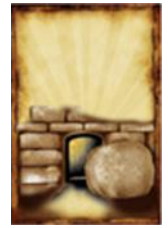


Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Lent Week One, 2026



A reminder of our Lenten focus: Listen. Pay Attention. Choose.

Sunday, Feb 22: *"Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death"* (Rom 5:12-19).

I love the creation myths of indigenous peoples: the Cosmic Egg, the *Wakan Tanka* (the Great Spirit), the Sky Woman, the Dreaming. Like Genesis, they also center around nature and often incorporate the sources of light, the sun and the moon; the Genesis story starts with light as well, Divine Light! But there is little in indigenous tradition about the concept of sin or humanity's dominance over the rest of creation. Failure to live in harmony with nature, being out of balance with creation and the community...these are the things that cause suffering in people's lives. This is perhaps the closest one gets to assigning blame. It's all about the choices one makes in their life.

As Christians, we believe Jesus takes away the sin of the world, this sin of Adam that brings death. But it's not only sin that entered the world that fateful day in the garden. Choice did as well. Choices about faith, choices about hope, choices about how we live our lives.

Provision: "A willing spirit sustain in me" (Ps 51). We read in today's gospel that as he endured the desert, Jesus had choices to make. He had been blessed by the Spirit as God's Beloved, but I imagine he prayed constantly for a willing spirit to sustain him. Each day, remind yourself that you, too, are God's beloved. PAY ATTENTION to this affirmation and pray the Spirit will sustain and strengthen you to make choices to live in harmony with nature and the community.

Monday, Feb 23: *"You shall not...stand by idly when your neighbor's life is at stake. You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove him, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen"* (Lv 19:1-2, 11-18).

Two messages intended for us! We see in communities all over the world, people taking great risks to defend their neighbors; in some cases, losing their very lives. Ordinary people joining together to stand up for justice against oppressive forces in their governments: in the US, in Iran, in Israel, in Serbia, (go to <https://nonviolencenews.org/> to find out more). We cannot stand by or hide away when our neighbors' lives are at stake. Per Robert Alter, this means we cannot *"stand by without intervening while for fellow human's blood—literally or figuratively—is spilled"* (*The Hebrew Bible, Vol 1*, p. 432).

AND, we are not to harbor hate, take revenge, or hold grudges against anyone, even those we see as perpetrators of oppression. This is not an either/or. It is a both/and!

Provision: CHOOSE love. Wow. In less than 50 words, this pretty much sums it up, and aligns with Jesus' message to us. Taking a stand for the oppressed and against the oppressor does not mean we love one and hate the other (see Saturday's gospel). It means we choose love. It's a radical stance, and a hard one, especially now in these deeply divided times. While I may abhor and condemn the actions of some people, I am still called to love. Let's challenge ourselves today (and maybe for the rest of Lent) to fast from hating those we see as enemies of the good.

Tuesday, Feb 24: *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"* (Mt 6:7-15).

"Yes, I understand God knows what I *need*, but does God know what I *want*?"

God knows!... I need humility to accept God's will if God's will is something other than what I want. God knows! ... I need wisdom to understand God's ways are not my ways. God knows! ...I need what Ron Rolheiser calls "a mellow heart," to accept that not everyone will think and feel the way I do. God knows! ... I need faith and trust in Divine love and mercy so that, in the face of hardships and disappointments, my relationship with God can grow deeper. God knows what we need. And the way we come to accept this is through prayer...prayer that changes us, not God (Kierkegaard).

Provision: LISTEN to your prayer. Here's a little challenge: Pray as you normally would this week, but at the end of prayer each day, do a mini-examen. How much of your prayer that day was you talking to (or at) God? I'm not referring to prayers of intention for loved ones in need of healing or comfort or for peace for our world. These prayers are wonderful, meaningful, and can bring us closer to those for whom we pray. Do you end each prayer with praise and thanksgiving? Do you say to God, "Your will be done," AND then listen to what God has to say to your heart? If we can talk to God in a heartfelt and humble manner about what we want, we can be assured we've been heard. And if we allow God to speak in reply to our hearts, we can come to a greater understanding and acceptance of God's will. This is not easy but can be very comforting. Give it a try if you struggle with unmet needs and wants.

