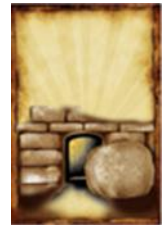


Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Easter Week Three, 2025



As the Spirit leads, I will be reflecting on the papacy of Pope Francis. May he rest in the peace he tried until his death to bring about in the world. (If you've not yet read this beautiful tribute to Francis by a Hindu, go to <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/opinion/107284/the-loss-of-a-good-man-a-tribute-to-pope-francis-and-the-power-of-universal-faith>).

Sunday, May 4: *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing"* (Rev 5:11-14).

As I read this verse, I think about Jesus (the Lamb) and Jesus (the man) and how he would react to receiving the gifts the author of Revelations enumerates. I can see him treasuring wisdom, strength, and blessing, but the rest of them—honor and glory? Power and riches? These don't fit the Jesus who came "to serve rather than to be served," who eschewed all forms of riches and glory...in fact, ran away from them. Of course, John of Patmos writes in the context of his time, in terms of the Roman Empire—monarchical, power-driven, and rich, but I don't know...it seems to me that when Jesus tells us he is "the Way," he is NOT referring to money and power and glory. We were blessed to witness this kind of humility in Pope Francis as he lived following the example of Jesus, the servant king.

Provision: How do you view "Christ, the King?" The more I read, the more I study and pray, the more I think we've got this concept of "kingdom" all wrong. Humans can't seem to shake the idea that power and pomp, and gold and glory are what God expects and wants to see. I think these are, in fact, an affront to God. God wants to see love and compassion and mercy and justice as the foundation of the kingdom. It puzzles me to no end how Christians can see Jesus in the monarchical, power-driven, exclusionary leaders we have put in charge. What is your opinion? What do you see as the Kingdom of God that Jesus, our servant king, desires for the world?

Monday, May 5: *Though princes meet and talk against me, your servant meditates on your statutes. Yes, your decrees are my delight; they are my counselors* (Ps 119).

This verse calls to mind the "princes" of the Catholic Church that met and talked against Pope Francis. They objected to the ways in which he took counsel in the decrees of Christ: "love one another," "do not judge," "love your enemies," "do not despise these little ones." They were very open in expressing their opinions publicly, both in writing and from the pulpit. But as Paulo Coelho says, *"The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion."*

Provision: Whose example do you follow? In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages people to follow the example he sets forth, to imitate him as he imitates Christ (11:1). Then why don't we just imitate Christ? That makes sense, but God sends people among us, in every age, to teach us what it means to follow Christ in the context of our time. Jesus, of course, treasured nature and respected Mother Earth, but we need to understand what treasuring the earth means for us today. This is why Pope Francis urgently appealed to us to change our destructive, wasteful ways. There were things acceptable in Jesus' time like slavery and the mistreatment of women and foreigners (remember him calling the Canaanite woman "a dog?!) that Jesus would condemn today. Pope Francis has been and will continue to be a prophet for me, an example of living the way Jesus would live today. Whose example do you follow?

Tuesday, May 6: *"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always oppose the Holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?"* (Acts 7:51-8:1).

"Kasha oreph." a stiff neck. A phrase used in the OT to describe the Israelites and their hardheartedness and arrogance. People unwilling to listen, to recognize their faults, to turn back from their sinfulness and mistakes. Human beings tend to dig in their heels to maintain their stance, even when they see things happen that call them to metanoia (a change of mind and heart). People unwilling to admit they are wrong can turn mean, even violent, "grinding their teeth" at the one who calls them out, like the elders do with Stephen in today's reading...like some world and church leaders did when Pope Francis called out hypocrisy.

Provision: Call out hypocrisy. Forgive me if I am repeating something I have written recently, but it seems people are just fine following Jesus' words in Mt 25: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, even visiting prisoners. But how about Jesus' words in Mt 23, when he denounces the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, white-washed tombs? Most people are not as "fine" with that. Reflect on what keeps you from following Jesus to call out hypocrisy.

Wednesday, May 7: *"Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me"* (Jn 6:35-40).

