

I don't know how many of you have been to Blackpool in England, and Blackpool Tower in particular. At the top of the Tower, on the third floor, there is an area of that floor which is different from the rest, being several square feet of clear, transparent, highly polished glass, two inches thick, through which, to all intents and purposes, all you can see the Promenade, 380 feet below. The thrill is that you are invited to walk across the glass floor, not even knowing if it will hold your weight. This is not easy; some people can do it; some can't; and many go hand in hand with another person. This experience in the Tower is called the Walk of Faith.

In today's Gospel, we hear of Mary, a young, teenage Jewish girl, who is asked by Gabriel to be the mother of God. We hear that Mary said she was a virgin, so how could she conceive a child. But what else would have crossed Mary's mind? Mary was a devout Jew, and would probably have known her scriptures well, so perhaps she thought of the reading from Isaiah, written about 700 years earlier, our first reading today, about the maiden giving birth to the child who would be called Immanuel. She probably thought of her engagement to Joseph and how that could be broken if Joseph found out she was expecting a baby; she probably also wondered how her parents would react, her society too, where for a betrothed woman to be expecting another man's baby could mean death by stoning. But Luke tells us that, with little hesitation, she accepted God's plan for her. *I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.* Mary accepts the responsibility placed on her, relying totally on her belief and faith in God. She made the Walk of Faith.

During our lives, there can be many times where our faith is tested, in situations where we find it difficult to see and understand the love and plan of God in our lives. This can be bereavement of close family or friends, serious illness, financial difficulties, family crises, or the like. At these times it can be very difficult to trust completely in God and to place ourselves in his hands. Are we able to make the Walk of Faith which entrusts ourselves to God? Some people can manage it; other can't and lose faith; but many others are like some of the people in Blackpool Tower who need to hold another's hand to see them through.

During Advent, Mary is held up to us as a model of faith and trust in God. How appropriate it is then that we can turn to Mary, the mother of God and our mother also, in times of crisis; that we can ask her to be our friend, our companion, and to take our hand as we make our Walk of Faith.