

Provisions for the Journey

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



Sunday, April 30: *"I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ...I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly"* (Jn 10:1-10).

It's a comforting image: the sheep going in and out of the gate and finding pasture wherever they are. It says the sheep (AKA we) will find nourishment and safe haven regardless of the situation in which we find ourselves. We are not afraid to go out, even into unknown territory, because the shepherd is always with us and calls each of us by name.

Today's Provision: "I have called you by name and you are mine." (Is 43:1) Jesus, the Good Shepherd, ranks high of the list of favorite descriptions for Christ: the gentle shepherd who finds and carries the lost sheep on his shoulders, no matter how many times it strays. The familiar voice that calls us by name back into the fold. Something to consider: how well do you recognize Jesus' voice? Jesus' voice speaks of abundant life filled with love and compassion. That doesn't mean we have great material riches or even that our lives are idyllic; being part of Jesus' flock isn't easy. It doesn't mean we will not feel the sting of sin when we go astray. But Jesus is all about consolation, leading us to find peace even in the midst of difficulty. Listen for Jesus' voice today calling your name. (A little hint: find some silent time away from phones and computers and media. To hear the tiny whispering sound, you need to be quiet!)

Monday, May 1: *"What God has made clean, you are not to call profane"* (Acts 11: 1-18).

It's hard to overstate how dramatic the events recounted in the Acts of the Apostles are for the Jewish followers of Jesus. Centuries-old dietary laws and rules about fraternizing with Gentiles are falling by the wayside. It's not an easy time for the community of believers. Conflict arises between factions of the new sect. It's not unlike today, when as Christians, we are to consider how we interpret the rules, laws, and statutes handed down by our leaders. We are called to look at what we deem "profane," both as individuals and as institutions.

Today's Provision: What or who do you deem as "profane?" This might be a difficult assignment for some, but one worth praying about. What does "what God has made clean" mean to you? I have to admit there are people I consider profane, but that doesn't square with my belief that we are all made in God's image. I think this phrase speaks of the need to stop judging others based on what they do. I surely would not want to be judged as a person based on the worst thing I have ever done. I know that is not how God will judge me, so who am I to be a tougher judge than God, who am I *"to be able to hinder God?"*

Tuesday, May 2: *"My home is within you"* (Ps 87).

The Jews are on the journey back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century, BCE. God's people had been scattered to foreign lands. Many were born outside of Zion. The Lord consoles all the people, *saying "my home is within you."* In other words, it doesn't matter where you were born. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter where you will be. There's a deep intimacy in these words. This is food for profound prayer.

Today's Provision: Pray with these life-giving words. Not only do we hear God is within us, we hear God is at home within us, content and secure in our hearts:
(*Covenant* by Margaret Halaska, OSF):

"God knocks at my door seeking a home for his son. 'Rent is cheap,' I say. 'I don't want to rent. I want to buy,' says God. 'I'm not sure I want to sell, but you might come in to look around.' 'I think I will,' says God. 'I might let you have a room or two.' 'I like it,' says God. 'I'll take the two... 'I'd like to give you more, but it's a bit difficult. I need some space for me.' 'I know,' says God, 'but I'll wait. I like what I see.' 'Hm, maybe I can let you have another room. I really don't need it that much.' 'Thanks,' says God, 'I'll take it. I like what I see.'

'I'd like to give you the whole house but I'm not sure.' 'Think on it,' says God. 'I wouldn't put you out. Your house would be mine and my son would live in it. You'd have more space than you'd ever had before.' 'I don't understand at all' 'I know,' says God, 'but I can't tell you about that. You'll have to discover it for yourself. That can only happen if you let me have the whole house.' 'A bit risky,' I say. 'Yes,' says God, 'but try me.' 'I'm not sure— I'll let you know.' 'I can wait,' says God. 'I like what I see.'

Wednesday, May 3: *"I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these"* (Jn 14:6-14)

What was the last miracle you've witnessed? Better yet, what was the last miracle you performed? Some may say we must not be very sincere believers since we haven't seen anyone doing works like that again...or have we? Almost every day, we hear about people raising large sums money for charities through walkathons and races. People set up Facebook pages to support and collect funds for specific individuals unable to provide for themselves. We are so used to this now we take for granted how truly amazing these miracles are! Like the young child who brings the few loaves and fish to Jesus to feed the thousands, we may not be able to do much alone, but together, we can feed the world! Focus on good news about simple people doing extraordinary things for others. Better yet, become one of those people willing to make a difference by sharing what you have.

Today's Provision: Work a miracle! Heck, at the rate we are going these days, even smiling at a stranger might seem like a miracle! Have you ever considered the difference between healing and curing we read about in Scripture? It's true most of us may not be able to cure someone who is ill, but we can indeed heal the spirit of others. How? With compassion, with practical help, with mercy, with love. Work a miracle today!

Thursday, May 4: *"Whoever receives the one I send receives me; whoever receives me receives the one who sent me"* (Jn 13:16-20).

The Greek word for "receive" as it is used here is "*lambanē*" which literally means "getting up." It means actively receiving in a welcoming way—taking ownership, making what has been given a part of one's self. It is so appropriate given the immediate context of Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet: *"Don't just sit there passively and politely accepting my love and service to you. Take it in. Make it become part of who you are and what you in turn offer to others."* What a beautiful message! Do you actively open yourself to receive Jesus' love and service? Do you encourage those to whom you give to accept Jesus in this open and loving way?

Today's Provision: "Take and receive." These two words connote different things: We are not just to take all the blessings and lessons God gives us. We are to receive them as well, to make them part of who we are so that we can share them. Every experience we have has the potential to help us grow in love—even the difficult times. Pay attention today: Are you merely taking what God is offering? Or, are you willing to receive it as well?

Friday, May 5: *"Do not let your heart be troubled; have faith in God and have faith in me. In my Father's house there are many places of rest"* (Jn 14:1-6, literal Greek translation).

Some translations say "rooms" or "mansions," but I love this image: *"places of rest."* We often hear this reading at funerals as a comfort to those who mourn. But where exactly is God's house? If we think of it as a physical place we go after we die or the place we go to worship, that limits our options. It limits God's options too. God's house is everywhere because God is in all things.

Today's Provision: Take a rest in God's house! *"Take my yoke upon yourselves and learn from me, because I am gentle and accommodating in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Mt 11:29). If anyone questions you today about taking a rest in God's house, let them know you have my permission! God's house can be anywhere, but a quiet place in nature might be best. Spend at least an hour today, not reading, not speaking prayers, but being in prayer in God's restful embrace. (Warning: this can be habit-forming—Alleluia!)

Saturday, May 6: *The Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy...Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it...we now turn to the Gentiles. ...The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 13:44-52).

We hear the disciples *"were filled with joy,"* but I'd bet Paul and Barnabas are quite saddened their own people reject them. We hear Paul's lament in Romans 9: *"For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh."* Rather dramatic of Paul (as usual!) but think about it: it's not easy to be rejected by your own people. Just ask Jesus.

Today's Provision: Believe God comes to each of us where we are. Have you left the faith of your youth for something that speaks more clearly to you of God's love? Are you a parent who worries about kids who have eschewed religion or someone whose family members have left the fold? Will you be like Paul, full of angst and ready to throw in the towel? Or will you be like Jesus, trusting God will lead each one in their own way? Spend time in prayer today to affirm your faith even if others reject you. Be filled with joy! Pray for those who have lost faith that they will receive God's invitation to return to God, even if their path is different from yours. Trust God.