

Provisions for the Journey

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



Sunday, May 1: *At nightfall, weeping enters in, but with the dawn, rejoicing.... You changed my mourning into dancing; undone my sack cloth and bound me with joy! O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks. (Ps 30)*

In many Catholic traditions, the month of May is dedicated to Mary. But after a quick review of all the readings for the Easter season, I find no mention of Mary; only a passing one in the first chapter of Acts. In St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, he includes a non-scripture-based contemplation on Jesus appearing to Mary just after he has risen. If you google images of the scene, you will find many artists' interpretations of what that might have looked like. (And, at the risk of sounding disrespectful, I think to myself as a mom... "You'd better had checked in with Mom first!" 😊) If I were an artist, I would use these words from Psalm 30 to depict Mary... dancing and filled with joy!

Today's Provision: Dance and forever give God thanks! How's this for a provision: Dance! At one point today, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for what God has done for me. It is such a gift when we experience God's goodness and benevolence washing over us like that, so dancing was easy today! But there's a lot to mourn over these days and perhaps for some reading this, your sorrow is raw and real. Don't deny your suffering but ask the Risen Lord to be with you to give you hope and to be a sign of the promise of happier, peaceful times ahead. Ask "the Lord of the Dance" to lead you on the steps you need to take.

Monday, May 2: *Even when princes sat to scheme against me, your servant dwelled on your statutes. Yes, your precepts are my delight, my constant counselors. (Ps 119:23-24, Hebrew translation)*

I don't know about you but I am nowhere near important enough to have anybody, much less leaders, scheming against me! That doesn't mean though that I am not threatened by forces that would distract me from God's precepts and especially from God's promise. The psalmist is speaking of the Law — "your statutes" — and it is all well and good to dwell on those. Statutes can keep us from falling to temptations that plague us, but the message of this psalm is bigger than that. The "princes of darkness" that scheme against us are despair and desolation, judgment and condemnation. We need to have as our constant counselor God's promise of mercy and deliverance. To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind means that we trust God to be true to that promise, even if (and when) we (or others) fail.

Today's Provision: Follow the light. The light of God's presence is even more important in days of darkness. Some find that light in the statutes, but if we are not careful, they can lead us back into the darkness of judging and condemning. Instead, follow the light of Jesus and his words of mercy and compassion for both ourselves and others.

Tuesday, May 3: *"Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip?" (Jn 14:6-14)*

How long have you been with Jesus? Do you know him?

Today's Provision: Getting to know Jesus. The first question to ask yourself: "Do I want to get to know Jesus?" I mean really know him. It's important to learn about the historical Jesus. There are lots of books that can give you all the details about what life would have been like for a Jewish man at that time. Having a context for his words and teachings can go a long way to help us better understand them. (That's also why I like translations so much.) But would you pick a life partner just by reading their online profile? Getting to know Jesus means spending time with him and not just "quality time," whatever that is. (FYI, all time should be quality time!) It takes "Chronos" time — measured, real time -- to get to "Kairos" time, a place where intimacy can be nurtured.

I think there are a lot of people who know *of* or *about* Jesus and his teachings, but don't really know him. I'm not saying I have it all figured out either. I am amazed at how much I unlearn and learn anew each time I sit down with him. But sit down with him, I must.

There are many ways to get to know Jesus better. I am partial to Ignatian prayer, but there are all kinds of prayer approaches and they should all begin with these simple steps: Thank Jesus for his presence in your life and tell him directly that you want to know him better. Ask him to send his Spirit to guide you and then make sure to set aside time each day not just to talk "at" him — he already knows you and your intentions better than you know yourself — but to listen. Find a spiritual guide if this is hard for you.

Wednesday, May 4: *"For many of those having impure spirits in them, shouting out in a loud voice, came out..."* (Acts 8:1-8, literal translation by David Bentley Hart: Footnote: *"Whether intentionally or by inadvertence, the Greek text speaks of those possessed by impure spirits [or, really, those "possessing" such spirits] as the ones who "came out" as a result of exorcism."*)

I realize this is nit-picky but the Spirit led me to read the footnote, so here we are! For me, the image of the real person coming out as a result of the healing (as opposed to a spirit being driven out) is striking and empowering. I think of someone finally able, with God's grace, to be the person God created them to be. Some scholars say biblical possessions are likely seizures or epilepsy, but let's expand our imagination: maybe what ails a person is addiction, depression, anxiety, or mental illness. Or maybe it is shame or denial, living in hiding behind a façade. The phrase "came out" is loaded in our culture but it's about new life emerging from the darkness to be the person God intended you to be. By his love, Jesus empowers you to break free from whatever holds you back.