"The Father loves the Son and has given him everything" (Jn 3:35). Everything, everyone. Jesus will not reject anyone who comes to him. No conditions. No "only if" you do this or that. The father does not put conditions on the prodigal son ("clean up first" or "you have to earn your sonship back.") The Publican is justified in his need for mercy; the Pharisee, in his show of false piousness, is not. Many criticisms leveled at Pope Francis had to do with him engaging people who others viewed as sinners or not worthy. Hmmh. He did not reject anyone who came to him, especially those who were oppressed, but he also didn't hesitate to point out pretense. Sound like anyone else we know?

Provision: Who do you reject? I imagine very few of us get a pass here. I know I sure don't! (I think about the old Irish curse: *"May those who love [read: agree with!] us, love us; and for those who don't love [read: agree with!] us, may God turn their hearts; and if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles, so we will know them by their limping!"*) I can reject out of hand people who call themselves Christian while fostering hate and exclusion. I close my ears and my heart instead of looking to dialogue to see if we can find common ground. I'm praying a lot these days for the grace to be open, to not reject anyone. How is it for you these days? Who do you reject?

Thursday, May 8: *They came to some water, and the eunuch said, "What is to prevent my being baptized?" Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him* (Acts 8:26-40).

Eunuchs were not accepted in Jewish society. In Jesus' time, they weren't treated as badly as in the time of the patriarchs, but they were still not allowed admittance into the community. So, this story goes beyond a conversion experience. It is a story of welcome and acceptance to a class of people that heretofore were ostracized. In Jesus' name, we welcome one and all, as Pope Francis did...or do we?

Provision: Welcome everyone. Does your church welcome everyone to the table? I believe Jesus would not exclude anyone, and for us to do so is hubris. Who are we to determine how the Spirit will move someone who receives Christ through the sacrament? *"The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. ... The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators"* (from *Evangelii Gaudium*, by Pope Francis, p.41). What is your opinion? Who do you think Jesus would exclude from coming to the table?

Friday, May 9: *Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains* (Acts 9:1-20).

Saul's undertaking here is no small mission. Damascus is about 150 miles from Jerusalem, so it's about a two-week trip (although I can see Saul, the zealot, pushing his traveling companions to make better time!). Then he will be rounding up followers of "the Way" and dragging them back to Jerusalem. I like to imagine Saul's fervent prayers as he travels, hoping to arrest and enchain as many of these rebels as he can, doing what he thinks is best for his people and his God. I don't doubt his sincerity and dedication to his cause. It is towards the end of his journey to Damascus when the Lord strikes him blind. When we commit our whole selves to a cause, it can bring about what we talked of on Tuesday: a stiff neck, an inability to look around and see what else is out there. We too can be blind.

Provision: What "Cause" causes you to be blind? The Spirit posed tough questions this week. One thing I must remember is that, for many people, the fate of the free world is not the most pressing issue. It's getting enough food for their kids, avoiding deportation, working three jobs to make rent. They don't have the luxury to debate this policy or that politician. They're trying to survive. Let's not allow big-picture Causes cause us to be blind to those in need.

Saturday, May 10: *Peter sent them all out...Then he said, "Tabitha, rise up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. He gave her his hand and raised her up* (Acts 9:31-42).

One of the many things I loved about Pope Francis was his gentleness, especially towards those who were suffering. The moving images of him comforting the young boy whose father had just died, his embrace of the man with the disfiguring disease, his joy as he welcomed new parents, his kneeling in front of prisoners to wash their feet. Gentle, like Peter offering his hand to Tabitha, like Elijah when he raises the widow's son, like Jesus with Jairus' daughter and the widow's deceased son. All these people have been through an ordeal. They are vulnerable, confused, but are shown gentleness and a loving hand to help them.

Provision: Lend a gentle, helping hand. Friends who are grieving... those who've been through a traumatic event or are recovering from illness or addiction...those who have received faith at Easter. Let's remember that once the big event is over—be it sad, challenging, or joyous—people still need support and a guiding, gentle hand to help them get up on their feet. Who will you reach out to today?