

Fourviere Reflection 23 July 2023

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A Leap of Faith

I would first like to acknowledge that we meet today on the lands of the Wallumedegal people and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge that sovereignty over these lands was never ceded and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



Engaging in this reflection is a bit of a leap of faith for me. When my Mum asked me to give this reflection, I was quite anxious. I'm sure many of you know much more than me about Marist charism and theology.

And thinking on the theme – a leap of faith... as I pondered it, I really had to wonder, had I ever taken a leap of faith? What exactly is a leap of faith? Sure, in my personal life or my career or school, I'd taken risks and chances. But a leap of faith is something different. And honestly, I don't think I have taken the opportunities or chances in my life to take such a leap of faith yet, not deeply or in a transformative way.

That's what I want to explore and reflect on today – what does it really mean to take a leap of faith authentically, and what might we be being called to take a leap of faith into?

And while I am not a theologian or philosopher or anyone with deep knowledge or Marist charism, I think these things are so intrinsic and integral to all of our human experience so I hope there are still elements that will stand out.

So, a leap of faith – what is it for us in 2023?

Initially, to me the idea of a leap of faith seemed quite remote and distant, not something that I have the time to do while keeping up with life and work and family. But perhaps I've deliberately kept it at a distance. The transformation a leap of faith requires is uncomfortable and scary.

From our point of view, it seems simpler for the men of Fourviere or other radical thinkers and activists to take a leap of faith than it is for us. As the passage says, they were burning with a vision, men on fire. It was not a question of commitment. If only I had that same vision or fire or were that kind of person, it would be so much easier!

But it's important that while we recognise their great vision and purpose and commitment, we don't forget that all these people are essentially like us – just

people; people who can be afraid; people who can be uncomfortable; people who can be hesitant and resistant and fallible.

These people were deeply in their community and their world, with the same responsibilities and struggles many of us might have. Taking a leap of faith would have been just as much of a struggle for them as it could be for us. They would not have necessarily known it would work out or even that they were on the right path.

And that's a critical part of a leap of faith – the faith: the trust that this is the thing I am called to do, that I have to do, this is what is right. And critically, this isn't a blind trust or naivety. It comes out of a process of discernment and reflection and even if we don't know if this is the exact right path or if it will work, we know it is better than doing nothing or being passive bystanders. We trust in ourselves to learn and grow along the way, and be guided towards a more just, authentic, compassionate way.

And that's the same thing that Joseph, Mary and even Jesus experienced – questioning, uncertainty, fear, but ultimately, trust and faith and acceptance.

Importantly as well, the men of Fourviere were not only on fire, they were available. They were open to a call to the more, ready to answer, even if they were afraid or even skeptical. In the same way, in the reading, the mustard seed did not just appear. A man took it and sowed it in the field.

Taking a leap of faith requires that we be open and available to take action, be moved and respond to a call. Even if it is scary or even if the change is small. As in the parable again, from a mustard seed can grow the largest tree.

So what might we be being called to do, what are we taking a leap of faith towards?

Looking at the passage, what really resonated with me was the idea that we are being called to be a servant and pilgrim people, to bring a new sensitivity and compassion. That's quite a radical and counter-cultural idea, especially when we look around and see so much polarisation, communal and political fracturing, anger, and inequality.

Compassion and sensitivity and being of service should not be confused with being weak or passive. Indeed, it can actually be the hardest thing to commit to. It means to stand with and importantly, behind marginalised and disempowered people and communities to understand, learn and offer our service, and actively resist injustice. It means trying to connect to hearts and minds, also to understand. It means challenging our ego and learning where we might be complicit in systemic inequality, and committing to changing that. It can even be in the quiet everyday interactions to help people know they are welcome and valued.

And this is a uniquely Marist way of seeing things. It isn't about moving fast and breaking things or flying in and presuming we have all the answers. It isn't about being the hero or the saviour.

It is about letting go and taking on, being hidden and unknown.

And that is a real leap of faith for today's world. Taking on the mindset of a servant or pilgrim, being committed to listening, learning and being of service, means we might be rejected or ridiculed. It may not sit well with our ego. We might get things wrong sometimes and have to be humble about what we do and don't know and where we need to learn and grow.

