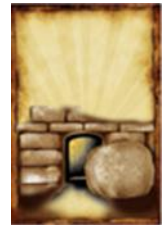


Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

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



Sunday, May 11: *"For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water"* (Rev 7:9, 14-17).

Have you ever asked yourself the (hard) question: If Jesus came today sharing the same message and calling out hypocrisy as he did 2,000 years ago, would I follow him or would I follow those in charge? (For a troubling take on this question, read "The Grand Inquisitor" scene in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*).

John tells us the Lamb will be our shepherd. The lamb, the innocent one, the gentle and vulnerable one, will lead us. Nice, comforting image, but how real is it? How does it feel to follow someone who is innocent and vulnerable? It's not what we are accustomed to, not what we look for in our human leaders. Gentleness and vulnerability are not traits our culture reveres or rewards; in fact, we tend to mock people who display these traits. Just look at the current leadership in the United States to see what I mean.

Jesus spoke and acted in ways that were hard for the people of his time—and for us—to accept. "The last shall be first." "Those who lose their life will save it." "Blessed are the poor." "Bring the children, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's no wonder those in high places want to get the real Jesus out of the picture as soon as possible.

Provision: What is my answer? Jesus walked the earth 2,000 years ago but make no mistake: he walks and lives among us still, still gentle, still vulnerable. Will I follow the kings of the world or Jesus, the Lamb, our shepherd King?

Monday, May 12: *When they heard this, they stopped objecting and glorified God, saying, "God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too"* (Acts 11:1-18).

A great gift of reading Scripture stories again and again is finding new things that strike a chord given the context in which you are reading it. I prepare these reflections using the practice of *Lectio Divina* and seeing where the Spirit leads. Today, she has a sense of humor! The first thing that struck me in this passage: its' amazing to see how quickly the naysayers who confront Peter for eating with Gentiles change their tune and praise God. Like that ever happens! Most human beings dig in their heels and become more stubborn and entrenched. While I imagine there are some that do just that, it is a great example of how the Spirit works to change people's hearts if we are true to our witness.

Provision: Allow the Spirit to change hearts. There is so much strife and conflict today, it's exhausting. I can work myself into a tizzy and dig in my heels with the best of 'em. I have taken to reminding myself of the words of a hymn from my youth: "They will know we are Christians by our love." I am not called to change or "fix" anyone. I am called to be faithful to love, and it is my example of tolerance and love that helps set the stage for the Spirit to do her great work!

Tuesday, May 13: *When [Barnabas] arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart, for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith* (Acts 11:19-26).

This story of Barnabas' visit to Antioch reminds me of a quote I've shared before. In the words of the late David Fleming, SJ, "Most people say, 'I'll believe it when I see it.' St. Ignatius says, 'When I believe it, I will see it!'" Barnabas is a good man, filled with the Spirit and with faith. He sees the grace of God at work because he himself is filled with that grace as well. Now, I'd bet that what he sees does not "dot all the Is and cross all the Ts." Probably far from it! But he knows the grace of God when he sees it.

Provision: Look for God's grace. If you are a faith- and grace-filled person, this should be an easy assignment. But perhaps the state of the world makes it harder for you to see God's grace at work. Maybe that grace looks really messy, not at all the way you expect. One of the great gifts Pope Francis demonstrated for us is the ability to see God's grace at work in the real world. Maybe a situation doesn't "meet all the criteria" set down by the Magisterium, but what occurs is God's grace at its best! God does God's best work in the real world. The psalm today reminds us it doesn't matter where we come from or where we've been as long as our home—God's home—is within each of us. Make a point to look for God's grace today especially in those places, situations, and people in which you least expect to find it!

Wednesday, May 14: *"You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place"* (Acts 1:15-17, 20-26).

I'm intrigued by these words about Judas. The Greek translation reads *"which Judas deserted for a place of his own."* To me, this sounds mild and nonjudgmental, almost apologetic. Not at all what I'd expect since a few verses prior Scripture explains, *"so that from the reward for his injustice this man purchased a field and having fallen prone in the middle of it, he burst apart and all his entrails were poured out"* (v. 18). Eww!

