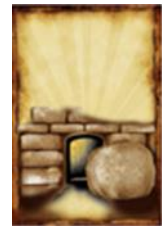


# Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings  
Lent Week Five, 2024



**Sunday, March 17:** *"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:20-23). "Amen, amen, I tell you, unless the grain of wheat falling to the ground dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears plenteous fruit" (literal translation).*

The literal translation really speaks to me: the grain of wheat that does not die remains "alone." This brings a whole new meaning to this metaphor, emphasizing the importance of "dying to self," of being vulnerable in community.

**Today's Provision: Healing is communal.** I watched a "60 Minutes" episode last night that included a story about an American Iraqi war veteran who is helping Ukrainian widows and their children deal with the trauma of war and the deaths of their spouses/fathers. The vet himself suffers from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. In the interview with him, he is overcome with emotion at how much helping others to heal has healed him. (The video is not yet online but should be posted soon on the "60 Minutes" website. It is incredibly moving.) So often, when we "fall to the ground," we want to tough it out, to go it alone, and yet great growth, plenteous fruit can come for ourselves and for others if we are willing to die to self and share. We can be wounded healers, and we can be healed in community. Reach out if you are struggling. Reach out if you have struggled. Just reach out.

**Monday, March 18:** *God stirred up the holy spirit of a young boy named Daniel, and he cried aloud: "I will have no part in the death of this woman" (Dn 13:41-62). "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:1-11).*

While we may think these stories appear together in the lectionary because they both involve the accusation of adultery, the real message is about taking a stand in the face of injustice. I love the image of God stirring up the holy spirit, already in this young boy, Daniel. He takes a risk. He is not yet part of the adult Jewish community and children had no voice. Jesus takes a risk as well. He faces a showdown with the Pharisees. The people gathered around him to hear his teaching are cowering in fear, wondering if he will flinch. There are likely others in the crowd hungry for blood. He composes himself and utters the famous words we read today. And while the Pharisees, in their hard-heartedness, go away angry, there are those in the crowd who go away healed and justified. Healed in community.

**Today's Provision: Take a stand.** The last chapter of lawyer Bryan Stevenson's powerful and provocative book, *Just Mercy*, is entitled "The Stonecatcher's Song of Sorrow." It addresses the privilege and the risks involved with being a person who stands between those accused and those all too willing to cast stones. An older woman Stevenson encounters at a courthouse explains that after her own grandson was murdered, she found her calling "to be here to catch some of the stones people cast at each other." It didn't matter to her whether the people grieving were with the victims or perpetrators. Her role was to provide compassion and support to whoever needed it. In these days of extreme division, we pray for the courage to take a stand for justice. We also pray we can be "repairers of the breach" by sowing peace, catching some of the stones being hurled across the aisle, and bringing about healing in our communities.

**Tuesday, March 19:** *When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly (Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24).*

Let's be clear about a few things. Mary is "found with child." The whole Holy Spirit part of this equation is unknown to Joseph, her parents, and whomever else is in on the secret. Imagine his torment, disappointment, and even anger. We learn Joseph is a righteous man, and in that, he has every right in Jewish society to expose her sin. But he is unwilling to shame her. In his grief and confusion, we learn another thing about Joseph: he is a compassionate man.

**Today's Provision: Practice compassion.** Joseph learns *after* his decision to protect Mary that he need not worry since he is being called to the sacred role to be the earthly father of Jesus. And wouldn't it be nice if, after being hurt by someone, we find out something that sheds light on the situation, something that mitigates our fears and hurt. This doesn't usually happen, but let's practice compassion anyway. We don't always know the story behind the situation. In Ignatian spirituality, we call it the "Ignatian Plus Sign." Try to assume good intentions on the part of anyone you encounter. I'm not suggesting we become doormats but remember: everyone has their story.

**Wednesday, March 20:** *"But you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you"* (Jn 8: 31-42, literal translation).

