

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

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



Easter Sunday, March 31: *When Simon Peter arrived, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place (Jn 20:1-9).*

This verse, with the details of the burial cloths Peter found in Jesus' tomb, brings to mind the image of Jesus calling Lazarus from his tomb: *"The one who had died came forth, feet and hands bound with strips of linen and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him and let him go free'"* (Jn 11:44). *"Unbind him and let him go free."* Jesus, through his resurrection, has freed and unbound not only himself but us as well.

Today's Provision: Be free. In my ministry and life, I encounter many people who are not free, who are tied up in knots. For some, it is the past that keeps them bound. For others, it is the loneliness and isolation of the present or fears for the future that holds them in darkness. The Easter celebration, of course, commemorates an event of the past and a promise for the future, but even more so, a reality to be lived every day of our lives.

As human beings, we will always endure some Good Fridays. When they happen, we put our sufferings at the foot of the cross. We also live through many Holy Saturdays when we are confused, frightened, and unsure. During these times, it can be good to be in the company of others who can sit with us in quiet prayer. But the essence of our faith is that the story does not end there but comes to life in rebirth and hope. Allow Jesus to loosen what holds you bound. *"Enter the dark tomb. Look, see: death has been scattered. You are free. Believe."*

Monday, April 1: *"Peter...raised his voice, and proclaimed: "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you and listen to my words. "You who are children of Israel, hear these words"(Acts 2:14, 22-33).*

I like how Peter starts out here. He calls everyone within earshot to pay attention and listen to what he has to say. Then immediately, he limits his words to the Jews. Now, there were Jews from all over visiting Jerusalem for *Shavuot* (the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, 50 days after the first day of Passover), but I'd guess everyone else—Romans, Greeks, and other Gentiles—just tune him out: "Oh, this doesn't pertain to me. I don't need to listen to this guy." I wonder if he missed an opportunity to invite others to learn. Just as the Canaanite woman calls Jesus to see past his mission to the "lost sheep of Israel," (Mt 15), Peter will be called to expand his vision as well (Acts 10).

Today's Provision: Expand your vision. What does this mean for you? Do you limit the people you interact with to those who live or think or pray or vote the same way you do? I know I tend to be in an "echo chamber" and am sorry to say, can also be judgmental to those who have different political leanings. I must be on my guard for this because by doing so, I violate a tenet of Christ's teaching. We talked last week that exclusivity was NOT an aspect of Jesus' ministry. Let's consider how we might be more open to dialogue with others "outside" the circle we've drawn around us.

Tuesday, April 2: *[Mary] saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. (Jn 20:11-18).*

In John's Gospel, Mary does not recognize Jesus. In Matthew, the two Marys seem to know it's him right away. There's lots of scholarship about the differences in the Resurrection stories but I like what the late Raymond E. Brown, SS says in his book, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (1972): *"...the evangelists are telling us the witnesses enjoyed not only sight of Jesus, but also and even primarily insight... Thus, the appearances entail a sight that involves revelation, a sight that goes beyond ordinary experience"* (pp. 112-113).

Today's Provision: Do you recognize Jesus? I'd like to say that when I am out and about, I try to see Jesus in the people I encounter; not just in the poor, but in everyone. I'd like to think I treat everyone with the respect with which I would treat Jesus, but I know this is not always the case. It takes heightened attention to maintain that perspective. But let's look at an insight, another way to pose this question: Do I recognize Jesus in myself? Not in my neediness (although that counts too), but in my ability to be present to others? Rather than just *seeing* Jesus in others, how about if I can *be* Jesus to others? Because if I can recognize Jesus within me and *be* Jesus to others, I will never fail to see him reflected in the eyes of the people I meet. Consider praying with this insight today.

