

Saint Mary MacKillop  
Lived From 1842–1909 A.D.

Is it possible to be both faithful and critical? This is one of the enduring questions Christianity has grappled with from the beginning, though often unspoken. In a healthy community it is possible to be both faithful and critical. When a community or society is unhealthy and afraid, those who are critical tend to be accused of being unfaithful.

Mother Mary MacKillop was Australia's first canonized saint, and when she was canonized the secular media focused almost entirely on one incident from her life. After MacKillop had founded her school and religious congregation, the community's constitution was approved by the local bishop.

Several years later, the same bishop, under the influence of an overzealous vicar-general, sought to have the constitution changed. Mother MacKillop refused, pointing out that she and her sisters could be made homeless under the proposed changes. She was excommunicated for refusing, though an investigation later exonerated her. In the context of the times, as a woman in the late 1800s, standing up to the bishop and other church leaders as she did was a display of uncommon courage and boldness.

The saints demonstrate that it is possible to be both critical of the Church and faithful to it and to God. Some people correct and criticize out of jealousy and hatred, but the saints did so out of a deep love for God, his Church, and his people.

When criticism is automatically considered to be infidelity, it is a dark, unthinking time. This theme leads most people to think about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to challenging people in authority, but it is equally important for us to consider how we respond when we are corrected. Do we respond humbly and accept correction as an opportunity to become a-better-version-of-ourselves? Or do we hang on pridefully to our old selves?

Champions love coaching. They love to be corrected, because they know it will make them better. This is true in sports, business, relationships, and spirituality. It is true in every area of life. Are you coachable? Some people refuse correction and instruction. This is a sign of massive arrogance and mediocrity.

How coachable are you?