

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Holy Week 2019



Sunday, April 14: *"The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them."* (Is 50:4-7)

I sure could use someone to rouse me out of my weariness these days. I know I'm not alone. I speak to many people who are world-weary, in need of good news. I know in my case I would also benefit from a good swift kick to startle me out of my apathy and set me back on a hopeful, active path. The only person who can really do this for me and you is Jesus—the Good News. I have a choice: to look at the stories that unfold this week as nothing more than stories of desolation and pain or as stories that are seedbeds of hope. I can choose to join my sorrows and disappointments with the suffering of Christ, his disciples, and those of the rest of the world to rouse me and provide fodder for growth for myself and for my brothers and sisters.

Today's Provision: Fast from 'Skimming the Surface.' What I am going to suggest may sound counterintuitive, but in order for the joy of the Resurrection to really make a difference for us, we need to experience the sadness of the coming week. Khalil Gibran wrote, *"The deeper sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain."* Having heard the Holy Week stories over and over, we might tend to look at them as ancient history, to skim the surface, not allowing them to penetrate our hearts. Instead, take time this week to read the gospel stories intentionally. If it helps, imagine them as a play; maybe you can be one of the actors or someone in the audience watching this story of sorrow develop. Think about adding to the story your own pain, sorrow, or fear. It's important to bring that same level of involvement and attention to the story that unfolds next Sunday. Consider going to Triduum services and to the Easter Vigil. Be an active participant not only in the passion story, but in the story of hope that begins with the empty tomb.

Monday, April 15: *"Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial."* (Jn 12:1-11)

Jesus says an interesting thing here: "let *her* keep this for the day of my burial." It's not about him. It never is. 'Let Mary have this to hold onto when I am gone, this deep, intimate sharing of love.' I think of stories people tell me about loved ones long gone and how they hold onto a special event or moment that keeps that loved one alive in their hearts. Perhaps you've had an experience of closeness like this with Jesus. What memories keep love alive in your heart?

Today's Provision: Pray for Loved Ones who Have Died. Spend time today thinking about special people in your life who have died, not necessarily to mourn (unless you still need to), but to remember cherished times of intimacy and love. See if you can allow a treasured memory to light the fire of love to warm and comfort you. If your memories are too difficult or fraught with pain, pray instead that God will grant you a place of peace through acceptance and forgiveness of the person or of yourself. *"There is no death, daughter. People die only when we forget them," my mother explained before she left me. "If you can remember me, I will be with you always."* (Isabel Allende) *"Do this in memory of me."* "I will be with you always even to the end of the world." (Jesus)

Tuesday, April 16: *Peter said, "Master, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times."* (Jn 13: 21-33, 36-38)

I can't help but imagine Peter as a whiny kid: 'But I wanna follow you NOWWA.' Oh, my friend Peter has the best of intentions. He is emboldened, and I believe he really means what he says to Jesus, but when push comes to shove, he crumbles. He lies. He runs away. So very human, just like me. The reason Peter is so special to me is his willingness to repent. He is tenacious and doesn't allow his weakness to get in the way of coming closer to Christ. In the Catholic tradition, St. Alexandra is the patron of defending humanity, but for me, Peter is the patron saint of human beings—flawed but resilient, weak but willing to return again and again to his only, his ultimate source of strength.

Today's Provision: Give it Another Try. One thing Peter teaches us is to never give up. If, for whatever reason, you are estranged from God, look to St. Peter for an example of the power of God's mercy and love, and of the strength you gain when you get your pride/shame out of the way. It is a paradox, but the best way to come closer to Christ is to accept the weakness of our human condition. Sure, we always want to strive to do better, to repent for our sins, to actually walk the walk, but we will never be able to do this if we don't first reunite with God. Let Peter's tenacity and commitment be inspiration for you.

Wednesday, April 17: *"The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed."* (Mt 26:14-25)

Betrayal is the theme that underlies today's readings. The hardest thing about betrayal is that it is the most hurtful when it happens at the hands of those closest to us. Betrayal by a casual associate is often felt as embarrassment for letting ourselves be taken in by someone not worthy of our trust, but broken trust with a good friend or loved one can be some of the greatest pain of all. Amid the pain of betrayal, our reliance on God's mercy and love is so important as we work to heal not only ourselves, but the other and the broken relationship. If we have been betrayed or have betrayed another, we need not despair as Judas did. God's mercy is deep and broad and wide enough to take in all that pain. Let God provide a soft, gentle, healing place for trust to take root again and blossom.

