

Provisions for the Journey

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Easter Week 2023



During Lent, we focused on fasting. For this Easter season, as the Spirit leads, we will focus on gratefulness.

Sunday, April 9: *"Clear out the old yeast"* (1 Cor 5:6-8).

With all the readings for the Vigil and Easter Sunday, you'd think something a bit fuller, richer, more joyous might emerge. But these few words speak volumes in my life, and, I'd venture, in the lives of others too. In Exodus 12:15, we learn the Israelites (and observant Jews today), in preparation for the Passover, *"shall have your houses clear of all leaven."* Get rid of what is stale, shake off the old stuff, get ready to move ahead to new experiences, new challenges, new blessings. In the words of theologian and author, Molly Fumia, this is the time of year when, *"we come back to life, not only when we start to shake off the shroud of sorrow that has bound us, but when we begin to believe in all that is still endlessly possible. We give thanks for all those times we have arisen from the depths or simply taken a tiny step toward something new."* Happy and Blessed Easter to you all!

Today's Provision: Clear out what no longer bears fruit. I love the idea of "spring cleaning." It can be cathartic to clean out the flower beds, to be rid of the paperwork we've saved for last year's taxes, to donate the clothes and material things we no longer use or need. Do we do the same with our spirits, with the activities and anxieties that weigh us down or cause fear in our lives? Don't just look around the house to see what needs to go; look around your spirit and your life. Are there things you do out of habit that no longer bear fruit or are even unnecessary? (Guilty as charged!) Are there charitable activities, that while good and noble, are not giving you life? Instead of just pitching these, look at them and ascertain *why* they are not giving you life. Perhaps your expectations of yourself or the impact you can have are not in line with reality. As you go about clearing out the old yeast in your life, take time to give thanks for the blessings and lessons these things have given you. Then let them go.

Monday, April 10: *"O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot"* (Ps 16).

What does "my allotted portion and my cup" mean? In the Old Testament, "allotted portion" was used to describe the plot of land Israelite families were given to provide for their sustenance; it was also used to describe something that was "enough." "Cup" sometimes meant pain or punishment, as it does in the New Testament, but it can also refer to God as quenching our thirst. This psalm is entitled, *God, The Supreme Good*, so it's nice to think of God providing all we need as well as spiritual living water.

"Portion" and "cup" can represent the blessings and trials we encounter in life. God holds us fast, empowering us to do good with our gifts God has given us and embracing us in our pain. Is God "enough" for you?

Today's Provision: Give thanks for what you have. Working with the poor never fails to humble me. I am always knocked off my high horse by the gratitude I witness when accompanying people who have so much less (in terms of material things) than I do. I assure you, they are not lacking in spiritual riches. If you have God in your life, you have enough. Give thanks and praise for this amazing gift!

Tuesday, April 11: *When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. ... Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him, "Rabbouni"* (Jn 20:11-18).

There's a nuance in this passage. Mary turns away from the tomb when she is surprised by the person she thinks is the gardener. Then she turns away from the tomb again when Jesus calls her name. So, we surmise that, as she is explaining to the "gardener" her reason for being there, she has turned back towards the tomb, head bent, looking away from the person. Why? She could be frightened; that makes sense: it is dark, it is dangerous, and she is in an unexplainable situation. Women of her time do not address strange men. She might be embarrassed in her grief. It could be all those things together. What would make you turn away?

Today's Provision: Be willing to look at Jesus. When we find ourselves in fear, compromising situations, or grief we too might be tempted to turn away from that which can console us. In tomorrow's gospel, the travelers to Emmaus are also "prevented from recognizing" Jesus. Grief, sorrow, sin, embarrassment...all these can keep us from seeing Jesus in our midst. If you are struggling, turn to Jesus, your teacher. Tell him you want to see.

Wednesday, April 12: *"Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name; make known to the nations his deeds"* (Ps 105).

