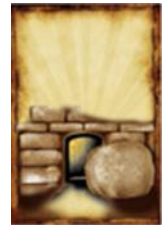


Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Lent Week Three, 2025



This week, the Spirit has led me to add another aspect to our Lenten reflections: Fast. Pray. Give, Act. And Hope.

Sunday, March 23: *"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope.... And hope does not disappoint"* (Rom 5:2, 5-8).

The Greek for that last phrase is, *"and hope does not prove an embarrassment."* Have you ever hoped for something only to have it blow up in your face? It can be embarrassing. The chorus of naysayers and skeptics pipes up: "I told you so." "He trusted in his God, let him deliver him now" (Mt 27:43). Hoping for things requires us to take a risk. What if what we hope for is actually a sham or a failure (1 Cor 15:17, 19)? I wonder, amid the intense fear felt by the disciples on Holy Saturday, if embarrassment was part of their pain. It takes faith to look beyond our immediate circumstances, to things that we hope for that don't pan out, to trust that God's got this, to have the faith of Julian of Norwich: *"All will be well."*

Provision: HOPE. It's important to distinguish between "hope" and "wish." Henri Nouwen, in his meditation, "Waiting for God" reminds us, *"Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes. Hope is always open-ended."* Let's pray together today for an increase in faith, trust, and hope that all *will* be well, not likely in our lifetimes, but in God's divine plan. All God's children will be at peace.

Monday, March 24: *"As a deer yearns for streams of water, so I yearn for you, O God. My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God"* (Ps 42, Hebrew translation).

Here we are almost halfway through Lent. I don't know about you, but this has been a painful, living Lent for me. I thirst for the living God. I join my prayers with those who are encountering so much suffering and abuse—immigrants, industry workers, research scientists, victims of war, those who have dedicated their lives to Mother Earth and her poorest children. There have been times when I could not hold back tears or quell my anger seeing the images and words that flash before me on the news. I yearn for the streams of living water, the living God, Jesus.

Provision: PRAY for living water for all! As we reflected yesterday, to access the living water of God's peace, we strive to keep the faith, trust in God's promises, and keep hope alive. How do we best do that? Of course, daily prayer really matters. Not just rote prayer, but heartfelt dialog with God. If you've not used the psalms for prayer, give it a try. (Today's psalm is perfect; psalms 4, 16, 27, 49, 62, 92, 115, 121, 133, and 146 are several more you might want to pray.) And once you've strengthened yourself, **ACT.** Support those whose strength is failing.

Tuesday, March 25: *"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son"* (Lk 1:26—38). A Meditation on Henry Ossawa Tanner's 'The Annunciation,' by J. Michael Sparough (from *America*, March 31, 2008).

"Yet you do not blink. In the intimacy of a bedchamber
Your soul is awakened from sleep, Fragile flesh before angelic brilliance.
Your ruffled night sheets tossed aside,
You listen in peace with your whole self
To the question that will define history.
Holding its breath for your answer, all heaven pauses.

"LET IT BE DONE TO ME..."

Here it begins. In such utter simplicity,
In quiet strength, at the appointed hour,
With the rippled rungs of time at your feet,
And the broad lines of history at your back.
At the balance of His grace in your will, Eve reborn, humanity to be
redeemed Through a child, from a virgin Whose name is Mary."



Provision: GIVE yourself over to God's will. Gabriel comes to each of us, calls us by name, and says: *"Behold, favored one. You will conceive in your heart and bear God's son."* What does it mean for you to bear Christ in your heart for the good of the world? Let God's grace balance with your will. Can you say, "LET IT BE DONE TO ME?"

Wednesday, March 26: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill"* (Mt 5:17-19).

A Bible website I access lists 44 OT references to the Messiah, so I get what Jesus means when he says he fulfills the prophets. But what does it mean for him to fulfill the law? *"You shall love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."* Jesus says, 'watch me, how I resist the temptation to take the easy way out; how I retreat from the crowds for intimate time with my Father. Watch how I pray and gather strength to access the Spirit when confronted by evil.' *"Keep holy the Sabbath day:"* 'See how I enjoy times of rest with my friends to praise and thank God. But don't forget, I'm willing to do the will and work of God any day of the week.' *"You shall not bear false witness."* 'Look. I am not afraid to call out hypocrisy and dishonesty when I see it.' *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* I am always ready to heal, to forgive, to treat everyone with the dignity they deserve as a child of God.'

