

Provisions for the Journey

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Fifth Week of Easter 2022



Sunday, May 15: *The One who sits on the throne says, "Behold, I make all things new."* (Rev 21:1-5a)

God makes all things new. Every day. We praise and celebrate how God dwells with us and transforms the world! Yet as humans, we often resist the new. We want to stay with what we know. We typically don't like change. In the readings from Acts this week, we see how quickly the early disciples have to adapt and figure out what living in the Spirit of Jesus means as they go forward to share the Good News to the Gentiles. We see some of the Jewish converts to "The Way" resist and even disrupt the outreach to non-Jews by telling them they too have to follow Jewish law. Avoiding what is new can often be a means of control. The unwillingness to welcome others who are different from us can be a defense mechanism against change that might cause us to resist the Spirit. Like Peter from one of last week's reading, we may even put ourselves in a position to hinder God.

Today's Provision: Ask yourself—where do I resist change? I'm not implying all change is good. In fact, as Pope Francis says, we should go back the early teachings of the Apostles, the kerygma: "*The kerygma — the proclamation of the Good News — is not a 'traditional' custom or a certain 'social practice.'* *The kerygma is the joyful announcement that Jesus Christ is a living Person to be encountered, who through his Resurrection has defeated sin and death.*" Over the past two millennia, there have been so many changes that have, in effect, piled layers upon these initial teachings, so much so that people are not even aware of them! Take a good look today at things you dismiss or resist. Look at both secular change as well as change in the realm of faith. Look at the change in light of Jesus' words and teachings. What would Jesus say to you about the change you resist?

Monday, May 16: *A crippled man, lame from birth, who had never walked...listened to Paul speaking, who looked intently at him, saw that he had the faith to be healed...* (Acts 14:5-18)

These words hit me hard. How does one see in another who is suffering the faith and hope that they can indeed be healed? When working with the poor or with refugees, you often see that hope in the eyes of young children and it can bring you great joy. But if you work long enough with those who continue to suffer oppression, you see those bright-eyed hopeful children becoming teenagers and young adults, the light in their eyes dimmed by living constantly in survival mode. Someone once said to me that kids living in poverty and amid violence and oppression must have PTSD—post-traumatic stress disorder. I responded it's not just "post," but "present" and "pre" as well. Paul saw in the crippled man's eyes the light of hope. What do we do when we want to offer healing to someone who has seemingly lost hope?

Today's Provision: Be hope for others. I admit this is not easy. We can look to James' letter for one example: "*What good is it if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you tells him, "Go in peace; stay warm and well fed," but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that?"* (Jas 2:14-15) Charity like this can provide hope for the day, the promise of survival for at least some period of time and that is good, but it usually does not lead to healing. We can easily be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the suffering we see so it is essential that *we* maintain hope, and work and advocate, in solidarity with those who suffer, to change systems that cause people to become hopeless. Think about volunteering with an organization that looks to change lives, not just for a day, but for a lifetime. Help a refugee family get settled so that they can begin new, productive lives. Teach new skills to help lift someone out of poverty, or give a person who has skills a chance to use them. How will you be hope for another person today?

Tuesday, May 17: *"Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom."*(Ps 145)

There's a verse in Acts today that says Paul and Barnabas tell the new disciples, "*It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.*" Given that Paul has recently been stoned and left for dead, I imagine his appearance speaks louder than his words! It reminds me of a line attributed to Teresa of Avila: "*God, if this is the way you treat your friends, it's no wonder you have so few of them!*" The Lord's friends make known to the world the glorious splendor of the Kingdom of God despite the risks. Our willingness to share our gifts and hold onto our faith in joy, even in the face of teasing, skepticism, and suffering speaks volumes.

Today's Provision: Are you God's friend? In Hebrew, the phrase is "your faithful ones." In this case, I like the NAB translation better. "Being faithful" doesn't have the same intimate nuance as the word "friend." This psalm takes it even further to the kind of person who's proud to be God's friend, making God's glory known. Be God's friend today.

