to be confounded? Indeed he never does, for in some way or other He grants what the soul in the end sees is best for it....I feel that the events of the last few months have made me much older in many things. They have strengthened me for still weightier cares than I have yet had. At least I trust in God's mercy and love that they have done me this good, which indeed I needed. Some unfaithful ones have also been removed from amongst us. We have all learned good lessons which I trust will not be lost upon us.

#### **Trouble with Church Authorities**

#### **MMK to Sisters in Adelaide 15 November 1883**

My dearest Sisters,

My letter this time will give you great surprise but not greater than I feel myself at the news I have

to give to you. Circumstances call me to Sydney. S. Bernard (Walsh) says that if I go for one week, they will be satisfied, but I have reason to think that I shall be longer than that away. In any case, you will soon know more than I am at liberty to mention now. Now, my loved ones, there is more that I would like to tell you, but for the interests of charity and peace 'tis better not. The Institute is passing through a severe trial, but with humility and charity and truth on the part of its members, all will in the end be well. Have patience, my own loved children. Pray, pray humbly with confidence and fear nothing....More than ever try now to be united, love and help one another, bear with little defects.... God bless you all. Have courage, pray earnestly, and ask our glorious Patron to help your Mother General to do what is right and best for all, Your fond mother in JMJ, Mary of the Cross.

**MMK to Bishop Reynolds, 16 November 1883**

**My dear Lord,**

The instruction in your last letter surprised me but I submit. All is, I hope, for the best. At least I know you so intend it. I have no hope that any suggestion of mine would have any weight under present circumstances, therefore do not make any unless it be an earnest entreaty that you hear what Sister Monica can tell you and which it may help you to know.

I have made all the haste possible and will leave by the Penola tomorrow. The Sydney Sisters had written to me to ask me over on some business about our property there, so I am able truthfully to give that as my reason, or one of the reasons, for going.

May I tell you that many of the Sisters had sad misgivings and really want encouragement. If you appoint a vicar, let it be one in whom they can confide.

I say no more, but grieving deeply for having caused you any sorrow, remain dear Lord,

Your humble child in JMJ

Mary of the Cross.

**Part of a letter of MMK to Dr. Campbell, Rome 17 November 1883**

...Please help us, dear Dr Campbell - and if strange things are said of any of the Sisters, ask that they may not be believed until at least the community have the opportunity of disproving them if they can.

By last accounts from Adelaide, two Sisters have put it in the Bishop's power to say that they answered him rudely. I think they did, and no matter what provocation was given I do not excuse them. At the same time, I do believe that many others would make some excuse for them. The fault of one Sister was that when she heard the Bishop say, "The rotten sheep could go", she hastily answered, "it's the rotten sheep would stay with you, my Lord", and that was as far as I yet know the rudest thing said.

Fancy the Bishop addressing such a term to any of the Sisters, they who had worked so long and faithfully for him. I do not want to put Bishop Reynolds into any trouble that can be avoided, and not one of us does so, but things have gone too far for us in the interests of the Institute to remain silent.

Asking your prayers and blessings,

Mary of the Cross.

## **5. HUMILITY: TO GIVE ALL WE HAVE IN USING OUR GIFTS AND TALENTS**

### **MMK in a Circular to the Sisters 19<sup>th</sup> March 1893 writing about St Joseph as their model:**

“This humility .... Is something wonderfully beautiful in itself... My sisters, his was a quiet humility... a humility of heart, not of words... a silent not a noisy humility.... The spirit of the Sisters of St Joseph is a spirit of poverty... Poverty and humility go hand in hand. If our poverty is not humble poverty it will not last... we must never consider ourselves, but only our work and be ready to do it wherever it is to be done.”

### **MMK’s Circular to the Sisters of 4 September 1906”**

“Sisters of St Joseph should never love their own opinions. Let us be ready to give way. We are never sure that we are right; and even when we are nearly sure let us not contend. When we have given our opinion humbly and quietly, let us sacrifice the rest for love of God.”