

Provisions as We Become A New Creation

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Sixth Week of Easter 2021



Sunday, May 9: *"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love."* (1 Jn 4:7-10)

This week's readings have several references to love and inclusion. We hear from Peter today that *"God shows no partiality,"* and that *"the circumcised believers were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles."* If we truly believe God is love, this should come as no surprise. I imagine it pains God when we choose to exclude people for whatever reason, when we build walls instead of bridges.

Today's Provision: Look at your heart. I'm called to take a good look at my heart today. While I can say I don't harbor hate for any one person, I am surely *"without love"* for some groups (which is the definition of bias and prejudice). If we claim to know God, then love must fill our hearts for all people. Do we love our "enemies" or those with whom we vehemently disagree? Jesus appoints us to go bear fruit that will remain, but that doesn't guarantee we will see those fruits in our lifetime. What can you do today to plant seeds of love and inclusion in your world?

Monday, May 10: *"...in fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God."* (Jn 15:26 – 16:4)

Can killing another ever be of God? I remember reading about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his conflict as he participated in the plot to kill Hitler. He wrote that he was throwing himself at the mercy of God for he knew that what he was doing was a sin. There is a place for self-defense and protecting the lives of others – we are thankful for the true civil servants who put their lives on the line every day, particularly in my country where gun violence is so rampant. I think of the insurrectionists who invaded the US Capitol building a few months ago, threatening to kill politicians, and participating in a riot that caused the deaths of several people. I imagine if I were to ask, some would say they were doing it "for God and country."

When God stilled the hand of Abraham about to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God was saying, "Enough is enough. Do not ever think that killing another human being in my name offers me praise or is a sacrifice I demand. *'I take no pleasure in death.'*" (Ez 33:11) It took a millennium or so for the tribal sensibilities of the Israelites to come to an inflection point in Jesus and his words: "turn the other cheek."

Today's provision: Do not kill. I think of those ostracized, persecuted, and killed for their faith, in my own country and across the world. I doubt anyone reading this would ever consider taking the mortal life of another, but we need to reflect on the spiritual lives of others as well. I think of children who are abused, their spirits killed, some at the very hands of those charged with forming them. I think of the poor and oppressed whose spirits are knocked down, day after day. As Christians, we attest that the life of our spirits is much more important than our mortal lives. Let's make sure the words we say and the things we do don't injure or kill the spirit of another.

Tuesday, May 11: *"But I tell you, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you."* (Jn 16:5-11)

In his book, *The Holy Longing*, Fr. Ron Rolheiser expands the common definition of the Paschal Mystery to include the Ascension and Pentecost. He explains the disciples, while overjoyed by the Resurrection, were to grieve and be fearful yet again after Jesus' ascension. They could not cling to him, even in his resurrected state. They needed to allow him to go, to "let the past bless them" so as to receive the wisdom of the Spirit and move ahead.

Today's Provision: Letting go of the past. In order to grow in faith, we have to let go of the past—the good things and the bad—and allow the past to teach us what we are to learn. What is it you hold onto? Can you let it ascend to God so as to receive the grace-filled lessons of the Spirit?

Wednesday, May 12: *"You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious. As I walked around looking at your shrines, I discovered an altar 'To an Unknown God.'"* (Acts 17:15, 22-18:1)

Paul's faith and the Greeks' practice are totally different yet Paul recognizes and acknowledges their religious nature. Even though he is *"exasperated at the sight of the city full of idols,"* (v.16), he doesn't shy away from walking around *"looking carefully at the shrines,"* a huge taboo for a Jew! He doesn't denigrate or belittle the Greeks, even though they have already belittled him (v.18).

Does everyone buy what he has to say? Of course not. But some do, and perhaps others may feel the Spirit's promptings later. Within the same religious practice and within congregations, we know people on opposite sides of one issue or another who can't or won't agree on anything. What does it say about us if we cannot find common ground as members of the Body of Christ?

Today's Provision: Respect the other. Who is "them" for you? Do you know any "thems" with whom you can have a civil discussion? Can we put aside labels and find common ground? Let us pray today for families and communities torn apart by political or religious strife. If you find yourself estranged from someone, pray the Spirit will strengthen you to make the first overture. Don't belittle the other. If you really believe you have the truth, then there's no need for you to worry or argue or fight. The Spirit is the one who changes hearts.

Thursday, May 13: *"Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; break into song; sing praise."* (Ps 98)

There's a lot of singing and praising in this week's psalms. I know people in my area are beginning to venture out again, going to back to worship in community and, while perhaps not singing, praising God for the sense of rebirth and renewal as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. Not so in many other lands. Friends in India tell horrible stories of mass death and despair. Brazil too is facing record infection numbers and deaths. Dirges and mournful wailing are heard, not songs of joy. So while some of us are seeing signs of hope and singing songs of praise, let us not forget our sisters and brothers suffering so terribly around the world. Let us reach out in prayer and compassion to those whose sorrow is not abating.

Today's Provision: Pray for those still suffering. Don't think I am trying to be a "Debbie Downer" here. We should be joyful and celebrating as we begin to reconnect with loved ones – I can't wait to be with family and friends again -- but it's easy to keep to our own little bubble, shielding ourselves from bad news. We are all the Body of Christ: *"We are one, after all, you and I, together we suffer, together exist and forever will recreate each other."* (de Chardin) There may not be much we can do practically, but we can pray for God's mercy and peace for those still suffering the horrors of this pandemic. Make it a point to hold this specific intention in prayer every day.

Friday, May 14: *"He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people."* (Ps 113)

"The princes of his own people." So it behooves the princes of God's own people to avoid getting caught up with power and politics on issues that have no bearing on the real lives and needs of the poor and lowly.

I've decided to stop using the terms "conservative" and "liberal" or "progressive" to describe a person's spiritual and religious leanings. These are political terms and I know plenty of political conservatives who have deep and open hearts for the oppressed, and plenty of political liberals who talk a good game but don't live their words. Instead, I've started using "COGs" and "COTs:" Christians on the Ground" and "Christians on the Throne." God says here that the poor will be lifted up to sit with princes but I humbly suggest the first step is for some of the princes to get off their lofty thrones and to spend more time on the ground.

Today's Provision: Are you a COG or a COT? While my reflection is obviously directed at the hierarchy, it applies to each of us as well. If this concept makes you uncomfortable, all the more reason to consider praying with it. God calls each of us where we are and I would venture to say most of us are somewhere in the middle, vacillating between the two. So think about it this way: what will you do today to bring the throne a little closer to the poor and lowly, the people on the ground?

Saturday, May 15: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you ...On that day you will ask in my name, and I do not tell you that I will ask the Father for you."* (Jn 16:23-28)

Wait a minute...what does Jesus mean here? He says for us to ask in his name, but that he won't ask the Father for us? Jesus is clarifying for his disciples an issue that seems to crop up a lot—that the Father and Son are one. Remember in John 14 when Phillip asks Jesus to show them the Father (*"and that will be enough for us!"*). Jesus is not our intermediary to God. He doesn't need to be. He is God.

Today's Provision: Pray in Jesus' name. Christians often end prayers with, *"we pray in Jesus' name."* It's a way to acknowledge our relationship with the cosmic Divine that became incarnate in the person of Jesus. There is such comfort in that. And praying in Jesus' name also helps us to pray the way Jesus prayed—intimately and from our hearts. Pray from your heart today...in Jesus' name.