Wednesday, April 3: *When [a man crippled from birth] saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. Peter looked intently at him...and said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk"(Acts 3:1-10).*

It's "go time" for Peter. Sure, he was likely among the disciples Jesus sent out two-by-two to heal but now, things are different. He's on his own in a sense—no human Jesus to return to—with only his faith to strengthen him. And he knows all too well that he failed in the past to stay true to that faith. I like to think that as Peter looks intently at the crippled

man, he is summoning all his courage and hope that Jesus' Spirit will indeed work through him. And I also like to imagine that as he and John enter the temple for the three o'clock hour of prayer, Peter is brought to his knees, overcome by humility and gratitude that he has been found worthy to be a healer in Jesus' name.

Today's Provision: Do you have faith to heal someone today? Each of us has an opportunity each day to heal someone. Summon up your courage and your faith. Be humble. Offer someone healing, especially if that someone is you.

Thursday, April 4: *What is man that you should be mindful of him? You have made him little less than the angels, given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet" (Ps 8).*

The line that reads human beings are made "little less than the angels" has me concerned for the angels! If I were an angel, I wouldn't take this as a compliment!

God has given us "rule" over the works of God's hands. How would you want to be ruled? What kind of ruler would you want? I think most of us would like rulers with gentle hands and honest hearts. Ones who want only for our good; ones who allow us to flourish when we are strong, and care for us when we are weak. We'd all like the kind of ruler God is for us. Why then should we not be the same kind of gentle, caring ruler for Mother Earth and her creatures?

Today's Provision: Care for the works of God's hands. I'm afraid we know the answer to how we've performed as "rulers" of Mother Earth. We have not been benevolent or compassionate, but instead have tried to drain her dry, and are now seeing the environmental and societal results of our abuse. Over the next two months, several international organizations will celebrate Mother Earth Month, Earth Day (April 22), and *Laudato Si'* Week (May 19-26; <https://laudatosiweek.org/>). Spend time exploring what you can do to lessen the impact you have on the earth. If we all make just a few changes, we could make a difference. Think about supporting companies and politicians who pay attention to environmental issues. Let those who don't, know your opinion. God wants us to look upon the earth and her creatures and each other as God does: not as separate nations and kingdoms, but as an entire family, ALL being cared for and fed by the Earth's great bounty!

Friday, April 5: *"There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:1-12).*

I'm confronting these words after avoiding them for 15 years. I am not a theologian or a biblical scholar, nor do I speak for any church or practice. All I can do is to add what the Spirit has led me to write. The idea that only those who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved has been argued for centuries and is still a tenet of some Christian denominations. In the Roman tradition, Vatican II attempted to get around this with the term "anonymous Christian," adapting a concept from Karl Rahner, SJ as to how to answer the question of salvation. This, understandably, caused problems, particularly for our Jewish sisters and brothers. I personally believe in a God of mercy and that all will be saved, at peace with our Creator. I also believe: *"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in them.... There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because God first loved us.... whoever loves God must also love his brothers and sisters" (1 Jn 4:16-21).* IF we claim to believe Jesus is God and God is love, then the path to salvation, now and forever, is through God's true name: Love. *"Our savior God ... intends that all human beings shall be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:3-4).*

Today's Provision: What do you believe? Why do you believe? I've encountered many people in my ministry who are Christians, not primarily out of love, but out of fear. It takes time and lots of prayer to come out from under the images of hell and damnation that many of us heard preached and may still hear preached. If fear is the underlying source of your belief, I encourage you to find a good, compassionate spiritual companion. Consider consulting someone outside your faith community but be sure to discern well. Is there someone you know who radiates love, who seems to have a healthy, loving relationship with God? Think about talking with them and see where the Spirit leads.

Saturday, April 6: *"Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:13-21).*

This verse reminds me of the story in the Book of Daniel of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: *"King Nebuchadnezzar ... If our God can save us from the white-hot furnace, may he save us! But even if he will not, you should know we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up."* It is courageous to stand up for what you believe, especially in the face of the powers that be. Peter and John trust their consciences. They trust what they have experienced. They trust the Spirit.

Today's Provision: What have you seen and heard from the Spirit? It can be easier just to go along with what others in authority tell us to do. It might seem easier to just ignore the voice of the Spirit. But she is persistent, that Spirit, and she will continue to knock at the door of your heart, waiting for you to invite her in. Listen to what she says.