

# Provisions as We Become A New Creation

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

First Week of Easter 2021



**Sunday, April 4:** *"Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough? Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened...let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* (1 Cor 5:6b-8)

This is one of 14 readings that you may or may not hear Easter Sunday, but it strikes me because it speaks of leaven, something we reflected on earlier this Lent: Jesus warned the disciples: *"Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."* (Mk 8:14-21) *"The elders aren't all bad; most of them have good intentions. They are just trying to keep the tenuous peace with the governing authorities that allows them to practice the rituals of their faith. But what are these religious leaders sacrificing to keep that peace and keep their rituals? Their leaven is old, worn out, no longer life-giving. It is time for the new leaven of mercy and love."* (Feb 16, 2021)

In this reading, Paul goes further. He says, "Clear out the old leaven. Make it as if you were never leavened at all, as if you are fresh, a new creation." In other words, let the past go.

This is hard. Our past is part of what makes us who we are. I know that if I hadn't experienced certain things in the past, I might not have the faith I have today. I don't think Paul means we should develop amnesia about where we have been, but if we truly want to rise with Christ, we need to rid ourselves of the old things, the old habits that stand in the way of a change of heart.

**Today's Provision: Spring-clean your heart.** This is the time of year, at least in my neck of the woods, when we start looking to plant flowers and clean up around our homes, and ideally, to get rid of a lot of stuff we no longer need. This year, more than most, I feel like there's a lot of dead wood in my heart that needs clearing out. Don't overlook the need to spend time within, in prayer, asking Jesus to help you clear out what keeps you from following him.

**Monday, April 5:** *The chief priests assembled with the elders; then they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.'" (Mt 28:8-15)*

Let's talk about this. If you believe this story, then you are likely incredulous at what the elders do and yet this is a common human trait: justifying previous acts by continuing to lie and committing more grievous acts, all in an effort to justify one's self. (It's why scammers always target persons who have fallen prey to them in the past.) So the elders and the guards conspire — with the help of a monetary bribe, of course — to do just that. We even hear the story circulated among the Jews "to the present day" (70-90 CE). There's a psychological term for this -- the "illusory truth effect" -- the tendency to believe lies and falsehoods to be correct after repeated exposure to those lies.

It's hard to know what to believe these days. And it's really hard to admit if we've been wrong. But as the saying goes, *"telling the truth makes a problem part of the past; lying makes it part of the future."*

**Today's provision: Face the truth.** In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius spends a lot of time on discernment, helping us sort out what is of God and what is not. He uses the terms "good spirit" and "evil spirit." This can be off-putting, but here's a basic foundation: the good spirit brings consolation, peace, and quiet (note: this is not the same as happiness or satisfaction; and, if we are turned away from God in sin, it will poke at us, sting our conscience, etc.). The evil spirit brings disquietude and confusion, distracting us from following God's will (although in an effort to keep us turned away from God, it will stroke our egos, provide spurious justification, help us "talk ourselves into things," etc.). It is our ego that keeps us from admitting we've been wrong, but it's the only way forward. Seek forgiveness if you have been wrong and hurtful to others. Give copious mercy (and no "I told you so's!") if someone seeks to make amends.

**Tuesday, April 6:** *She thought it was the gardener.* (Jn 20:11-18)

We hear in the previous chapter there was a garden near where Jesus was crucified, land likely owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Imagine: a garden so near a place of cruel death. Now imagine the angel in the Garden of Eden guarding the Tree of Life with a fiery sword. Mary thought Jesus was the gardener, the one who tended the earth with loving care, making sure new life would blossom again, freeing for us the Tree of Life by the wood of his cross.

**Today's Provision: Pray with these images.** Don't overthink or analyze this. Just sit and reflect on these images and Jesus' role as the new Adam, bringing us back to the garden. Imagine wandering around the garden with Jesus (as Genesis says God did with Adam and Eve, in the cool of the day). What wonders do you see? If the weather is good in your area, think about taking a slow, meditative walk in nature. Give praise to the one who bring us to new life!