Today's Provision: Be who God created you to be. We are all created in God's image. In John's first letter, we hear God is light and love – that's the image of God – and *"If we say, 'We have fellowship with him' while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth."* Let's encourage, not condemn. Let's help those who struggle. Let's accept those to whom God has given different gifts. May we rejoice when all can be who God created them to be.

Thursday, May 5: *The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route."* (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip, the Evangelist (who, BTW, is not the same Philip the Apostle in Tuesday's gospel) has been doing amazing things in the city of Samaria. Then, all of a sudden, an angel appears and tells him to go off into the wilderness. Samaria to Jerusalem is about 35 miles — not a hop, skip, and a jump — and the road south to Gaza was likely not well-traveled in those days. As Philip sets off, I wonder if he is thinking, "Why the heck would God send me away from a place where I can make lots of new disciples into the middle of nowhere?" This is often how God's call works. Maybe we have visions of doing extraordinary things for the faith; maybe our role has been, up to this point, far-reaching but God has now put us in a more modest setting (called retirement, perhaps?). Maybe, like Philip, we will only reach one person on an otherwise empty road, but we trust in God's plan. That one person Philip encounters along the way will bring the Good News to a whole new nation!

Today's Provision: Trust God's plan for you. I'm a spiritual guide for the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, a US-based organization of retired people who want to be part of a social justice- and spiritually-minded community. This juncture in life can be a tender time for some, and calls for prayer, introspection, and acceptance. As we talked about Tuesday, listening is key to discerning our call. Ask God to show you the way. Trust God to lead you.

Friday, May 6: *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."* (Acts 9:1-20)

Paul is a rule follower when it comes to the Law, but I don't see him as someone who enjoys being told what he "must do." I imagine him as somewhat of a hot-head, a zealot who pursues his cause with fervor and determination, but based on his terms. After he is struck blind, he has no choice but to be dependent, led by the hand to Damascus. We too like being in control of our own destiny and can be resentful if some stranger out of the blue tells us what we must do. Most of us don't physically persecute the Body of Christ -- although we see images on the news of exactly that -- but does our need for control cause us to do (or not do) things that hurt Christ's Body nonetheless?

Today's Provision: Cede control to be in control. Perhaps, it's as simple as getting anxious about the way others are driving or how your child/spouse approaches something in a way different from the way you do. Or it's more involved, like taking a stand against injustice you witness. Pay close attention to your anxiety level. Note when it escalates. Is it about something inconsequential or out of your control? How will you feel if you do not calmly address what you see? Consciously take some measured breaths to calm yourself down. Count to ten. Pray "thy will be done." This is a learned behavior that takes practice but is so helpful for the not-so-simple stresses we encounter in life.

Saturday, May 7: *Peter said to (the man who was paralyzed for eight years), "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed."* (Acts 9:31-42)

"Peter, slow down! Let the poor man get his bearings! He needs to get used to walking again. The bed can be made later." 😊 Peter wants Aeneas to leave the past behind and move forward to give witness to Christ. A natural reaction to healing is to get up right away and forget our woundedness. But I'm reminded of the Samaritan leper who comes back to thank Jesus and give him praise before heading off to share his own good news. When we experience God's mercy, we may find ourselves in a big hurry to leave the past behind. Remember though to take a moment or two to reflect on where we have been and where we are now. Give thanks and praise to Christ Jesus, our healer.

Today's Provision: Say thank you! Reflect on a time you were healed...maybe not cured, but healed. Or a time you escaped a dire situation. Even if you were thankful then, go back and say thank you again. (For an amazing story of coming back to say thanks, watch <https://blog.theanimalrescuesite.greatergood.com/thanks-from-rescued-whale/>)