

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

First Week of Lent 2021



Sunday, February 21: *God said to Noah: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark...I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." (Gn 9:8-15)*

*"We have neglected and mistreated our ties with our Creator, with creation, and with our fellow creatures. But the good news is that an Ark awaits us to carry us to a new tomorrow. Covid-19 is our Noah moment, as long as we can find our way to the Ark of the ties that unite us: of love, and of a common belonging. The Noah story in Genesis is not just about how God offered a path out of destruction, but about all that followed. The regeneration of human society meant a return to respecting limits, curbing the reckless pursuit of wealth and power, looking out for the poor and those living on the edges. The introduction of the Sabbath and the Jubilee—moments of recovery and reparation, forgiving debts and restoring relationships—were key to that regeneration, giving time for the earth to bounce back, for the poor to find fresh hope, for people to find their souls again. **That is the grace available to us now, the light in the midst of our tribulation. Let us not throw it away.**" (Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, emphasis mine.)*

Today's Provision: "Let us not throw it away." If you are someone eager for things to "get back to normal," to be just like it was before the pandemic, read this book by Pope Francis. I will admit it is a daunting task he presents; he acknowledges that as well. I'm sure some will consider it "pie in the sky," but I am reminded that Jesus was also dismissed. While we may not be able to change the course of the world, we can work to make positive changes in our lives and of those in our communities. It is a clarion call to each of us. Will you answer the call?

Monday, February 22: *"You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes..." (Ps 23)*

What kind of imagery might we use today to describe what God is doing for the psalmist? We remember that in Old Testament times, wealth and riches were a sign of God's favor, so here, God is portrayed like a servant that sets and provides a sumptuous meal as the psalmist's foes look on. There are preachers today that espouse this same thing: amassing "shameful profit" (1 Pt 5:2) as a sign of God's favor. I like to think, though, that it is by us holding fast to our faith in God in the face of sorrow and difficulty that through us, God demonstrates to the naysayers his love and mercy. The table is spread for us by our Servant Shepherd, the one who sacrifices all for us.

Today's Provision: "The Lord is my shepherd." "Yes, indeed, Lord, I believe this...why then is there still so much I want?!" Make note today of your "wants." Try to do it without judgment. We have lots of wants and most of them are not bad: "I want to take better care of myself." "I want to pray more." "I want to be more of a help in my community" - all good things to want. But let's make sure to follow our Servant Shepherd on the path to what we really need, to help us discern God's will so that our wants align with our call.

Tuesday, February 23: *"Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth...so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it. (Is 55:10-11)*

I've read various interpretations of what is meant by "my word." Christians usually define the "Word" as Jesus. Other scholars say "my word" refers to the commandments or gospel message. Skeptics might say, "Well, it must not be Jesus. He's supposed to be the Prince of Peace, but he didn't achieve the end for which God sent him." Perhaps they overlook Jesus' words in Mt 10:34: *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword."* Jesus was made incarnate to shake us up as no prophet in the past was able to do; to stir us from our lethargy. And as bearers of his word, we're to continue to water the earth with messages of hope and peace until he comes again.

Today's Provision: Persevere: *"In the past, the prophets...prophesied war, disaster, and pestilence against many lands and mighty kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace is recognized as the prophet whom the LORD has truly sent only when his word comes to pass." (Jer.22:8-9)* It can be hard to keep the faith, especially when we look at all the violence around us. It may seem the gospel message has been lost amid the chaos. When we're feeling skeptical or beaten down, pray for strength to continue to be a beacon of peace for the world.

Wednesday, February 24: "...every man shall turn back from his evil way and from the outrage to which they hold fast." (Jon 3:1-10) (Hebrew from the Masoretic text)

"Holding fast to outrage." Wow! Can't think of anyone these days who wants to do that! And I can't think of anyone who, like Jonah, is eager to see God punish the evil-doers. There's a lot to reflect and pray about here (and in the reflections for the rest of the week that follow a similar thread). Righteous anger is an important aspect in the battle for justice, and God knows, justice always seems to elude us. But evil and violence have no place in that battle. How do we hold on to the righteous outrage necessary to end injustice and still work for peace?

Today's Provision—Listen to "the other:" I'm not good at this. I exist in my own echo chamber and spend my time with people who hold similar viewpoints. I say viewpoints, not values, for a reason. I think if I were to have an honest peaceful dialogue with a person I consider a "them," I might find some common values and goals. It might be the way we strive to achieve those ends that are different. I need to listen. How about you? Are you listening?

Thursday, February 25: "...turn our mourning into gladness and our sorrows into wholeness." (Est C:12,14-16,23-25)

What a beautiful prayer for us at this time in history! There is so much mourning and sorrow. The idea of praying for wholeness moves me deeply. We are fragmented, isolated from each other by disease and political conflict. The image of wholeness reminds me of our basic human need for connection and unity. *"Lord God, we are alone and have no one but you. We need your help. Bring us again to wholeness."*

Today's Provision: Strive for wholeness. Our true wholeness is based in our unity with God. We cannot rely on the external environment, on our institutions, or even on each other; it is God that makes us whole. "We cannot give to others what we do not have ourselves," so strive for that wholeness found in intimacy with God. Use your prayer time this Lent to ask God to allow you the grace to come closer, to find your wholeness, so you can then share it with others, leading them in their quest to find their own wholeness in God.

Friday, February 26: *"If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, who can stand?"* (Ps 130)

Who can stand? Are you ready for good news? We can — each one of us -- any one of us who is willing to acknowledge our own iniquities before the Lord, ask for forgiveness, and resolve to *try and* do better. God knows we will likely fail again, but *"with the Lord is kindness and plenteous redemption."* Although we refrain from "alleluias" in Lent, and Easter is still weeks away, we can still proclaim *"O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!"*

Today's Provision: Seek forgiveness. As we strive to change our hearts this Lent, seeking forgiveness is more challenging. Sins of commission, even sins of omission can be easier to identify. It's what's behind those sins we seek to uncover and acknowledge. What's behind my unwillingness to get involved, to learn more about, and take a stand on racism, abortion, climate change, capital punishment? What about those feelings of vengeance I carry in my heart for those who espouse viewpoints different from mine? What's behind the prejudice I know is in my heart, even though I'd never act on it. (I call this the difference between "ist" and "ism" -- I may not act like a racist or an ageist or a sexist, but is there racism, ageism, sexism in my heart?) This requires a deeper examination of conscience than we might be used to, but one that is necessary for true metanoia to occur. If you are interested in delving into the issue of racism, go to <https://jesuitseastois.org/news-feed/038em8gp7ere9ufseezmtmj7whpdp> for two exams on racial awareness and racism.

Saturday, February 27: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust."* (Mt 5:43-48)

God gives, God loves without limitations. God, the ultimate Judge, does not judge us as we stumble through our days, but is always calling to us, always on the lookout to see if we are returning, bedraggled but penitent. God is impartial but not distant. The distance is up to us.

Today's Provision: To love like God, get closer to God. Read this poem by St. Teresa of Avila. How does it feel to imagine that God desires you? How might God's desire for closeness make it easier for us to be his children?

"He desired me so I came close... A thousand souls hear his call every second, but most everyone then looks into their life's mirror and says, 'I am not worthy to leave this sadness.'"

When I first heard His courting song, I too looked at all I had done in my life and said, 'How can I gaze into His omnipresent eyes?' I spoke those words with all my heart, but then He sang again, a song even sweeter, and when I tried to shame myself once more from His presence, God showed me His compassion and spoke a divine truth:

"I made you, dear, and all I make is perfect. Please come close, for I desire you." (from *Love Poems from God.*)