
Bible stories to reflect on

“A sign of authentic servant leadership is the sensation of vertigo or disproportion between the mission that has been taken on and the awareness of one’s own fragility. Resolving this contrast is not easy, but it is key”

(Marist Voices cap. 16 - Br. Josep María Soteras)

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I have had various responsibilities during the 18 years that I have been linked with the Marists. The school is in the south of Colombia, on the border with Ecuador. We are part of the Marist Province of Norandina. An element relevant to our story is the fact that our school has been without the physical presence of the Marist Brothers for more than 13 years. They carry out the whole process of accompaniment, formation and input from other cities in Colombia (and from the Provincial House in Bogotá), but Marist Spirituality has not been extinguished in the school, much less diminished. The Brothers knew how to share their charism with the laity in order to continue with the aims we inherited from Father Champagnat.

From the Bible, we are aware of stories between pairs of “brothers” where the strengths, the solidity, the strong points, the dynamics or the examples to follow are interwoven and, in the same way, the dangers, the temptations and some counter-values that we as leaders face in our daily life (cfr. Soteras, JM in “Biblical Pointers on Fraternity for Leadership Oriented towards Service”). This challenges us in a profound way. In our lives, we find it difficult to learn from the examples of others. We often fall into the easy trap of saying “it won’t happen to me” or “it happens elsewhere”, but as servant-leaders we cannot give space to our vanities or “small egos”. It is best to humbly value all experiences from which we can learn.

Following the methodology of biblical examples, and feeling challenged by the life-stories that have helped me strengthen my leadership, I would like to share two very important stories for my life:

The Apostles: Diversity, Change, Acceptance

Within the capability of the Lord Jesus to choose his Apostles, lay the power to select those

who, for us, would be the most suitable (wise, well-educated, learned, erudite) but he selected a very varied series of people and trusted them to bring the good news to all humanity. However, within the group of apostles, things did not go as predicted. For example, the one who made notable mistakes, was foolish, and even denied the Lord was Peter. And he was the one whom the Lord gave the most trust, even entrusting him to lead his Church. John was described by some as burly and truculent and he was the most beloved disciple, to whom Jesus revealed remarkable elements of the Christian life and to whom he left the responsibility for his own Mother. In contrast, Judas Iscariot, who seemed honest and was the treasurer of the group, was the one who ended up betraying the Lord.

These stories take us leaders towards a major idea: never underestimate anyone: you don't know how relevant they will become and how they will contribute to your leadership. Treat all people well. You must give them the importance they deserve and not despise them for their manners, for how educated they are, for their physical appearance, for their ideas that are not like yours or simply because you don't like them. We never know if we will need them, or if their difference is what we need to achieve our leadership goals. We must recognise their potential within their differences, exploit them, motivate them, and trust them. On the other hand, we must learn to doubt those people who have only flattery and praise for us. This usually shows that they only want to take advantage or comfort at the expense of the leader. The most successful person is not always the one who is the best-educated, but the one who applies however much he or she knows in life; the intelligent person is the one who knows how to make good decisions, take advantage of opportunities, treat people well. Not only the one who knows what to do, but the one who simply does it. There we have Simon Peter, ignorant and clumsy, but his obedience and love for the Lord together with his boldness led him to walk on water and be named the first pope in history. Have you applied these principles of diversity, change and acceptance to the people around you in your servant-leadership?

Joseph: betrayal, temptation, healing

The story of Joseph is an inspiring one. He was the object of envy and betrayal. Several times he had to start over, but he did not despair and trusted in the ability the Lord had given him. Joseph, the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons, was envied and despised by his brothers because he was the youngest and was spoiled by his father. They despised him and tried to get rid of him because they considered him only a poor dreamer. One should not underestimate a dreamer because one





does not know what he will go through to make his dreams come true. This was the case with him. Joseph had dreamed that he would become great, and his brothers would bow down to him and, just as they were trying to eliminate him, reality began to unfold, sometimes painful and difficult, sometimes, transformative, and it led to his becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt. In that position, his brothers had to beg from him so that they would not starve. Joseph, the dreamer, by dint of following intuitions coming from God and having a loyal and patient heart, rose from slave to ruler. But this was NOT his greatest achievement. His greatest asset was his ability to forgive, to overcome the temptation to abuse his power and to realign his suffering in the light of faith.

As a leader, it is always important not to fall into the temptation of power. It is to be like Joseph, who might have been vengeful, but chose to be compassionate and merciful. That is why it is necessary to treat all people well. We should not make enemies of anyone. In no person, no matter how insignificant it may seem, should we leave an open wound for an offence, for humiliation, betrayal, or for having turned our back on them when they needed us. We do not know when, in this life, roles can be changed.

The main values Joseph brings to us in his life are steadfastness, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Do you take these values into your 'success' as a servant and prophetic leader?



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If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to fms.cimm@fms.it