But this sort of mindset, this leap of faith, is deeply needed in this moment. I think the passage is still correct today in "seeing the skepticism of the time a desire of people to be authentic, to cast off all masks and illusions."

Today, there is a crisis of loneliness across our society, there is a dearth of meaning and purpose, and increasingly we try to fill that gap with ever growing consumption and consumerism. We feel we can't trust our politicians or institutions, and it is hard to trust that we are heading in the right direction – that the future will be better.

Underlying all of this despair though, there is I think a deep yearning for connection and meaning and community built on compassion and justice. And that might be what we are being called to take a leap of faith on. To trust that we can build a fairer, more equitable, more just world. And to act on that trust, to make it a reality and work in our communities to achieve it, and resist the pervading cynicism or nihilism.

And eventually, in the same way the mustard seed grew into a tree that birds could shelter in, the way we live our lives, the openness and kindness we show, can be a doorway for someone to also consider making their own leap of faith.

That's what the men of Fourviere did, and it's why we're here today. Their leap of faith was active and transformative for their lives and for their communities. They didn't shut themselves off, they went out and tried to build something new within the world they were in. We need to be deeply in the here and now in our community to be able to take a similar leap of faith.

As I reflected on this, I thought, "**What might be the injustice in our community, the call that we are being asked to hear and respond to, to take a leap of faith on?**"

Well, as I said, part of my leap of faith was coming here today and opening myself to this reflection. That might resonate with some of you as well. We have come together in this room from so many different backgrounds and experiences but with a shared desire to find and build community, and to learn and live in the image of Mary – as a servant and pilgrim people. This might be our first step into a leap of faith.

But where do we go from here? We will all leave here today and go back to our lives, our pressures and responsibilities. As individuals, we all hear so many different calls and needs. There is so much work to do, so much that needs to change. It is important that we don't become shut off to these calls, that we don't become skeptical or disillusioned. From here, we need to take away the spirit of hope and transformation the men of Fourviere had, even in spite of the obstacles they faced.

So I would like to open a doorway for us to consider, speak to a call within our community today. I think the greatest call we are asked to respond to is the call for sovereignty and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We are all gathered here today on stolen, unceded land, the land of the Wallumedegal people. And we will go home to land that always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

This country is built on legacies of racism, colonisation, genocide and dispossession. We are complicit in the ongoing intergenerational trauma that perpetuates these violent legacies. It is our duty to face, recognise and dismantle this legacy, particularly as we come towards the referendum on the Voice.

We need to recognise the facts. 23,000 First Nations children are currently living in out of home care and there are record rates of child removal. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still being locked up and dying in custody at hugely disproportionate rates. Sacred sites, including the Juukan Gorge, are being destroyed in pursuit of profit. This is happening now.

There is strength, power and fearlessness within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are calling for truth-telling, for treaty, for an end to dispossession and violence, for land rights.

If we are to be a servant and pilgrim people, if we are truly authentic in listening to and being open to change, we need to listen. And we need to respond.

It may be challenging. It may require accepting harsh truths. We will need to listen and accept that what we have accepted as true may be steeped in historical silences and falsehoods. It requires giving up the privilege and wealth we have inherited. This is the leap of faith we are called to make, to be open to the call to transform our communities.

And it is important I say here, that I can talk about taking a leap of faith from a position of privilege. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, struggle and resistance to colonisation has never been a choice. And I acknowledge and humbly pay my respects to those histories.

So what do we do now? Well, critically, I am not the one to say. What I can say is that we must listen to the community, ask what we can do, and act. We must step

back to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the space and voice to determine their own lives and futures. We must commit to no longer being complicit in this colonial violence and we work for treaty, truth and sovereignty.

We can take a leap of faith to transform as individuals and as a community, knowing it may be a struggle, to respond to this injustice in our community and build a society on compassion, truth and justice.

To embody the spirit of a leap of faith that the men of Fourviere took, and that Jesus took, we need to first listen – what are we being called to do? And step back – how can we be compassionate servants in our community? Even in the smallest acts, even if we are afraid, this is how we make a difference - grow from seed to tree. And this is how we keep the spirit and fire of Fourviere alive.