

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Fourth Week of Easter, 2024



Sunday, April 21: *"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior"* (Ps 118).

A few weeks ago, I was speaking with someone about the difficulty she was experiencing. I shared some of my own story and said to her, "God's got this." This declarative statement leads to the question: so, what is the "this" that God's got? Too often, the "this" is the specific question or situation I am asking God to answer or to save me from. "This" may be something I am trying to dictate or to have other human beings control for me. When I say, "God's got this," it really means God's got the whole of "this," not just my own situation. While it is well and good and appropriate to pray for graces or healing or conversion, we can become disillusioned if God's answer is not the one we are looking for. When we allow our own expectations of how "this" will turn out; when we seek refuge in anything or anyone other than God, we will often be disappointed.

Today's Provision: Trust in God alone. The psalm tells us not to put our trust in leaders and humanity. Many leaders are wonderful and dedicated, but they are flawed human beings; some are like the "hired man" we read about in today's gospel, working for money or power, who will scatter at the least sign of trouble. Seek refuge in God alone, even, and especially, if "this" doesn't turn out the way you had hoped. Give thanks to God...he's got the whole world in his hands."

Monday, April 22: *"Who was I that I might hinder God?"* (Acts 11:1-18).

There are certain passages from Scripture I am compelled to reflect on each year. This is one of them. It is an essential question to ask ourselves on both a macro and micro level: How does my country, my church, my employer, my community hinder God by excluding others who don't quite fit the "model" we have created for ourselves? My opinion is that when we exclude, we hinder God, putting ourselves above God. To hinder God is a sin. I ask myself each night how did I hinder God today by what I did or did not do? And how do I continue to hinder God's work in me by refusing to forgive myself or others?

Today's Provision: Ask yourself this tough question. Don't dismiss this as an historical account of Peter's outreach to the Gentiles, or just something for the leaders of our various institutions. This is an important phrase in Scripture for deep prayer and reflection. Those princes from yesterday's psalm, those hired men minding the sheep will have run away and scattered, and we will be left to do an accounting for ourselves (see Wednesday's reflection). Take time to review your life: are there times you have hindered God, things for which you'd like to repent? This can be a very uplifting experience if you accept God's mercy and forgive yourself. Then, try to make the nightly examen a habit. Ask yourself: "Where have I helped God today and where did I hinder God?" Say a prayer of gratitude for being able to be a channel for the Spirit and for forgiveness for those times when we have gotten in the way of God's work.

Tuesday, April 23: *"The Father and I are one"* (Jn 10:22-30).

That's it! We cannot overstate the impact this statement would have had on (and still likely has on) the Jews hearing these words. The people who are gathered around him ask him if he is the Christ, the Anointed One, the *mashiach*, the human being from David's line, the consecrated one who will restore the Kingdom of Israel. That alone is tough to believe given the man presenting himself, an itinerant preacher from the backwater town of Nazareth. But to declare that he is one with God!? This is blasphemy at the highest level.

Today's Provision: Be one with God. What would it look like to be one with God? Do you see such a statement as blasphemous? In the psalm today, God says "my home is within you," putting to rest the concerns of those Jews born in exile. God talks about taking up residence in our very souls. Maybe we prefer thinking God saying to us, "I am one with you and all of my children?" Either way, God invites us to an intimacy of oneness with the Trinity: Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit. Ask for the grace today to be one with God.

Wednesday, April 24: *"And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke will condemn him on the last day"* (Jn 12:44-50).

If I hear Jesus' words, which I have, and I do not observe them, i.e., if I do not live by them, Jesus tells me he will not judge me. It makes me think that, in reality, I will judge myself. Anyone who has a conscience knows what this means, that stinging feeling when we miss the mark. But so often, we fail to understand and recognize what missing the mark

means. We tend to focus on sins of commission — breaking the rules —rather than sins of omission — failing to even try to live as Jesus lived.