Wednesday, Feb 25: *"Who knows, God may relent and forgive and withhold his blazing wrath"* (Jon 3:1-10). Who knows? We do...at least, I hope we do!

Provision: Do you have faith? I can't tell you the number of times I fall back into images of the "blazing wrath of God!" I believe in God's mercy, I believe God's promise of mercy. So why is it that these little thoughts of my sinfulness sneak up? Why is it that I find myself, like Jonah, expecting God to zap those I see as doing evil? Or is to say, "I know," a vestige of original sin? Yeesch. Heavy stuff. If this kind of thing happens to you, return to your faith—not just your belief, but your faith. *"Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe."*

Thursday, Feb 26: A reading from the Book of Esther: *When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he replied: "Do not imagine you are safe in the king's palace.... Even if you now remain silent, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews; but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows—perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, had recourse to the LORD. She lay prostrate upon the ground...from morning until evening, and said: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, blessed are you. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand. ...Come to help me, an orphan. Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion...Save us from the hand of our enemies; turn our mourning into gladness and our sorrows into wholeness."*

Provision: "Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" I expanded on the reading from Esther today to give some context to the story since it is so relevant and meaningful for us. I regret the word "enemies" used to describe others (see our reflection from Sunday), so we instead look at the "enemy" as injustice and oppression. Today, make time to have recourse with the Lord. Know that you have "come to the kingdom" here on earth at this time for a reason. Don't remain silent. Pray God will give you the courage and strength to speak out.

Friday, Feb 27: *"I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven"* (Mt 5:20-26).

I wonder about Jesus' quote today. In Matthew's Gospel, he often lambasts the elders for their hypocrisy (e.g., Mt 23:27-28). Here he talks about their righteousness. What is righteousness? Based on sources I use, the Greek root is *dikaíosunē* which can mean integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting. In Hebrew (similar in Aramaic) the word used here is *tsidqah* which *"expresses concrete, visible righteousness—right conduct that accords with God's moral order and expresses covenant faithfulness. Unlike abstract virtue, the term highlights righteousness made manifest in deeds, especially toward the vulnerable"* (<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6665.htm>). In the beginning of Chapter 6, Jesus warns the disciples not to be hypocrites. In other words, practice what you preach.

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. Your actions speak louder than your words. I talk with so many people who are concerned they are not doing enough to ease the plight of the oppressed. In their hearts, their intent is sincere, but they feel impotent to do anything. We can all do something. Not all of us can be out on the streets protesting or accompanying immigrants to court, but we can provide food and resources to organizations delivering goods to those too afraid to leave their homes. I've read of some tutors and retired teachers going to homes to assist the children who can't go to school, or people driving immigrants to important doctor appointments. Sincere, heartfelt prayer for those oppressed and those on the frontline assisting them (not *proforma* prayer—God knows what's in your heart) is important and needed. Dig deep today in prayer and ask God to help you find an action that aligns with your words and heart.

Saturday, Feb 28: *"I will give you thanks with an upright heart, when I have learned your just ordinances"* (Ps 119:7).

In the Hebrew: *"I shall acclaim you with an honest heart as I learn your righteous laws."* "As I learn?" "When I have learned?" "Wait a minute...I learned God's law years ago. The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes. I even know some Canon Law. What is all this about *'WHEN?'*"

In November of 2023, Pope Francis wrote to the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo*, an international association that promotes the study of canon law. Pope Francis invites members to conduct their work in a pastoral and missionary manner: *"Revelation in its twofold expression of the Word of God and living Tradition," applying "what Christ wants, through the canonical norm, to the concrete situation of each believer, so that he or she may be accompanied to accept God's will."* He ended the letter with, *"Be aware that you are instruments of God's justice, which is always indissolubly united with mercy"* (<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-12/pope-letter-study-canon-law-anniversary-justice-mercy.html>).

Provision: PAY ATTENTION to the Spirit of the Law: Again, go back to Jesus' words last week about his role in fulfilling the law. The Ten Commandments come to fruition through the Beatitudes, through the life and works of Jesus: healing, mercy, compassion, openness to the foreigner, taking a stand for justice and righteousness. Not judgment, not punishment, not "thou shalt not." If we are followers of Christ, we are called to embrace his Spirit and his merciful ways.