

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Seventh Week of Easter, 2026



Sunday, May 17: *"The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. ..." Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age"* (Mt 28:16-20).

An important theme emerges from the readings this week, one that is appropriate for all of us, no matter where we are in our lives: Letting Go. In this scene, Jesus is departing from the physical presence of his friends and disciples. He of course knows and understands he will be present for and with them forever. But it's not so easy for those standing there, mouths agape, as he disappears from their sight. Letting go can be very hard.

We hear in this passage, "they doubted" (the Greek translation: "but some doubted." It would be interesting to speculate whom among the eleven doubted!). Jesus knows this. He knows that there is doubt and there will continue to be doubt. But he doesn't say to the disciples, "With all we've been through, how can you doubt? Let go of your doubt!" Nope. He just promises to be with them (and us) always and everywhere...when we are sure and when we doubt, when we worship and when we turn away, when we are alive with his presence and when we feel nothing but his absence. Always.

Provision: "Make disciples" despite doubt. There are some, I'm sure, that would suggest our provision should be letting go of doubt, but I am more inclined to Thoreau's words: *"Faith keeps many doubts in her pay. If I could not doubt, I should not believe."* I look to St. Teresa of Calcutta and her many years of struggle with doubt and desolation for inspiration. Despite her darkness, she continued to follow Christ's call. Doubt itself is not wrong; it's what we do with it. Do we despair and give up? Or do we face it—even embrace it—and continue to be faithful, despite doubts? I don't know but perhaps doubt is one of those crosses Jesus tells us to pick up when we set out to follow him.

Monday, May 18: *"We believe you came from God." Jesus answered, "Do you believe now? Behold, the hour is coming when each of you will be scattered to his own home and you will leave me alone. ...I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world"* (Jn 16:29-33).

"In the world, you will have trouble." "Thanks, Jesus, for the subtle reminder! No, really." We need to be reminded of this from time to time. We let go of false, unrealistic expectations of the temporal world and of ourselves, all the time continuing to hope and work for the Kingdom to unfold through the presence of the Spirit. Jesus has no false illusions about humanity; he knows us all too well! (Jn 2:24). But he tells us: "Not to worry. Take courage. I am with you."

Provision: Be at peace. In the classic, *The Road Less Traveled*, Dr. M. Scott Peck begins with these words: *"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it."* (This book, written in 1978, is full of wisdom, but its psychological and biological science is outdated.) Throughout the gospels, Jesus tells us the same thing: we will struggle and suffer to keep faith with the truth. He has told us this so that we might have peace in him. Each morning, remember this promise he has made to us. Be at peace.

Tuesday, May 19: *"And so I solemnly declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God"* (Acts 20:17-27).

Well, Paul doesn't sound anywhere near as nice as Jesus here! No, "I will be with you always." No, "Take courage!" "Be at peace!" No... he's just washing his hands of responsibility. Despite Paul's tone (and we see he gets more sentimental tomorrow), there is an important message about letting go. Last week, we used a quote from what is known as the Prayer of Oscar Romero, by Bishop Ken Untener: *"We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs."* After we have done all that we can to provide love and light to another, there comes a point when we need to let go and allow the Spirit to continue the work.

Provision: Let the Spirit take it from here! I can't remember if I coined this, or I read it somewhere, but I like this quote: *"Faith is like a toothbrush. You gotta have your own."* God comes to each of us where we are and as the unique person God has made us to be. If we believe we have the truth, there's no reason to try to impose that truth on others. If we really believe the Spirit is at work, pray of course for the good of others, but let God be God to the child, the parent, the spouse, the person to whom you are ministering. Let go and let the Spirit take over.

Wednesday, May 20: *"And now I commend you to God and to that gracious word of his that can build you up" ... When he had finished speaking, he knelt down and prayed with them. They were all weeping loudly...deeply distressed that he had said that they would never see his face again"* (Acts 20:28-38).

