

# Provisions for the Journey

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



**Sunday, May 7:** *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. ...so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way"* (Jn 14:1-12).

My husband and I just returned from a Danube river cruise, visiting Budapest, Vienna, and Prague, among other ports of call. It was extraordinary and we are very blessed to have had this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Anyone who lives in Europe or has traveled there knows of the opulence of the hundreds of churches; many, testaments to the Holy Roman Empire's faith in and dependence on God, but others, testaments to the emperors and princes themselves. I struggled to pray in these palaces of worship, having heard the history and stories of the Crusades and religious wars; and even more so, in the smaller cities that still bear the scars of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars and hostile occupations. My heart was very troubled especially with war raging in Ukraine, a country not so far away. Prayer was easier for me in the God-made cathedrals of the mountains and gorges through which we traveled, and in meeting the delightful people we encountered along the way. That is where I found Jesus. That is where I found peace.

**Today's Provision: Where is Jesus for you?** The artisans who painstakingly labored to produce these incredible works of art were doing so for God's glory. Some sacrificed their very lives to bring images of the grandeur of heaven to the masses. I do not question their commitment and faith and am in awe of these magnificent examples of human creativity and ingenuity. But I learned for sure that I don't find Jesus very easily behind layers of marble and gold. I find him on the city streets and in the joy and labors of the locals; behind the banners hanging from medieval windowsills demanding peace; in the hope of these peoples who have endured centuries of oppression and war; in the splendor of nature that no human can recreate. God comes to each of us where we are and shows us the way. What is your way to Jesus? Where do you find peace? Blessings on all who find Jesus in the majesty and grandeur of human artistic expression! And blessings on all who find him in the beauty of nature and in the smiles and tears of the everyday!

**Monday, May 8:** *At Lystra there was a crippled man, lame from birth, who had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking, who looked intently at him, (and) saw that he had the faith to be healed* (Acts 14:5-18).

Do you ever wonder about these stories where the disciples can "see" that someone has the faith to be healed? Or conversely, when they see (as led by the Spirit) to avoid some town or some person? What does Paul see in this man? One might say it is desperation. I like to think he sees hope.

**Today's Provision: Open eyes.** As Christians, we are called to evangelize, but sometimes I think we fail to be led by the Spirit to "see" the readiness of those to whom we *preach* the Good News. We *preach* because we are supposed to but not because the Spirit has led us to do so. Now, one might argue that, like Jesus' parable of the sower of the seed, we should not worry where the seed lands. That is up to God. But if we are looking to go beyond scattering seed...if we look to bring God's healing by bringing hope, this takes a greater Spirit-led awareness and vision. (Note, we are talking about healing not curing.) When you encounter someone who seems low on hope, don't assume you know the reason nor the balm that will heal them. Don't assume healing for them looks like what it would be for you, or that they even want to be healed. Don't spout off some platitude about God's love (see James 2:15-17), but look them in the eyes and give them dignity. If you can, provide for their bodily needs. Show compassion. Give them hope.

**Tuesday, May 9:** *They stoned Paul...the disciples gathered around him, he got up and entered the city. On the following day he left with Barnabas for Derbe... they returned to Lystra and to Iconium...to Pisidia and Pamphylia ... Attalia...to Antioch...they called the Church together (and) spent no little time with the disciples* (Acts 14:19-28).

It seems Paul and Barnabas continually go back to where Paul was stoned in the first place. As we talked about yesterday, they rely solely on the Spirit to lead them where they are to go. But the verse that spoke to me today is that last one: the *Good News Translation* reads: *"And they stayed a long time there with the believers."* What a good idea! When you are out in the world, trying to live the gospel and avoid the occasional rock thrown your way, make sure to come back home and spend "no little time" with those who believe in and comfort you!

**Today's Provision: Find community.** Note: community, not echo-chamber. Too many of us rely on social media that feed skepticism, negativity, and even hatred. A true community does nothing of the sort. While we may commiserate on the challenges of keeping faith amid dark times, a true community is always a source of hope and comfort, a wellspring of peace and love. If you don't have such a community, then take the initiative to begin one, even if it is just with one other like-minded person focused on Divine peace. Make sure to keep true to the mission by never neglecting gratitude, prayer, and praise; comfort, comradery, and compassion.

