

Provisions for the Journey

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Easter Week 2022



Sunday, April 17: *"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."* (Col 3:1-4)

It's Easter Sunday. We rejoice and proclaim Christ has risen. This is not a time to hide! So what's this about my life being "hidden with Christ in God?" The disciples have spent the last day hidden away in fear, and fear will continue for them until they receive the Holy Spirit and are emboldened to come out of hiding. When Paul talks about us being hidden with Christ in God, he is telling us we need not fear. The essence of our being is now wrapped in God's protection, hidden from harm and guided by the Spirit. It is a paradox as is so much in our faith: We are hidden in God so there is no need for us to hide.

Today's Provision: Come out of hiding. Many have been in hiding for the past two years and for good reason. Others have chosen to brave the virus in order to help others. We thank you and pray for you. There is still reason to be cautious in terms of caring for our physical bodies, but are we hiding our spiritual selves as well, crouching behind a wall of despair? We are each called to give testimony to the role faith plays in banishing our fears. Spend time during this Easter season thinking about this question: Is your life free from fear, hidden *in* the protection and love of God through Christ? Or do you live in fear, hidden *from* God, afraid to allow Jesus' Spirit to take hold of your heart?

Monday, April 18: *"Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope."* (Ps 16)

Apt prayer to follow our Easter reflection. Our hope is in the Lord. And where is the Lord? We believe Christ sits at the right hand of God, but we also believe something else Jesus told us: We find him in those who suffer, those who are vulnerable. Gee, it's so much easier to rely on the mystical hope of the world to come than to look around at the pain and misery that exists in the physical world and find hope. And yet, in order to live in the glory of the Resurrection, we must also glory in the cross.

Today's Provision: Look for hope now. At Easter, I make New "Risen Life" resolutions. One I am going to try – refrain from "doom-scrolling." It's amazing how addictive that can become if I am not careful. (Remember, "no news is good news" so what we see on the news is by definition bad!) I'm not suggesting we ignore what is happening in the world, but perhaps we get our news from one balanced source and not read multiple takes on the same story. Perhaps we mine the stories for glimmers of hope or we resolve to do something to give hope to others impacted by the pain we read. Take today's provision one step further: Don't just look for hope. Be hope for someone else.

Tuesday, April 19: *"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* (Acts 2:36-41)

I wonder how many times this line has been uttered over the centuries! It's almost like a competition: which generation can be truly be labeled the most corrupt? I guess we are at least in the running!

I am reminded of Jesus' words in John 17:16 -19: *"They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. ...As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth."*

Again, we pull a thread from our Easter reflection: Jesus sends us into the world...the messy, corrupt, and sometimes dangerous world...shielded by God's hand and protection. Saving ourselves from this corrupt generation does not mean we withdraw from it. It means we engage with it, confident in the faith that God protects our hearts and souls. And as we engage with the world in confidence, we might just be graced to lead others on the way of salvation as well.

Today's Provision: Be a person of hope and love where you are. I think about the desert mothers and fathers of old who chose to leave the corruptions of the world. There are those called today to this life of prayer and austerity, but most of us are called right where we are, in the midst of the messiness of everyday life. A saint in waiting you might be interested in learning about is Blessed Charles de Foucauld. A lovely book, *Letters from the Desert*, by his disciple, Brother Carlo Carretto, speaks of a need for the deep silence and contemplative prayer of the desert, particularly for those whose call to action is lived out in spiritual desert of "the real world." Believe me, I know this is hard, but try to take just a few minutes in silence each morning to put yourself completely in God's hand. Ask God to help you stay confident and aware of God's protection and the inspirations of the Spirit as you go about your day. Make a commitment to be a person of hope and love to all you encounter.

Wednesday, April 20: *"Look to the LORD in his strength; seek to serve him constantly."*(Ps 105)

This is an easy one, not much more I can add. The ONLY way to serve the Lord constantly is through God's strength. We cannot do it on our own.

Today's Provision: Access God's strength. Are you facing a difficult situation? Is the day-to-day grind getting to you? Were you raised, as many were, to tough it out, to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps?" Were you told "God helps those who help themselves?" Well, here's what I say, a favorite line I saw outside a church: "If God is your co-pilot...switch seats!" This doesn't mean we don't do what we need to do to help ourselves; we just need to access God's strength first in order to do it. (Another favorite line: "Trust in God, but paddle the canoe!") Start each day strengthened by God's love and mercy.

Thursday, April 21: *"Peace be with you...Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?..." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* (Lk 24:35-48)

How open is your mind to Scripture? We may think Jesus warns us here that we should not have questions or be troubled, so we avoid Scripture and stick with the lessons we learned as children. I don't think that's what Jesus is telling us. He knows our humanity and the innate tendency we have to apply our God-given gift of reason to what is presented to us. But he invites us first to a place of peace. "Don't be troubled by your questions. I am with you."

Today's Provision: Read Scripture with new eyes. You may want to get a whole new translation of the Bible in order to stop the tapes from rewinding and playing back in your head. Maybe there was a sermon you heard or read in the past that was either really insightful or caused you much trouble. It's hard to put those memories aside, and to be honest, if the Spirit is still speaking to you through that sermon, there may be things you need to take a bit deeper. But it can also be a way to dismiss your own ability to be open to the Spirit. Before you sit down to engage Scripture, start by imagining Jesus saying to you, "Peace be with you." Then ask Jesus to open your mind and heart to understand the lesson he wants you to learn. If anything troubles you, consider discussing it with a minister or a wise, trusted friend.

Friday, April 22: *"Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore.* (Jn 21:1-14)

I'm practicing what I preach today. I have been struck in the past by the image of Peter dragging the net ashore by himself. There were six others with him. Why didn't they help him? We hear Jesus addressed "them," not just Peter. Did Peter shoo the other away, still over-confident that he could handle whatever the Lord asked of him? Did Peter think that since Jesus had named him Cephas, "the Rock," that he needed to be as physically strong as a rock (a first-century version of Dwayne Johnson 😊)? Was he still trying so hard to prove himself that he refused help?

Today's Provision: Recognize Simon Peter in ourselves. I need time to contemplate what the Spirit is telling me here, although I have some inkling. Peter was my go-to saint as I began my conversion 20 years ago, and I still find so much to identify with as he struggles to find his way. Later in this same chapter, Jesus tells him: *"When you were younger, you used to ...go where you wanted, but as you grow old, you will stretch out your hands (and be led) where you do not want to go."* (v. 18, adapted). I too, at times, still believe I need to prove myself, to earn Jesus' love and trust after so many betrayals. I too still balk at receiving help or ceding control, particularly as I grow older. I think there is a bit of Simon Peter in all of us. Let's pray to him to receive from Christ the grace to surrender.

Saturday, April 23: *"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) *But later, as the Eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised.* (Mk 16:9-15)

"We walk by faith and not by sight." (2 Cor 5:7) Just as Peter and John address the Jewish elders respectfully, we too need to speak out respectfully about what we have seen and heard by virtue of our faith experience; but speak out, we must. And we follow our consciences and pray for the courage to take a stand against injustice and apathy in the face of forces that might just be trying to keep an uneasy peace or to retain power. It is so much easier to tend to our own little world and the salvation of our own souls, thinking we can do so just by our own private piety. It is so much easier to harden our hearts.

Today's Provision: Read the Acts of the Apostles. Read the whole thing. It is a story of dramatic sacrifice, a story of pettiness and in-fighting; a story of great courage and great confusion; a story of dialogue in search of the truth, a story of hearts open and closed. Read it with an eye for our world today. See what lessons we can learn from these early seekers along the Way.