Today's Provision: Imagine judgment. In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, one way he suggests discerning a decision is to imagine ourselves on our death bed: "How will I feel at the end of my life if I decide to take one option over the other?" (Decisions are always between two goods; evil is never an option.) But discernment is not limited to big events or situations. We look at our everyday lives and how we might change some things, things that in and of themselves might be good, but stand in the way of the "Magis"—the more, the better (which often means taking things off the list, not putting new ones on!) "*In the twilight of life, we will not be judged on our earthly possessions and human successes, but on how well we have loved*" (St. John of the Cross, adapted).

Thursday, April 25: *Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you*" (1 Pt 5:5-14).

This is a somewhat "recycled" reflection from 2013 that speaks to me even more these days, in light of the frightening rise in mental illness, particularly among young people. When I read this line from Peter, a popular song from the 80's/90's (I know, ancient past) comes to mind. It has always been one of my favorites. Here's an excerpt from "Trouble Me," lyrics by Natalie Merchant. "*Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and your worries. Trouble me on the days when you feel spent. Why let your shoulders bend underneath this burden when my back is sturdy and strong? ... Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and your worries. Speak to me and let our words build a shelter from the storm. Lastly, let me know what I can mend. There's more, honestly, than my sweet friend, you can see. Trust is what I'm offering if you trouble me.*" (For all the lyrics and to hear it performed <https://oldtimemusic.com/w2/the-meaning-behind-the-song-trouble-me-by-10000-maniacs/>).

Today's Provision: Reach out. If you are troubled these days, reach out to someone you trust and let them help you build a shelter from the storm. Imagine that God sings this song to you every day. If you see someone struggling in your family, church, or community, and your back is sturdy and strong, reach out. Offer to take on some of their sadness. Remember: God's got this.

Friday, April 26: *"I myself have set up my king on Zion, my holy mountain"* (Ps 2). *"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (Jn 14:1-6).

According to OT scholar Robert Alter, "*Zion is a modest mountain on the crest of which sits a modest fortified town, the capital of a small kingdom, surrounding by vast empires.*" I always thought Zion was the biggest and best, but per usual, God's way is often the quieter, more humble approach: the way, the truth, and the life modeled by Jesus of Nazareth.

Today's Provision: Practice humility. When Jesus says, "I am the way," he means it—literally. "Look at me. Look at my life. This is the way you are to live if you seek truth and life." It's not some vague expression of faith in his divinity or following a set of rules. "*In the last analysis, faith is not a way of speaking or a way of thinking; it is a way of living... To acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior is only meaningful in so far as we try to live as he lived and to order our lives according to his values... He himself did not regard the truth as something we simply 'uphold' and 'maintain,' but as something we choose to live and experience.... We can refer to traditional authorities and theological arguments, but what we believe can only be made true, and be seen to be true, in the concrete results which faith achieves in the world*" (from *Jesus Before Christianity*, by Albert Nolan, O.P., 2001, p.169). Where will you be a quiet, humble presence amid the clamor of the world's vast empires?

Saturday, April 27: *"Sing to the LORD a new song"* (Ps 98).

"In this celebration of God's majesty, it is of course in the interests of the psalm poet to proclaim that this is a fresh and original composition" (from *The Hebrew Bible, volume three: the writings* by Robert Alter, 2019, p. 228). Alter observes the psalm poets often use this line— "sing a new song"—to "market" their newest creations. As a writer, it makes me smile to think that they too had to recycle things occasionally! But these words speak to me in light of our theme for this liturgical year: Something New. Frankly, my prayers, my songs are kind of stale right now. This sometimes happens after the intensity of Lent and Easter, so I am looking forward to Pentecost, something new from the Spirit!!

Today's Provision: Sing a new song! What kind of songs are you singing now? Were there experiences of prayer and songs from Lent and Easter that inspired you or gave you hope? Have you been able to pick up a tune from someone else and make it your own? We reflected on a beautiful, healing song on Thursday. Consider other popular songs whose meaning can become even richer if we sing them to God, or if we imagine God singing them to us. How about: "I love you just the way you are!"