

3 July 2017 (Silver Jubilee of priesthood)

A personal reflection

I will follow you, wherever you go!

This year I have been given the great privilege of celebrating 25 years of ministry as priest. This occasion gives me another opportunity to reflect on what this ministry means to me.

Life is a journey and over the past twenty five years I have travelled with a great number of people; many people have joined me on my personal journey and enriched my life with their love, friendship, support and generosity.

My life as priest is firstly a life of discipleship. As a Christian and a member of the Church I have been called to be a disciple of Jesus. This has not always been an easy road to travel. One of the scripture verses that inspired me in my life is 'I will follow you, wherever you go!' (Mt 8:19) In my life I hope that I have always done my best to keep on following. With the other members of the Church wherever I have been, I am first and foremost a disciple.

As a disciple, within the Church, I have been given a role of a leader. As a leader I am asked to journey with different groups of disciples, listening to their stories and helping them make sense of their story within the story of Jesus. I am very often reminded of the story of Moses in front of the burning bush where he was asked to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. (Ex 3:5) In my role as leader, as I walked on the holy ground of the stories and lives shared with me, I often felt the need to take off my sandals as a sign of deep respect and gratitude towards what was shared. It is a very humbling experience to be allowed into these sacred spaces where God is really and truly present.

In my role as leader I try to listen to God's Word and speak it to the people I am invited to minister to. During my years at university I studied theology and scripture, and even now I still enjoy reading to better understand both subjects; yet my role is not to be either a theologian or a scripture scholar. My role in the Church is to help those around me to better understand God's Word in their life. I hope to do this through my reflections, through the liturgy and, perhaps even more importantly, through my relationships with those around me.

God has been extremely good to me in providing me with a number of different communities to journey with; I still carry each of them in my heart in deep gratitude. In each of the places I have been sent, people have reached out to me in friendship, supporting me with their prayers, for this I am indeed grateful. 'I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.' (Phil 1:3-4) You have all deeply enriched my life by allowing me to walk with you.

Finally I thank God for the first Church that nurtured my faith: my parents, my four sisters and my extended family. They were the first to share their faith with me and share their image of God with me. Ironically they are the ones who shared least in my ministry as priest, especially since I came to Australia. I do remember them daily in my prayers.

I ask you to kindly continue carrying me in your prayers so that I can continue being a faithful disciple of Jesus.

Fr Mario