

Provisions for the Journey

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



Sunday, May 29: *While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?"* (Acts 1:1-11)

I wonder if these two guys in white garments that suddenly appear to the disciples are the same two angels dressed in white that suddenly appear to Mary of Magdala at the tomb? (Jn 20:11) They might be. In each instance, they ask pretty "duh?" questions: Why are you looking up into the sky (where your teacher has just disappeared)? Why are you weeping (next to the empty tomb of your beloved)? Two lessons for us: First, if all of a sudden, two beatific images in white garments show up, you can bet Jesus is either coming or going! 😊 Second, these stories are a good reminder that even though we do not and will not understand the ways in which God works, we are still called to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, to go and tell others the Good News!

Today's Provision: Embrace The Mystery! I have taken to saying, "It is all a mystery, so nothing is a mystery!" It's tough to keep faith, to share the Good News to a world, drenched in news, that thinks "no news is good news;" most of what we hear on "the news" is bad. Sometimes, the mystery I have to embrace is why God would think enough of us, after eons of sinfulness, to actually become one of us. That kind of enduring love is hard to understand. What aspects of "The Mystery" do you struggle to embrace? Talk honestly with God about your doubts and struggles.

Monday, May 30: *"How were you baptized?" They replied, "With the baptism of John." Paul then said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance... When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* (Acts 19:1-8)

This topic -- the baptism of John (repentance) versus the baptism of Jesus (salvation) -- has been the source of much debate and schism within Christianity over the centuries. This is way beyond my scholarship and level of knowledge so I am not qualified to be an apologist for either stance. And, frankly, I don't like the either/or aspect of this debate -- why can't it be both? Repentance and salvation are both life-giving gifts from God! All I can do in the face of The Mystery is to allow the Holy Spirit to guide me every day and to recognize honestly the times I fail to follow her guidance.

Today's Provision: Receive the Holy Spirit. You were given the Holy Spirit when you were baptized. But did you receive the Spirit? Do you welcome the gift of the Holy Spirit? Do you use the gift of the Holy Spirit or is it sitting up on a dusty shelf somewhere just waiting to be opened? Many of us who were baptized or confirmed at a young age may still not realize the fullness of this gift. Open your mind and heart and let the Spirit guide you to a book or prayer practice that will help you open the gift. Try not to limit yourself to books just by authors from your chosen denomination. One thing I've learned about the Spirit: she doesn't pay attention to our man-made divisions. Her guidance transcends all boundaries.

Tuesday, May 31: *"Brothers and sisters: Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor."* (Rom 12:9-16)

I was driving the other day watching in amazement, yet again, the number of people weaving in and out of traffic, no thought of using their blinkers, no thought of other drivers on the road. I had read this passage that morning and it occurred to me "anticipating one another" has pretty much gone by the wayside, at least on the beltway! I guess those of us who value our lives need to anticipate the recklessness of those who do not.

In some Christian traditions, today is the Feast of the Visitation. Mary, hearing from the angel that her elder cousin Elizabeth is six months pregnant, rushes to be with her even after her own profound experience of the Annunciation. Elizabeth, enlightened by the Spirit, also anticipates Mary in her blessed state, bringing joy and affirmation to her after this life-changing experience.

Today's Provision: Anticipate one another. There's an important caveat here: anticipate but don't assume. We might think we know how another is grieving or celebrating or reacting to something because that's how we would feel, but that approach doesn't always play out well. We might assume the people to whom we give charity or support want what we want; that is often not the case. The Greek translation is "giving preference of honor to one another," and Jesus gave us the perfect example when he asked those he healed, "What would you have me do for you?" Instead of launching right into doing or saying what we think the other needs, honor them, anticipate them by being present as Mary was for Elizabeth and allowing them to express their own needs. (P.S. Use your blinker!!)

Wednesday, Jun 1: *"I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the Evil One."* (Jn 17:11b-19)

Throughout the pandemic and with wars and violence so prevalent, I have heard some Christians see this time as signaling the end of the world. They cry out to God to come and put an end to all this through what is sometimes called "the Rapture." But in reading this passage from John, that's not what Jesus asks of God. He asks God to keep the disciples right here on earth. Protect them from evil, keep them living and safe so they can continue my work. I'm not sure if this is heretical – wouldn't be the first time! -- but I do wonder: Will Jesus return, not as it is written in Revelations to clean up our mess, but when we finally come to understand and live his message of love and peace?

