

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Sixth Week of Easter, 2024



Sunday, May 5: *Then Peter proceeded to speak: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him"* (Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48).

Verse 28 from this same chapter reads: *"God also showed me that I must not call any human profane or impure."* In the Roman Catholic Church, there are vocal pockets of resistance to Pope Francis. A few conservative bishops and cardinals in the US have questioned the legitimacy of his papacy, in part due to his willingness to open the doors just a bit wider and to engage "people of goodwill" regardless of their faith or lack thereof. I'd like to invite them to spend time reflecting on this passage from Acts and considering that perhaps Francis is following in Peter's footsteps more closely than they think. And please note that Peter says these things about God's lack of partiality **before** the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to Cornelius and his family. God's instruction to Peter was not contingent on a divine sign of acceptance.

Today's Provision: Who are we to judge? I can be quite judgmental, particularly about people who exclude others. I am intolerant of intolerant people! It takes a conscious effort to put aside my biases and to be open to those whose understanding of Jesus' message is vastly different from mine. But I am a hypocrite if I fail to follow Jesus' words about judging others, lest I be judged. Do you struggle with judging others? If so, remember Peter's words: *"I must not call any human profane or impure"* or, for that matter, any other choice words that cross our minds! Be on the lookout for situations that tempt you to judge others. While we want to make good judgments for ourselves (and teach our kids to do so), that doesn't give us license to pass judgment on those with whom we disagree.

Monday, May 6: *"In fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God"* (Jn 15:36-16:4).

This sentence makes me shudder that there is still so much killing in God's name. Over the centuries, all major religions have been guilty of this egregious sin. It is particularly problematic in theocracies where there is an unhealthy mix of politics, power, and religious fundamentalism. Remember: it was the very mix of politics and religion that killed Jesus. In Friday's psalm, we hear the Lord "crushes people beneath us" (Hebrew translation). When, oh when, will we ever learn that killing in God's name is nothing more than self-worship? We who make God in our own sinful, egotistical image!

Today's Provision: Refrain from "killing." Odd provision, you say? When Jesus says these words, he is warning the disciples they will likely lose their mortal lives for their allegiance to him. But there are ways of killing that don't involve blood. We kill children's creative spirit and sense of wonder when we stifle them by imposing rigid rules and ways of thinking. We kill the Spirit within those we do not welcome at the table, those we discriminate against because they don't think or look or worship or love like "us." We kill empathy and compassion when we put too much emphasis on winning. We kill hope when our culture and laws keep the poor and oppressed from bettering their lives. We kill our planet by our overuse and abuse. Take this idea to prayer today: where might I be "killing" the Spirit? We are all culpable, so don't beat yourself up. See if you can identify an action or two that gives life to others and to the earth.

Tuesday, May 7: *When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me" (Ps 138). "But I tell you the truth, 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).

As much as we might like for God to just take care of everything for us (although, if memory serves me, we blew that deal a long time ago!), this is not how God works with us. The psalmist sees God's answer as strength that is built up within us. Although the disciples are likely completely confused about this "Advocate" concept and would just as soon have Jesus hang around, God knows it is by empowering us that we grow and thrive.

Today's Provision: Empower others. This is so important when we are ministering to others, especially when we minister to our kids. Self-efficacy—the ability to do for oneself—is an essential building block for growth. These days, when everything is about immediate gratification and lives are so programmed and scheduled, our children don't always get the lessons they need in perseverance, patience, and resilience. When we minister to the poor and oppressed, often their immediate need is so great, we don't have or take the time to help them find ways to improve their lives. This can apply on church committees, too: Do we allow and encourage others to step up to leadership roles or do we keep a tight rein on "our" ministry? Think about relationships or situations where you might help build up the strength of another.

Wednesday, May 8: *"The God who made the world does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands...Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything. He made from one the whole human race...so people might seek God, even grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us"*(Acts 17:15, 22—18:1).

The word "grope" has a negative connotation today, but groping for God is another thing entirely. Do you know what it feels like to grope for God: that deep desire to touch, to know, to connect even more with that which we cannot touch or ever understand...that intense longing that in and of itself is gratifying? Some may say this groping is a futile pursuit, and yet, while we cannot know God, we can surely connect with God.

Today's Provision: Breathe in the Spirit! Find a place of quiet today, even if it is just for 15 minutes. Become aware of your breath and imagine that with each inhale, you are breathing in God's Spirit, connecting at a cellular level with that which gives you life. As you exhale, send that Spirit flying out to touch the whole human race!

Thursday, May 9: *Jesus said to his disciples: "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me"*(Jn 16:16-20).

"One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love...The miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces and voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always"(Willa Cather, *from Death Comes for the Archbishop*).

Today's Provision: Look for Divine Love. Make a conscious effort today to be on the lookout for everyday miracles. Let's open our eyes and ears to experience *"what is there about us always."*

Friday, May 10: *While Paul was in Corinth, the Lord said to him, "Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack and harm you, for I have many people in this city"*(Acts 18:9-18).

Corinth was part of the Roman Empire, a sprawling Greek city with two ports, and a center for trade and travel. One reference I use said it was known at the time for "licentiousness and immorality." In other words, "what happened in Corinth stayed in Corinth!" Corinth had also had an influx of Jews recently due to disturbances in Rome between the followers of "The Way" and the Jews. (This is why Aquila and Priscilla had to leave. In typical Roman fashion, the rulers wanted nothing to do with the Jews and their squabbles, so they kicked them all out.) But God tells Paul not to worry. Despite the decadence Paul sees around him, despite the resistance he sees from the new Jewish arrivals, God sees "many people" ready to hear God's word.

Today's Provision: "Do not be afraid. Do not be silent." Perhaps we think anything we do or say for God's Kingdom is drowned out by a lack of morality and the rampant violence in our culture. Or, as we strive to bring new ways and thoughts to our churches, we meet resistance from the old guard. Let's remember the Lord's promise that he is with us. There are many people—not all, mind you—but many who are just waiting to hear the Good News in what we say and in what we do. Don't be afraid. Be a witness today.

Saturday, May 11: *Jesus said to his disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you"*(Jn 16:23-28).

And herein lies the confusion....In John 2:24, we read, "[Jesus] would not trust himself to them because he knew them all and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well." "Maybe Jesus let his guard down on this one! By saying to the disciples and to us that "WHATEVER" we ask in his name, the Father will give us, most of us, I imagine, will show up with a laundry list! This can lead to disappointment, anger, and even the loss of faith. When the illness is not cured, the longed-for child is not given, the job or college acceptance not offered or test not passed—heck, we even call a last-minute heave from the quarterback a "Hail Mary" pass—our expectations are dashed, and we question if God even listens to us. Why pray in Jesus' name if we don't get what we ask for? Why pray at all?

Today's Provision: Prayer does not change God. It changes the one who prays. I once read this paraphrased quote from Søren Kierkegaard coupled with a more irreverent statement: "God is not a vending machine." This is not to say we should stop praying in Jesus' name for what is important to us. Such prayer gives us strength and can be a great source of comfort, but it is good to end our prayers with the affirmation: "God's will be done."

"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health, that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity, that I might do better things. I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty, that I might be wise. I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God. I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing I asked for --but everything I had hoped for. Almost in spite of myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all, most richly blessed."(Anonymous, found in the pocket of a deceased American Civil War soldier.)