

# Adelaide priest celebrates 30 years of womenâ??s ordination with Sydney sermons

Reverend Canon Mara Di Francesco, Rector of St Martinâ??s, Campbelltown, recently preached at two services at Christchurch St Lawrence in Sydney. The second service on 18 September was live streamed.

Revâ??d Dr Lesley Mc Lean, President of Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), organised the occasion as part of a conference celebrating 30 years of the ordination of women.

Mara was invited to preach as the first woman of Italian background to be ordained in the Anglican church in Australia.

Her sermon is published here and you can watch the entire service via the video of the Livestream.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, my God, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Thank you Fr Daniel for allowing me to preach today at Christchurch, and the MOW committee for your invitation and the opportunity to be part of the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in Australia.

We heard read in verse 8a of the gospel â??for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their generation than are the children of light.â??

Who are the children of light?

***Reverend Canon Mara Di Francesco***

The children of light are those who seek to follow God and in doing so should be as shrewd, watchful and alert in their conduct as the children of this world are in their use of money and other material resources. As stewards, God has entrusted us to honour God and further Godâ??s kingdom; rather than for any personal gain or welfare as the manager does in this story.

I am often asked the question: how did someone who was raised a catholic and from an Italian family become an Anglican priest?

For me, that day which Iâ??ll briefly tell you about shortly, showed me a small window into Godâ??s calling and vocation. Godâ??s plans for me.

But it all began with Mamma and Papa.

My parents migrated to Australia in the early 50â??s and they met here, having made the choice to leave a hungry, war ravaged Italy for the lucky country. For them it was the lucky country. They worked in all sorts of jobsâ?¦factory work, picking fruit and the like and saved enough money to set up the first Italian restaurant and coffee lounge in Adelaide. They bought Capuccinos to this land! The restaurant /cafÃ©, the Open Gate in Adelaide, was a huge success, and after a few years they sold that business and bought a pub which they successfully ran for close to 18 years. I witnessed at first hand a very strong work ethic from both of my parents. They supported and hired other Italian migrants to work behind the scenes as they had no English. They brought Italian food to Adelaide and the Aussies embraced it. They integrated with the Austalians, and learnt from them and embraced this country and its values.They also employed Australians and supported any of the â??battlersâ?• who wanted to make a living the honest, hard way. It certainly would have put the manager in todayâ??s gospel to shame. But in the end money isnâ??t everything. My parents taught me that and serving God has also taught me about this.

Godâ??s calling first came to me as a child at the age of 6 when I felt strongly God sayâ?¦.â??one day you will be doing what that priest is doingâ??. It happened to be at mass when this calling first came. I dismissed it saying to myself that this was impossible because I was a girl and only boys were priests. Being a child and afraid of being falsely accused of lying and getting the cane, I told no one about what had happened during that communion service and at the elevation and consecration of the bread. Graham Greene wrote in *The power and the glory* â?¦.â?•There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets in the future.â?•

Years later in my 20â??s very early one winter morning while I prayed with a candle and a small light so I could read my devotionsâ?¦God came. This time the room became filled with what I call the light of Christ. It was bright. Warm. Safe and powerful. A voice called again. This time the words were different. â??Move now and fulfil the callâ?•.

But how? It seemed so hard and I was not equipped.

***Reverend Canon Mara Di Francesco was the first woman of Italian background to be ordained in the Anglican church in Australia***.

Then I felt God say to me I will open every door that appears to be shut. I will walk every mile with you. I will not ever leave your side no matter how hard it may seem. I will always be with you because I have chosen you and anointed you. That was the strongest sense of calling and vocation that I had had about ordained ministry.

When I was at theological college different people use to talk about their â??callingâ?•. Exploring a calling is far more complicated and involves more than just an individual call as such. A calling requires for it to be explored in a creative, prayerful way with the people of God, a spiritual director and mentor incorporating a process of self-reflection just to start with.

The process of formation was, for me, huge and transforming. A transfigurationâ?¦ â?¦an epiphanyâ?¦moments of sudden realisations. There would have been many of these for the women who waited and waited till finally they were ordained priests. Some at theological college were called to the mission field, or to chaplaincy to the local jail, the elderly, schools or hospitals, others to the parish ministry, some to the permanent diaconate, others to priesthood, others to very vital roles as the non-ordained people. I knew I was called to parish ministry.

My Italian heritage â?? strong family connection and obligation to the wider community â?? had given me the insight and skills to love and respect and work for others. It is a heritage that is oriented to community before self. It is also an Anglican heritage with worship and community life centred in the parish structure.