**Wednesday, April 7:** *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way..."* (Lk 24:13-35)

When has your heart burned? No, we're not talking about Taco Tuesday. When was the last time something -- spiritual, emotional, or psychological -- moved you in a deep way? Something that has stayed with you and has not dimmed even with the passage of time? I like to describe them as events or people "deposited in my psychic bank account for which there is no principal risk." Our theme this year is metanoia. A good way to change our hearts is to look closely at what burns them. Are there Scripture passages that never fail to move you? A poem, a song, a movie scene, or a piece of art that lights a fire in you or causes the "Spirit shivers?" Have you ever prayed with this?

**Today's Provision: Pray with the fire.** Or with the shivers. Whichever description works for you, just pray with it. You can use the same process as Lectio Divina: hold the words or song or image up to the light and look at it from all sides. Admire and savor it. Ask for the grace to let it settle from your senses and mind into your heart. Allow the Spirit to open your eyes to recognize the Lord with us.

**Thursday, April 8:** *"God raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."* (Acts 3:11-26)

If you read this closely, you'll see a nuance I wonder how many of us really accept: It is Christ's blessing that comes first to turn our hearts away from sin. When I started on my way back to God through the graces of the Spiritual Exercises, this was a difficult thing to wrap my head around -- the idea that God's mercy, forgiveness, and blessing comes first. Like the father in the story of the prodigal son who looks off into the distance each day, hoping and praying for the child's return, God looks and waits for us. The father sees the boy in the distance, runs and embraces him before his son can open his mouth to recite his rehearsed speech of remorse. The father's spontaneous joy can only mean one thing: the son is already forgiven, already blessed.

**Today's Provision: Allow Christ's blessing to change your heart:** If past sinfulness and unworthiness stand in the way of your return, pray with this image of being welcomed home. Ask Jesus to bless you and accompany you as you make your way back. Let his love and mercy change your heart for good.

**Friday, April 9:** *Simon Peter dragged the net ashore...Even though there were so many (fish), the net was not torn.* (Jn 21: 1-14)

Like the disciples on the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus may call us to do something we don't think we have the strength to do. We may feel like we are toiling in vain when, all of a sudden, we're asked to do the same thing but to do it differently, to cast our metaphoric nets a new way. Our stamina may be waning, but if we allow God to guide us, our efforts will reap a great harvest with our nets intact.

**Today's Provision: Be willing to change.** Remember this story if you are faced with a difficult task or a change in direction. Perhaps you've been working in a certain ministry or role, doing the same thing over and over, when someone new shows up and suggests a different way. Most of us don't take kindly to suggestions from "newbies," but it might be a subtle way of God speaking to you and asking you to look at things differently. Those of us who are older may find this challenging, but change is a fact of life, one that keeps us going and learning and growing. If you are finding change hard, go back to our provision from yesterday. Allow Christ to bless you and change you for the better!

**Saturday, April 10:** *"It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:13-21)

I've mentioned that I sometimes go back to previous years' writings (this being my 12<sup>th</sup> year of writing reflections, you kind of have to!) just to see if I am led in a new way or if the message is still the same. In this case, sadly, it is the latter. In light of the recent shootings in the US, I feel compelled to repeat what I wrote in 2018 for this Scripture:

*"As I write this, I see the images of the hundreds of thousands of young people taking a stand at Marches for Our Lives in cities around the world. Those who have seen their friends gunned down in schools and on city streets; those who have heard the cries for mercy, the sobs of anguish from loved ones left behind. 'It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.' Yes, these young people need our sincere 'thoughts and prayers' but even more, they need our voices, our hands, our feet. Our children need us to have their backs as they forge a better future for themselves and their own children. They are the face of hope."*

**Today's Provision: Do what you can to stop the madness.** Like so much of what I see and hear these days, I am appalled and confused at where some people's heads and hearts are on this issue. As the father of one of the children gunned down in Newtown says, "Your right to own a gun does not supersede my son's right to live." What's even more puzzling is that some folks who identify as "pro-life" also object to commonsense guns laws. I don't get it.

This is an issue that needs louder, more assertive voices. Too many of us shrug our shoulders, saying there is nothing we can do. That doesn't sound like "hope in the Resurrection" to me! Every state and locality have groups that lobby for commonsense on this issue. See if you can find one that is non-partisan to join your voice with others who see this as a pro-life issue. I need to do more. How about you?