But I reflect on times when I have turned away from God's call to choose my own path, to go "to my own place." It's easy for me to say I've never done something as egregious as Judas is said to have done, but I have betrayed Jesus, turned away in my own version of Jonah's attempted escape to Tarshish. In fact, if I look closely enough during my nightly examen, I can find examples almost every day. But I thank God every day for the gift of faith—the inability to turn away even when I have sinned.

Provision: To whom shall I go? (Jn 6:68) The powerful words of Simon Peter, my go-to guy. He messes up, he betrays Jesus, but unlike Judas, he knows he cannot turn away. And we know he finally answers the call to tend and feed God's lambs and sheep at great personal sacrifice. He knows his place is with Jesus. Spend time reflecting on situations when you have chosen "a place of your own," away from God's call. How did that work out?

Thursday, May 15: *"For I have given you an example so that, just as I have done for you, you may do as well. Amen, amen, I tell you, a slave is not superior to his lord, nor is a messenger superior to the one sending him. If you know these things, how blissful you are if you do them"*(Jn 13:16-20, Greek translation).

The operative words here are "blissful" and "do them." What are "them?" Jesus is telling us that we are not only to understand what he has done for us as our Lord, but we are to do the same as he has done for us. "Them" are the acts of kindness, humility, justice, and mercy the disciples have seen Jesus do and live every day. *"True knowledge [of God's love] is not merely intellectual but transformed into practical living"*(Jamie Wilson).

Provision: "You are the happiest when you are in service of others." Wise words from my wise and loving late mother, words that I have shared with my own children. Remember, "blessed" in Greek is "blissful." We might read the word blessed as winning brownie points for doing good, but what Jesus really says is serving others is the way to happiness, especially when you "do them" out of the goodness in your heart rather than for some reward. If you are not "blissful" when serving others, it might be time to reflect on your motivation for serving.

Friday, May 16: *I am going to prepare a place for you...so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life"*(Jn 14:1-6).

Thomas is eager to know Jesus' destination: "We have to know where you are going, Lord, so we can plug it into our GPS (God Positioning System!) and find the shortest, fastest route." Poor Jesus. These guys just don't get it. The fastest way is typically not the best way. "If you want to get where I am going," Jesus says, "If you want to arrive at the place I will prepare for you, there is only one way: I am the way. Pay attention. Look at my life. Do what I do. Follow me."

Most of us like to have a specific checklist when we travel. Maybe that's what Thomas wants to have, too. But the checklist for our journey is not just a bunch of explicit rules and regulations. Frankly, it is a list that grows and changes every day as we encounter the face of Jesus along the way. The way to Jesus takes time and attention.

Provision: Focus on the journey and on what you are bringing. The best way, indeed, the only way to get to the destination you desire—eternal peace and love—is to pay attention to the journey and the supplies and provisions you are stockpiling along the way. If Jesus is preparing a place for you to be with him, what is it that you need to prepare to get there? Use this as a prayer exercise today: what do you need for your journey to Jesus? What is the best route you can take today? (And, BTW, if the provisions are weighing you down, they are likely not the right ones!)

Saturday, May 17: *So, they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them* (Acts 13:44-52).

Shaking the dust off of one's feet is an expression for moving on, leaving behind things, events, and people that hold you back. In ancient culture, Jews shook off the dust of Gentile lands when they arrived onto Jewish land. This expression is used when Jesus sends the disciples out two-by-two to spread the Good News, and again in today's reading. Time is short. The disciples don't have the luxury of dilly-dallying with those who are not even willing to listen. This act is not meant as passing judgment; it is a sign of letting go and letting God. Jesus knows the disciples will face rejection, just as he did. Perhaps he is giving them (and us) a way of shielding themselves from discouragement and burn-out.

Provision: Remember, let the Holy Spirit do the work! It is far better to shake the dust off your feet than to shake your fist at someone who opposes you or who won't listen. Don't allow rejection or the judgment of others hinder you in your mission to share the Good News. Shut the conversation down. Move onto another subject, ideally one that shows your compassion. Or just walk away. Let your pointed, but peaceful example speak for itself. Then, let the Spirit take it from there.