Today's Provision: ACT as Jesus would. Jesus fulfills the law by teaching us how to live. Some folks get very caught up in the letter of the law. What Jesus is concerned with is the Spirit of the law. So, he heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. He saves the woman caught in adultery by challenging the elders and the crowd to examine themselves. He thinks a clean heart is more important than clean hands. He sees the poor as God's chosen ones. Think about stories from Jesus' life. Where do you see him showing you how to fulfill God's law?

Thursday, March 27: *"From the day your fathers left the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent untiringly my servants, the prophets. Yet you have not obeyed me nor paid heed; ... This is the nation that does not listen"* (Jer 7:23-28).

Earlier this Lent, I suggested reading the Book of Isaiah. For even more fun, add in Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Baruch. Misery loves company, you know! Actually, I take comfort in the words of the biblical prophets. They are hard to hear, even harder when I look closely at my own life and at our world to realize we've not changed much, and in some cases, have fallen far behind our ancestors. But the words of the prophets bear witness to God's unending commitment and mercy. Harsh though they sound, they are a source of hope for us. God will not abandon his children.

Provision: ACT on the guidance of true prophets. *From the time of my son, Jesus, I have sent you untiringly servants and prophets. I continue to send them today.* To whom do you listen? Who are today's prophets you turn to? For me, Pope Francis is one, the Dalai Lama another: lone voices on the world's stage calling us to compassion and truth. I read scripture and wisdom from the ancients and mystics, not as history, but with an eye to what it means for us today. As you read or listen to scripture today, make it real. How does it apply to our world, to your own life?

Friday, March 28: *"You are not far from the Kingdom of God"* (Mt 21:38-39).

"My sense of sin is linked to my sense of God. The closer I am to God, the more aware I am of my sinfulness. Distance from God reduces the contrast necessary for me to recognize my true condition" (Mark Link, SJ). I remember paraphrasing this to a much older classmate during my pastoral studies: *"The closer we are to God, the more we see our faults."* His eyes flew wide open, thinking I was referring to a closeness to death, rather than to the kingdom! I wonder if our scribe today might have that same worry! The kingdom Jesus refers to is not in heaven, it's not the idea of eternal life after our mortal bodies die. Jesus says this to the scribe because he sees the man understands God's law and the prophets. He knows this scribe realizes the Kingdom of God is right here and right now.

Provision: ACT for the Kingdom, right here, right now. *"To love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than burnt offerings."* Remember, "neighbor" doesn't mean the person who lives on your street or goes to your church. *"I really only love God as much as the person I love the least"* (Dorothy Day). This challenges me. Does it challenge you?

Saturday, March 29: *"What shall I do for you, Ephraim, what shall I do for you, Judah when your trust is like a morning cloud, like the early dew that melts away?"* (Hos 6:1-6, Hebrew translation).

God is speaking to two tribes of Israel, but I imagine God saying this to me, to our country, to our world. I wonder how many millions of times over the millennia has God had to ask this same question! (The NABRE translation sounds like a frustrated parent: "What can I do with you!?) But I like the Hebrew because of the word "trust" (other translations say piety, goodness, or love). Trust. Why do I allow my own sinfulness and the state of the world to erode my trust and my hope in God's promise?

Provision: FAST from hopelessness. I interact with folks from all walks of life: those living in fear of deportation or losing what little government support they have; others who are, or have family members, losing jobs to which they've dedicated their lives. Some are despondent, depressed, even despairing. We are called as Christians to stand tall in the grace of faith we have received and to fast from hopelessness. Do something **real** today for someone whose hope is flagging. Don't sugar-coat what is happening or share shallow words of comfort. If you don't know anyone who feels this way these days well, it may be time to reflect on how you are living the law as Jesus taught us.