Wednesday, May 18: *"You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you."* (Jn 15:1-8)

John's Gospel, particularly in the Last Supper discourses, is all about "the word." Of course, his whole gospel starts with the concept of "the Word" – Jesus -- being God. It's interesting that John's Gospel, unlike the synoptic gospels, does not talk about the institution of the Eucharist. He speaks instead of the washing of the feet, of service. In this passage, he talks about the disciples "being pruned" by the word Jesus has spoken. What does that image say to you?

Today's Provision: Allow the word to prune you. I think this has to do with clearing out all the dead wood and weeds that have grown up around my heart and soul. We talked about this on Sunday. Sometimes, it is additions to Christ's teachings that have caused the overgrowth, but mostly it is the things of this world that tend to smother and hinder new and fruitful growth. Think about allowing the words of Jesus to speak to you in a new way. Focus on them and what they say to you, not just what you've heard preached. What do they mean in your life today? Then allow Jesus' Spirit to pick up the clippers and clear out some clutter!

Thursday, May 19: *"Remain in my love."* (Jn 15: 9-11)

God's love is unshakeable, ever-present. We decide whether to remain in that love. God's love is also portable! It follows us up steep mountains and down dark chasms; through long desert treks and on stormy seas. It is with us in our joy and in our grief.

Today's Provision: Make a conscious decision to remain in God's love. How's this for an easy prayer? This morning and every morning, say aloud: "Today, I will remain in God's love." At midday, say it again. If you are faced with a challenging situation or person, say it again to yourself (or if the challenging person is your child, say it aloud and then live up to it—it's a great lesson for them!).

Friday, May 20: *"I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."* (Jn 15:12-17)

Here's that word "friend" again we talked about on Tuesday. Jesus tells the disciples he has chosen them to be his friends and has shared with them everything he has learned from his Father. But real friendship is a two-way street. Jesus saw an important aspect of friendship to be total and honest sharing of one's self, so he expected the same from his disciples. He expects that from us. It may seem easier to stay in the role of a "*doulos*" — a slave — who does what they are told and knows nothing of the master's plans and activities. Being a slave means not having to risk sharing my thoughts, emotions, and doubts. I don't have to get to know my master on a personal level. I don't have to take on the responsibility that true friendship requires.

Today's Provision: Jesus has chosen you as a friend. Will you choose Jesus to be your friend as well?

Spend some time thinking about what being a friend to Jesus looks like in your life. Once, when I was on retreat and having some difficulty in my relationship with Jesus, I wrote an "ISO" ad — "in search of" -- What did I desire from a friendship with Jesus? After some time journaling and sitting in prayer, I let Jesus do the same with me. I will share that this is one of the prayer times when I did "hear" the Lord speaking directly to me (see tomorrow's reflection – retreats are very good!) Maybe you want to try this prayer exercise as well. Take time and listen. Don't expect an answer right away but let it emerge and bloom just like all good and lasting friendships do!

Saturday, May 21: *They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia.... they tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them...During the night Paul had a vision... "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* (Acts 16:1-10)

"Oh, that the Holy Spirit would be so directive with me! Oh, that I might be aware enough to understand the Spirit's promptings!" When we read about burning bushes and angels appearing and the Holy Spirit seemingly blocking the path one way and leading in another, we lament: "Why doesn't God talk to me directly like that today? It wouldn't have anything to do with that cell phone I keep in my hand, or that computer on which I spend most of my days, or the abyss of YouTube or the TV that can drown out even my closest loved ones!" "It wouldn't have to do with the fact that I am hard pressed each day to find time for silence to listen to the Spirit? And of course it can't have anything to do with my ego and the earthly wants and expectations!"

"God still speaks to those who take the time to listen." (E.C. McKenzie)

Today's Provision: Discern. As a spiritual director, I hear so many people wanting to know where God is calling them. I struggle with that too unless I can put aside my ego and my need for an immediate answer to really allow time in prayer and silence. Discernment is always about good things, things that will bring you closer to God. St. Ignatius of Loyola has great advice on the process of discernment and there are lots of books written by modern authors to help us. Consider, *God's Voice Within*, by Mark Thibodeaux, SJ. It is an accessible read and leads you through some specific exercises. But remember, be patient. This is a prayer of both your heart and your head....and your soul's ears. Listen.