**Wednesday, May 10:** *"I am the true vine, my Father the vine grower. He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You have already been pruned"*(Jn 15:1-8).

A year or so ago, there were a flurry of articles about whether plants feel pain. While plants can apparently "feel" the light touch of a caterpillar walking on their leaves, they have no pain receptors. Pain, as we in the animal kingdom know it, is not an issue. While my houseplants seem to thrive better when I stay far away, it has made me be a bit more gentle with them 😊.

Pruning is hard. It even sounds painful. I'd say all of us have been pruned, young and old, given what we have experienced over the past few years. And as we know of life, we are not done yet. Pruning is a necessary and ongoing process. But I wonder: in the midst of the trials of pruning, are we also open to God's gentle touch? Are we aware of the tiny whispering sounds and subtle footsteps God leaves behind on the very surface of our daily lives?

**Today's Provision: Use your senses today!** Instead of waiting around and dreading the next pruning session, feel the warm sun on your skin. Touch the hands of those you love. Don't just notice—listen to—the songs of the birds or a children's choir or street musician. "Taste and see" the goodness of the Lord by taking time to *savor* what you eat and what you observe. Revel in the gentle and ever-present touch of God in your life!

**Thursday, May 11:** *"Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?"*(Acts 15:7-21).

We should all take time to read, reflect, and pray with Acts 15. It is more than topical, given the schisms and vitriolic debate occurring in many Christian denominations. While the context here seems to refer mostly to circumcision, the "yoke" Peter mentions is the whole of Mosaic Law, which of course none of the Jews nor their ancestors have been able to completely fulfill. It reminds me of Jesus' yoke: his commandment to love...that one he tells us is light. It makes me reflect on my own unworthiness and inability to bear even Jesus' easy yoke. It also makes me wonder: How are we, by not being open to the Spirit, putting God to the test? *"Who am I to hinder God?"*(Acts 11:17)

**Today's Provision: Pray for unity in love.** This is even more real to me now as I have revisited the history of the Christian schisms and wars in Europe. Folks, I believe our Creator will judge humanity harshly by our constant dissecting of the Body of Christ and thinking we know the mind of God. We don't. We are called to love. That is it. Anything else is not of God. Pray that we will begin to learn this lesson.

**Friday, May 12:** *"When the people read it, they were delighted with the exhortation"*(Acts 15:22-31). *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you"*(Jn 15:12-17).

This verse refers to the Gentiles who have just heard the news from Jerusalem that they do not have to be circumcised to become Christian. No wonder they are delighted! How would the story have unfolded if the Apostles had capitulated to the demands of those who insisted on strict adherence to Mosaic Law? Only God knows of course, but one can imagine the faith would not have grown as it did; perhaps it would have faded away. Anyone who does not see this current time in Christian history as another critical hinge point is not paying attention. How will the story unfold? Will we begin to grow again, or just fade away? Of course, the truth will always remain. And what is that truth? "Love one another as I love you," each of you—just as you are. If we cannot love others just as they are, we are not following his command. We are not living the truth.

**Today's Provision: Follow the Spirit. Follow the Truth.** For some reason, this recent trip as filled me with a sense of urgency. Perhaps it is seeing these huge cathedrals—museums rather than places of prayer and service. Relics of a time long gone. Jesus does not call our faith to be a reliquary tucked away, but to be alive in love. And that calls for Spirit-driven change. Pray—for ourselves and for the world to be open to the truth.

**Saturday, May 13:** *"Know that the LORD is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends. The LORD is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations"*(Ps 100).

A message so needed and essential amid the talk of schisms and pruning and hinge points that seem to pit the law against love (a human undertaking, not of God!) *"Know that the Lord is God:"* always and forever kind, despite our ongoing history of division, war, and sin. Despite our best efforts to convey our love through human endeavors that fall short of God's own grandeur. Despite our tendency to want to keep God locked away in temples of gold when all God wants is to be with us wherever we go. God's faithfulness extends to all generations.

**Today's Provision: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia!"**