I can be tough on Paul. I think his training as a Pharisee led to church rules and doctrines that are unnecessary and outdated in light of Jesus' message of love. But then again... who the heck am I!? What have I suffered for Christ!? I like Paul just as I like Peter. They are both so human, trying hard to transcend that humanity, even though that's not what Jesus asked of them. I imagine Paul in this scene, tears streaming down his face, saying good-bye to a community that has been both challenging and supportive to him. I imagine the people, sorrowful at the thought of saying farewell.

Provision: Accepting when it's time to let go. I used to give presentations to parents of college-bound freshman about how to begin to let go. (I could always tell the parents of first children versus those who were sending their last child away!) But letting go isn't just about dramatic good-byes. (I would assure the parents kids are like boomerangs—they tend to return!) Letting go of roles or possessions that no longer bear fruit. Letting go of what we can do as we age. Letting go of unrealistic expectations. Let's commend ourselves to God and allow the Word to build us up as we let go.

Thursday, May 21: *"Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope"* (Ps 16).

This verse of Psalm 16 is quite meaningful to me right now as I am facing some issues with my health. In one simple line, it captures the real essence of my prayer. While most of us pray for specific intentions...for healing or for successful surgery, for example...it means more to me now to pray that God will keep me "safe." The Hebrew translation is *"Guard me, o God, for I shelter in you."* Guarding me, keeping me safe is not necessarily about healing my physical body, but keeping my hope alive and vibrant whatever the situation. The Lord hears our intentional prayers, but it is in letting go in prayer and praying for God's presence and shelter that we can find peace and hope, regardless of the outcome.

Provision: What do you need to be "safe" from? With the state of the world right now, I need to be safe from jadedness and discouragement. I need God to guard my faith, so that I do not lose hope. Perhaps you are tempted to lose hope, or you are feeling something of a "dark night," when it's hard to find God anywhere. Or the temptations of the world are posing a threat to your peace of mind. Where do you need safe shelter right now?

Friday, May 22: *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep"* (Jn 21:15-19).

I recently read an essay that provided me with a new look at the Ascension ("When the Lord Ascends," by Adrienne von Speyr). She presents the Ascension as a symbol of absolution: *"We are free with a freedom whose source is the ascending Son, a freedom toward God, better discipleship, becoming a new person."* I see Jesus' exchange with Peter in today's gospel as that absolution. Jesus' desire is for Peter to let go of his sin of denial so he can move forward, unencumbered, to fulfill his mission and call. (Remember, some theologians see John's view of the Ascension as a relational ascension to God, rather than a physical one as in the synoptics—the exaltation of Jesus—simultaneous with the Resurrection.) We too are called to let go of sin so that we are free to move forward.

Provision: Let go of past sinfulness. How many years did I struggle to accept absolution by continuing to beat myself up for past sins!? We know accepting God's forgiveness but not forgiving ourselves is the contrite face of pride. (When I finally realized this, it made me feel even more guilty! 😞) If you struggle to forgive yourself, spend some time with Paul's words in Second Corinthians 12 about the thorn in his flesh. Could that have been a physical ailment? Of course, but I believe it's a metaphor. That thorn represents anything within us that keeps us from fully using our God-given gifts to bring about the Kingdom of love. Remember from Monday's gospel: Jesus told us of our denials ahead of time that we may have peace in him. Take him up on his offer. Let go of past burdens and be at peace.

Saturday, May 23: *"The LORD searches the just and the wicked; the lover of violence he hates"* (Ps 11).

If God is love (1 Jn 4:8), then how can God hate? This is a question that can trip us up. We can always fall back on "Hebrew hyperbole," the tendency in Scripture to overemphasize things to get the point across (e.g., pluck out your eye, cut off your hand from Mt 18:8-9). Or we can use this to condemn others. But I wonder: if God is love, then violence and injustice cannot exist within God's realm. Those who perpetrate violence and injustice are cut off, by their own choice, from God's love. They are the ones who hate love, not love (God) that hates them.

Provision: Be a lover of love. This sounds so logical. Who wouldn't want to be a lover of love? But here's the thing: we don't get to decide who or what we choose to love. We are to love like God. Where will you be challenged to love today?