

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Third Week of Lent 2019



Sunday, March 24: *God called out, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am. "...I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry...so I know well what they are suffering." (Ex 3:1-8, 13-15)*

God is a God of relationships. God is—not was—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is the God of you and me. Later in this passage, when Moses asks God whose name he should invoke, God says, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh," most accurately translated, "I will be who I will be." God is active and alive now and forever and hears our cry. He knows well when we suffer. God desires a relationship with each one of his children. What's your relationship with God like these days?

Today's Provision: Pray for the Strength to Look at God. I was so afraid to look at God and to have God look at me. I hid, like Adam and Eve, ashamed at the nakedness of my sinfulness. It took me many years to understand that in Jesus, I could not only look at God and live, but have life abundantly. If we want a good relationship with God, we need to approach it as we would an intimate human relationship. We need to spend time—lots of time—learning about the Divine Other's values and ways of being. Fear, selfishness, and retribution are not the basis for a healthy relationship--if I only relate to God out of fear of punishment or to get what I want. And while Jesus tells us we must be like little children, he is referring to the trust and wonder a child has; he is saying be childlike, not childish. If you struggle to have a good, mature relationship with God, seek out the advice of a spiritual director or pastor. You may want to consider reading, "A Friendship Like No Other," by William Barry, SJ, or accessing an article by the same author: <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/585/faith-focus/friends-god>

Monday, March 25: *"To do your will, O my God, is my delight...I announced your justice in the vast assembly; I did not restrain my lips...Your justice I kept not hid within my heart; your faithfulness and your salvation I have spoken of; I have made no secret of your kindness and your truth in the vast assembly." (Ps 40)*

In several Christian traditions, today is the Feast of the Annunciation, the remembrance of the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would bear God's son. But in a way, it is Mary's announcement as well—her proclamation of God's justice, kindness, and truth to the whole world. While she pondered many things in her heart, she did not hide God's faithfulness to his people, but gave her body and her whole life as a witness. Other than the martyrs, not many of us are called to such a dramatic demonstration of our faith. But we are called to witness nonetheless, not by what we say with our lips, but by how we live.

Today's Provision: Give Witness. The psalmist also says, "*Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not; then said I, 'Behold I come.'*" "I've shown up, Lord. I'm here, waiting to do your will. Tell me, what does that look like in my life? What does that mean for me today?" Each day, we might be called to do God's will in a different way: perhaps it is showing patience and compassion to that neighbor or co-worker who gets under our skin; maybe it is a more life-changing call to a vocation or missionary work; some days, it might be taking time for ourselves to rest with God. If we avail ourselves to God each morning and ask for the Spirit's guidance, that's great. But then we have to put it into action. Let's walk the walk of the one we proclaim. How will you give witness to God's great love today?

Tuesday, March 26: *"Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair." (Mt 18:21-35)*

To use today's vernacular, the servants in this story are "snitching" on their unforgiving peer. Snitching is when a person or group sees something wrong, illegal, or unjust and reports it to the authorities. In business or government, they are called "whistleblowers." Nowadays, people rarely come forward like the servants in today's story. They don't want to get involved, afraid of being ostracized, law suits, reprisals, or worse.

The unforgiving servant's peers decide not to sit back. They have seen their master's compassion, but also know he is just. They are confident that, despite incurring the evil servant's wrath, justice will be served.

Today's Provision: Fast from Complicit Silence. This is very hard to do. It is much easier to be nice to the kid who's been bullied than to report the problem or confront the bullies; less risky to ignore the graft than call attention to it; less time-consuming to give alms to the working poor than to lobby for just wages; more convenient to temporarily treat the symptom than try to eliminate the root cause. In reality, there are many things we can't solve, but that doesn't mean we should be silent. Use your voice today to raise the awareness of injustice in our midst.