In the US, we've recently finished "March Madness," the big NCAA basketball tournament for college men and women. I love watching the games as these young people play their hearts out for their schools. Most of them will not go on to the pros, so they really play for the passion, the joy, and the honor. I am also so impressed with how many of them give credit to God for the blessings they have. Now of course, we can be skeptical—not all of them live pious and holy lives (anymore than I did at their age!), but still, it is wonderful to hear they recognize from whence their blessings and gifts come, and that they are willing to share that knowledge with the world!

Today's Provision: Acknowledge your gratitude to God. *"Gratitude ...claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. ...I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize gratitude can be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy"* (Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, p. 85). Make a point today to be aware of all your blessings, especially those wrapped in packages that seem to hide the gift (e.g., sitting in traffic in *your* car to get to *your* job; waiting for *your* doctor who is running late, etc.) Challenge yourself to develop gratefulness as a state of being, not just for specific things. Give thanks to the Lord and be willing to share the Source of your gifts with others.

Thursday, April 13: *"Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?"* (Lk 24:35-48).

"Well, Lord, for starters: the last time most of us saw you, you were being dragged away to be crucified, and for a few of us, we actually saw the deed done. You were dead. Buried. Yes, of course, we are terrified. The whole Lazarus thing was terrifying enough. We knew you could work miracles for others. We just didn't know you could work them for yourself too." "For myself?" Jesus asks. "No, nothing I have done or will ever do is for myself. My birth, my whole life, my death, and resurrection—they are all for you and for the glory of my Father."

Today's Provision: Don't be troubled. I find myself troubled every so often. I have my doubts as I imagine many others have at times, given the state of the weary world. I take solace in Thoreau's quote: *"Faith keeps many doubts in her pay. If I could not doubt, I should not believe."* For what is faith if not based on belief in what we cannot see or know cognitively. Whenever doubt creeps in, don't be troubled. Pray Jesus will do for you what he does for the disciples: ask him to open your mind to understand Scripture so that you can know God, fully alive and present.

Friday, April 14: *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever"* (Ps 118).

Today's Provision: Give thanks for God's mercy. *"God's mercy endures forever."* Do you believe that? Be honest now. We are talking mercy here, not forgiveness. Having a forgiving personality is a virtue, but forgiveness is often transactional. Someone comes to us, or we go to another, to say "I'm sorry" for some slight or injustice. Perhaps there is contrition or amends made, but not always. Forgiveness is granted, we put the bitterness behind us, if not the memory of the injustice. Mercy is something different. It is a constant state of being. It exists regardless of amends, contrition, or even acknowledgement. The mercy of God is beyond our human understanding. If you have trouble with a God whose mercy endures forever, and if you still see a God who keeps a record of your sins, at least change the writing instrument in God's hand from a pen to a pencil! And one with a good eraser at that!

Saturday, April 15: *"Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:13-21).

"All human beings, endowed with reason and free will and, therefore, bearing a personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by moral obligation to seek the truth and to adhere to the truth once they come to know it...The practice of religion consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a human being directly sets a course towards God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind." (from *A Message of John Paul II on the Value and Content of Freedom of Conscience and of Religion*, 11/14/1980.) What Peter and John do today amounts to civil disobedience, following Jesus' path by calling into question the powers that be who care more about the status quo and the law than about love.

Today's Provision: Follow your conscience. (A brief aside: This time last year, I repeated something I wrote in 2018 about US school shootings. I am rendered almost speechless to realize that I could repeat it here yet again. "OMG" said as true prayer. Go to <https://momsdemandaction.org/> to see what you can do.)

In light of what I wrote yesterday, you may wonder if I think we will all be judged. Yes, I believe we will. Our eyes will be opened to see times we turned away from God's loving embrace, the source of all peace. We will remember those times with pain and sorrow, recalling the turmoil we felt in our sinfulness. And I believe God's enduring mercy will then embrace us, and like the father of the lost son, welcome us home into Divine Love. But I also believe, together with God, each of us will look at how well we lived our God-given truth, how well we followed our own consciences. Were we courageous enough to risk taking a stand against injustice, even in the face of governmental or religious institutions, or did we just check the boxes? Did we ever buck the status quo for a greater cause? What did *we* do with what we have seen and heard and felt and known of God's love?