Today's Provision: Live the message. It's easy to be discouraged and disheartened by what we see and hear and read. This is all part of The Mystery we've been talking about this week. What if we are the ones to bring about the rapture -- the ecstasy, the bliss that is living in peace and harmony with all of God's people and creation? Shall we at least give it a try? *"Be the change you wish to see in the world."* (Gandhi) Words of the Spirit!

Thursday, Jun 2: *"I wish that where I am they also may be with me..."* (Jn 17:20-26)

Present tense. Jesus does not say, Where I am going soon, I hope they too will be eventually. No -- Where I am right now, I want them to be here too! It seems he knows what is going to happen—that they won't stay when the going gets rough (see Monday's gospel reading from John 16), but he wishes it nonetheless. Jesus wishes this for us too: Be where I am, always blessed to be with the Spirit, even in suffering and death.

Today's Provision: Be with Jesus. Try to make a point today to be with Jesus. Not by sitting around reading gospel stories and putting yourself in the scenes (as much as I love doing that!), but being with Jesus as he makes his way around in the context of your life. Oh he's there, walking with you every step of the way. The question is whether you are walking with him. Ask God the same thing Jesus asks of God: I wish that where Jesus is, I also may be...

Friday, Jun 3: *He said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."* (Jn 21:15-19)

Lots of people, myself included, consider this one of the most impactful passages in the gospels. There are so many nuances in this story, but one that fascinates me is the difference in the Greek words used for "love." C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Four Loves*, explains the four main words: *storge*, *philia*, *eros*, and *agape*. (There are two others, *ludus* -- playful love, and *philautia* – self-love, but these don't seem to be used in scripture. And they were likely speaking in Aramaic, not Greek, and there are a few words in Aramaic for love, but that's for another time!) In the first two instances, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him with *agape* love: God's self-sacrificing love. Peter responds that he loves Jesus with *philia* love — deep friendship. The third time Jesus asks, he uses a variation on Peter's word, *philia*, that indicates something more along the lines of "cherish." I love this! There are lots of commentaries as to why Jesus changes the word, but I like to think Jesus understands Peter's deep human desire to know they are still friends, even after Peter's denials. The *agape* self-sacrificing love will come in time as Jesus goes on to explain Peter's fate, but for now, a deep abiding friendship, a deep personal love is more than enough.

Today's Provision: How do you love Jesus? There may be different answers to this question at any given time. We know Jesus loves us with *agape* love, but sometimes the love you have with Jesus is playful — *ludus* – like the way Jesus shows Martha love when he teases her about being too busy. There are saints – Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross come to mind – who describe a passionate, *eros*-like love in their relationship with Jesus, but this kind of intimacy is uncomfortable for some people. Maybe there have been times when your relationship seems more like affection – *storge*. Not too deep, a bit distant, but still friendly. We are called to give *agape* love to the Christ we see in others, when we show love without expectation of return. And yes, we are to love ourselves – *philautia* – not in a narcissistic way but to care for ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit. But most of the time, it's just great to enjoy a deep personal friendship with Jesus, what the late Bill Barry, SJ calls, "A friendship like no other!" What's your relationship with Jesus like these days?

Saturday, Jun 4: *Peter said, "Lord, what about him?" "What concern is it of yours? You follow me."* (Jn 21:20-25)

Gosh, don't you just love Peter! He, even with all he has experienced, is still just so human! I love Peter *philia*ly! How often I concern myself with what I think others should or could be doing! How often I ignore the plank in my eye, so eager to point out the splinter in someone else's, questioning how they choose to follow Jesus!

Today's Provision: Follow where Jesus leads you. I recently gave some retreats during which I talked about the difference between following Jesus and walking with Jesus. I explained the risk of following Jesus in a crowd or at a distance because that makes it easy to take an off-ramp here and there, or conversely, to stay on the straight and narrow when Jesus takes detours into scary places. In this case, Jesus is telling Peter to follow, not as one in the crowd, but as he is called as an individual, just as he was called on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The role to which Peter is now called is, in essence, the same as his first call, but with a level of commitment far greater than he ever anticipated. This can be scary, but if we are called to deep friendship with Jesus, we trust he will lead us in and to love. Walk with him. Follow him where he leads you.