Wednesday, March 27: *"Take care and be on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory, but teach them to your children and to your children's children."* (Dt 4:1, 5-9)

I read an article several years ago entitled, "The Secrets to a Happy Family." Based on research (and resulting book of the same name) done by best-selling author Bruce Feiler, the article enumerated 19 factors which emerged as common to happy families. I found the first one fascinating: children who knew the most about their family's history were the ones best able to handle stress and bounce back from adversity. *"The reason: these children have a strong sense of 'intergenerational self'—they understand that they belong to something bigger than themselves."* Moses, in his instructions to the Israelites, was clearly on to something!

These days, there's so much focus on the immediate, so much focus on 'me.' Sharing stories from the past (and not just the good or glamorous ones) helps keep things in perspective for our kids and for us. Successes and failures don't loom as large when they take their place in the big picture that is our history.

Today's Provision: Give Children Grounding in History. Once, when my mom was looking into our ancestry, my grandfather told her, "Go back far enough in someone's family and you'll find a horse thief." Just look at Jesus' ancestry—there was a lot worse than horse thievery going on in that family! We may be tempted to sugarcoat painful things and embellish the happy times, but respecting and sharing the past means we look honestly, with love and compassion, on the times, people, and places that have impacted us. Think about sharing some wisdom with the kids or grandkids about a family member whose story might resonate with them. Give them hope for the future.

Thursday, March 28: *But he knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house."* (Lk 11:14-23)

Whenever I hear this passage, I can't help but think of the tens of thousands of Christian denominations in the world, and the divisions that exist between the millions who call Christ their king. While I believe Christ's vision for a kingdom grounded in truth and love will never fall based solely on the strength of its central pillar, I wonder if we hinder the coming of that kingdom by our staunch defense of specific creeds and beliefs. Something to consider the next time I encounter someone whose faith is different than mine: "Am I building a wall or a bridge?"

Today's Provision: Fast from Building Walls. In his message to the 15,000 young Christians gathered in January in Madrid for the 41st Taizé European meeting, Pope Francis encouraged them to *"become bridge builders between churches, religions and peoples...promoting a culture of encounter."* In another address to young people in Poland, he said: *"Peace builds bridges, whereas hatred is the builder of walls. You must decide, in life: either I will make bridges or I will make walls."* God calls us to foster peace among all people and all religions. Let's fast from building walls and reach across any divide to build a bridge.

Friday, March 29: *And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.* (Mk 12:28-34)

I wonder why no one else dared to ask him any more questions. Were they afraid of what he might answer? Were they nervous that it might be a "dumb" question? (A teacher of my son's used to quip, "There are no dumb questions. Just dumb people who ask them!") After his resurrection, Jesus asks the frightened disciples, "Why do questions arise in your hearts?" But questions are how we learn, how we begin to formulate meaningful lives, how we expand our vision. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said that we are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we know the answers. What questions do you have for Jesus these days?

Today's Provision: Pray the Questions. *"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves...Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."* (Rainer Maria Rilke) As a child, I was not encouraged to ask questions about faith so they became nagging doubts that at times drove me away. Do I have the answers I so longed for so long ago? No, but the difference is now I can bring my questions to Jesus. I can pray the questions without worrying about judgment or even needing concrete answers. Don't be afraid to dialogue with Jesus about what might be troubling or confusing you.

Saturday, March 30: *"Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD..." "For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."* (Hos 6:1-6)

A good bookend to the week where we started by talking about the importance of a relationship with God. God wants us to know and love him in a deep and intimate way. God wants us to know of his unfailing love for us; it is why God sent his son to become one with us, to teach us to love as God's desires. Consider this: Do you know the Lord or do you know *of* the Lord? There's a big difference.

Today's Provision: Pray and Strive to Know the Lord. So how do you get to know the Lord better? Reading Scripture is one of the best ways. Find reliable, scholarly, but accessible sources for commentary to lead you through the more confusing passages. And as we said on Sunday, spend quality time getting to know God on God's terms. What does that mean? Experience God in the entirety of creation—in nature, in others. Be intentional. Make a point of looking for God, especially in the places where you might be challenged to find him. Don't make assumptions based on set expectations. Open up to what is possible. For all is possible with God.