Today's Provision: Pray for Healing. When we experience betrayal, as either the victim or the perpetrator, the worst thing we can do is not allow ourselves time to grieve. Betrayal is a highly sensitive place that requires us to move slowly and deliberately if we are to have hope for healing and reconciliation. The psalms provide good material for prayer; the help of a counselor or pastoral minister can also make getting through the initial days and weeks a little easier. If you are suffering from a betrayal, even one that is decades old, healing can still be there for you. Imagine God saying to you, "You've got a whole heart, give me the hard part. I can love that too." (From *Hard Part*, a song from the album *Vista* by David Wilcox). Pray for God's healing touch.

Holy Thursday, April 18: *"But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you."* (Ex 12:1-8, 11-14)

I've mentioned I am using a new translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the life's work of scholar Robert Alter. He translates this passage as, *"And the blood will be a sign for you upon the houses in which you are, and I will see the blood and I will pass over you, and no scourge shall become a Destroyer amongst you when I strike in the land of Egypt."* He notes, *"blood (is) a recurrent motif in the literary structure of the larger narrative."* "The blood will be a sign for you." Not just a sign for God, but a sign for each one of us. For Christians, the pain, the suffering, the shedding of the Lamb's blood will mark your hearts, and no scourge, not even the scourge of sin, can destroy you.

Today's provision: Give Your Heart to God. If you suffer under the weight of sin, don't delay. Give your heart to God. Let God see and heal the suffering you endure. Perhaps you are reconciled to God in your sin, but know others who still suffer the pain of an unreconciled heart. Invite them in, through your own personal prayer, to live under the protection of the blood of the Lamb.

Good Friday, April 19: *"I am forgotten like the unremembered dead."* (Ps 31)

In his thought-provoking book, *Sum: forty tales from the afterlives*, neuroscientist David Eagleman writes, *"There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time."*

In cities across the United States, December 21—the first day of winter and the longest night of the year—is National Homeless Persons Memorial Day. It is a day to remember the forgotten dead, some whose remains are never claimed, some whose consignment to the grave is a routine function. In the city of Baltimore near where I live, 192 persons were remembered at the memorial in 2017, some whose legal name was not known; officials say the actual number is likely higher, and it is also some 80 more homeless people than died in 2012. I shudder to think of those dead and forgotten in countries where disease and violence take hundreds of lives a day.

Today's Provision: Pray for the Forgotten Dead. On Monday, we remembered loved ones who have passed away. On this day of the Lord's Passion, spend quiet time in prayer for those who have died lonely, without support, without a name. Pray the Lord will call them each by their real name to dwell with him forever in paradise. *"No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know that no one cares or understands."* (Arthur Stanback)

Holy Saturday, April 20: There is no script for today's scene in the play we've experienced this week. Look back over the week. Are there situations, events, or words that Jesus or the prophets have uttered that move or resonate more clearly with you? God tends to speak to us this way—subtly, even through the passages that make us a bit uncomfortable. It's worth revisiting and praying with them today. Holy Saturday doesn't get much air time, but it is an important day, a holding pattern between sorrow and joy, a place where we spend a good deal of our lives. The fear of what lies ahead can mire us in the pain of the past and blind us to the light right around the corner. Allow yourself instead a time of reflection and rest.

Today's Provision: Fast, Pray, Give. Look back over your Lenten journey. Are there fasts you'd like to make a permanent part of your life? Are there special prayers or people you want to add to your daily reflection time? What have you given either to others or to God this Lent that you'd like to continue to give? Even though Lent is a time dedicated to these disciplines, think about committing each morning of the year to a fast, a prayer, and a gift unique for that day. Let God know your intention and pray for the patience, strength, and courage to live it.

Have a Blessed Easter season! *Come and See* returns next week and will take us through ordinary time--which we will make extraordinary by living in the Risen Christ!