Jesus is talking to a group of Judeans who "believe in him." I wonder what they believe "in!" He says his word has no room among the people. Again, there is a slight nuance in the literal translation of this verse so that I hear these words as directed to me as an individual. And of course, Jesus is talking about his death in a literal sense as well, but I ask myself: Do I reserve a place for Jesus' word each day? Do I in effect "kill" his spirit when I allow things of this world to crowd him out?

**Today's Provision: Give Jesus a place to live each day!** A priest friend of mine says that if he wakes up cranky in the morning, he will not get out of bed until he knows why he is cranky. I've never asked him what's the longest time he's needed to stay in bed! I know he is very busy, so I imagine he prays for a quick answer. Our alarm goes off in the morning. Cranky or not, many of us have a busy day ahead. So, if you can't figure out what's making you cranky, just say these few words: "Dear Jesus, help me to make room in my heart today for your word and for the joy of being your disciple." See if that can at least dispel some of the crankiness!

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**Thursday, March 21:** *"No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations"* (Gn 17:3-9).

According to a Jewish folk tale, Abram was the son of an idol merchant. One day, when Abram was minding the "idol shop," he took a hammer and smashed all of the idols except the largest one. Then he put the hammer in the large idol's hand. His father returned, quite upset of course, and asked Abram what happened. Abram replied, "The idols got into a fight, and the big one smashed all the other ones." His father scoffed: "Don't be ridiculous. These idols have no life or power. They can't do anything." Abram replied, "Then, father: why do you worship them?" ...a wonderful Midrash story, like so many in the Jewish tradition. (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/abraham.html>). Abram was granted the grace and insight to understand the primacy of the one, true God. He was instructed to abandon the land of his father and set out to establish a new home, a place where God could begin to grow a people called to himself; a people that would expand to a host of nations and to the whole of humanity—all this because Abram listened to and heeded God's call. He made a place in his heart for God's voice.

**Today's Provision: Listening for God's Call.** When we read Scripture, it may seem like God's call is very obvious, or that messengers arrive with specific instructions. Of course, there was very little to distract our ancestors in faith, but even now, some people seem to get a clear call. For most of us, though, God speaks in whispers, through other people, through our thoughts and feelings. Let's pay close attention to hear what God is asking of us. Pray today that your mind and heart may be open to God's call.

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**Friday, March 22:** *"I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer"* (Ps 18).

When was the last time you told Jesus you loved him? In this psalm, I'm afraid even the author feels the need to enumerate the reasons for their love for God. What would it be like to just feel love for God because God is God, not because of what God does for you? In his beautiful song "Holy Road," the late Bruce Guthro, writes these lyrics about Jesus: *"Did you just want to feel the love for you was real? Is that all you were looking for... nothing less or more?"* Of course, you can't really love someone that you've just read about, someone you don't know very well, someone you know from someone else's experience. You need to get close enough to fall in love.

**Today's Provision: Get to know Jesus. Fall in love.** *"Nothing is more practical than finding God; that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends; what you read, who you know; what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love. Stay in love. It will decide everything"* (known as the prayer of Pedro Arrupe, SJ, written by Joseph Whelan, SJ).

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**Saturday, March 23:** *"I will make with them a covenant of peace; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them...My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (Ez 37:21-28).

Yesterday, we talked about falling in love with God. Today, we hear God wants to dwell with us. "Hold on," we may say, "this is going a bit too fast. Yes, I am in love with you, but I'm not quite ready to have you move in!" The relationship God wants with us is not one of loving from afar. God wants each of us to realize that, in the words of St. Augustine, *"God is closer to me than I am to myself."* God desires an intimate relationship with every one of us, but that can be a scary proposition. What will such a relationship require me to give up? That's a question each of us has to answer for ourselves. But what we will gain is God's covenant, God's promise of peace forever.

**Today's provision: Let God Move in.** When people marry or join a religious community, one of the hardest things is giving up individual needs and habits for the good of the relationship or community. If God were to move in, what would you need to change or give up? This is fodder for deep, insightful prayer. Use it.