***Unfinished business: from the program for the Sydney conference***

I was deaconed in 1995 and priested in 1996. Some people have labelled me a pioneer in terms of the ordination of women. I am more of an interpreter.

I am a risk taker. I have the abilty to see outside the box. Like my parents. I see opportunities for Godâ??s mission and when put into action they have always brought much good fruit. I can see potential in parishes within the context of their location and the scope of ministry they can achieve. My active intuitive visual sense combined with my gift of knowledge serves the work of the Holy Spirit.

But I have another gift also that I am relucant to share here in the pulpit but happy to do so privately.

My journey into priesthood was easy compared to the women who were blocked for years as deacons suffering, battling, waiting for the day when they could fulfil Godâ??s vocation as priests. The history of the ordination of women is filled with sorrow, but also with the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit moving to fulfil Godâ??s plans. These women stood by the call which God had placed in their hearts.

Was Mary the Mother of our Lord any different? The choices she made to bear the Son of God could have had her stoned to death, yet she knew that no matter what God would always be with her. Her vocation was to be the Mother of the Son of God. No matter what, Mary was going to fulfil that call as did those first pioneer women on the frontline, paving the way for all the women who followed later and who have contributed and continue to contribute to Godâ??s church as servants who have answered God.

I am reminded of those wonderful words from the hymn â??I the Lord of Sea and Skyâ?• â?¦ â??here I am Lordâ?•. Simple words uttered by a small boy, Samuel.

Ken Gire writes about vocation â?¦.I quote â??look in this window. It is a window into your soul. It is showing something of who you are, what you love, and what you will be doing with your life if you listen to what your life is saying, where it is calling you.â?• Mary, Jesusâ?? Mother, did just that, so did Mary Magdalene and the many strong women that we read about in both the old and new testaments.

***Revâ??d Canon Mara with Ian Smith, a member of St Martinâ??s parish for 92 years, outside the old rectory at the removal of the foundation stone before the demolition of the building to make way for a mausoleum.***

The very end of  todayâ??s parable speaks about not serving two masters: in other words NOT being slaves to  material things, money, possessions, to name a few, in a world filled with little gods rather than God with a capital G.

Serving God can never be part-time or what we do in our spare time. If we use money as good stewards for the service of God, our neighbours and those in need, we are spreading the gospel, bringing justice and equity to those hungry for community, searching for God. And when we have a relationship with God and are part of a community, there is no place for anyone with power or money to exploit us, whether we are well educated, prosperous, marginalised or oppressed. Then we, like

Jesusâ?? disciples, will be the children of light, finding their treasure in faithfully proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Those first women to be priested would have known all about being faithful in the midst of many storms, and in the end it paid off. Created in the image of God, carriers of the Divine Trinity, their names were engraved in the palms of Godâ??s hands and they were and became vehicles by which they would be icons of God.

Author Monica Furlong sums up the challenges as ordained children of the light.

I quote: â??I am clear about what I want from the clergy. I want them to be people who can by their happiness and contentment, challenge my ideas about status, success, money and so teach me how to dare, as I do not dare and as few of my contemporaries dare, to refuse to work flat out and to refuse to work more strenuously than me. I want them to be people who dare because they are secure enough in the value of what they are doing to have time to read, to sit, to think, and who face the emptiness and possible depression which often attacks people when they do not keep the surface of their minds occupied. I want them to be people who have faced this kind of loneliness and discovered how fruitful it is, as I want them to be people who have faced the problems of prayer. I want them to be people who can sit still without feeling guilty and from whom I can learn some kind of tranquillity in a world which has almost lost the art.â?• End of quote.

***Revâ??d Canon Mara with Edda Di Francesco and Sheila Robinson at the Chat and Chew cafÃ© on the fourth Saturday of each month at St Martinâ??s.***

The children of light follow Jesus and are here to build the kingdom of God watchfully and alert in their conduct as stewards, vehicles and vessels for the purposes that honour God and further the kingdom.

On this 30th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in Australia, I give thanks to all those courageous women who stepped out in faith and, in doing so, made history and enhanced our church and mission.

We are following in the footsteps of Jesus and his disciples, male and female, his mother, Mary, the women who financially supported him and his ministry and Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the apostles.

These wonderful examples of children of the light used their ministries and spiritual gifts from God to benefit others. These are the true treasures and riches, all given for the glory of God and the kingdom here and into eternity.

This is true wealth and no one can ever use money to buy this kind of faithfulness.

Amen.

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