

# Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Third Week of Lent 2018



**Sunday, March 4:** *"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."* (1Cor 1:22-25)

Foolishness...Weakness? Not words we normally associate with God. What is Paul saying here? To the Jews who look for God in power and the Greeks who seek God in wisdom, Christ and his crucifixion are the antithesis of both. This passage reminds us we will never understand the mind of God. While we may deem things as unwise, unfair, or just plain foolish, God's ways are not our ways. To proclaim Christ crucified is to revel in the folly of the cross, to delight in the paradox of mercy, to live in the light of faith amid a darkened world.

**Today's Provision—Choose to Be Foolish. Choose to Be Weak:** How countercultural can you get! I don't know about you, but I hate to appear foolish. And yet to live God's will often calls us to make decisions that others may scoff at. Think about times you've taken a risk by standing up to an injustice at work or school, or choosing to forgo some obvious personal benefit for the greater good. Or times when you've chosen to respond peacefully to another's aggression. Culture would have us follow the adage, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me," and if we are going about our lives unaware, that can be foolish. This passage is about making conscious choices for the greater glory of God, even if those choices make us seem weak or unwise. Be aware today of the choices you make. See if the way you appear to others is influencing you to make decisions for show rather than for God.

**Monday, March 5:** *"Athirst is my soul for God, the living God. When shall I go and behold the face of God?"* (Ps 42)

*"Ok, let's look at the schedule for this week. Boy, the calendar is packed full. When can I go to behold the face of God—and the living God at that? ...Nope, too many A priorities right now. It'll have to be next week."* The psalmist longs to go to the temple, to have a "mountaintop" experience of God's presence in Jerusalem, to be among his kin and to worship. There's nothing wrong with this type of longing. If you've ever been to a beautiful church or holy site or in nature, the memory of a powerful faith experience can have you desiring more, and that in itself is a testament to the importance of God in our lives. And yet, God—the living God—is everywhere. And not only that, the living God longs to be with us everywhere, in every situation and place. Could it be that God thirsts for us as well?

**Today's Provision—"We thirst:"** We hear Jesus say on the cross, "I thirst," and we see his human body parched from the loss of the blood and sweat of his trials. But he is also God, the Living Water, and as his human life drains away, he thirsts to save us, he thirsts for us to come to him and receive the outpouring of his Spirit. Start your day reflecting on where you are thirsty. Where are you in most need of Living Water? Look around and see where others are thirsty. Allow Christ to fill your well so that you may be a source of Living Waters for others.

**Tuesday, March 6:** *"Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior."* (Ps 25)

Think about a time you've experienced an "AHA!" moment. Maybe it was through a teacher or preacher who explained something in a whole new way. All of a sudden, you received a unique insight that changed your perspective on what you thought you already knew. This is what the psalmist asks for today, and is something we should ask God for each time we pray or read scripture. *"Lord, grant me the grace of enlightenment today. I consciously choose to open my mind and heart to you. Guide me, Savior, to know in a very deep and real way, the path to your truth."*

**Today's Provision—Ask for the Grace you Desire:** In his spiritual exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola instructs us to ask each time we pray for the specific grace we desire. The Spanish word he uses is "demandar," to demand or insist. He also tells us if we don't know what we desire, we should ask God to help us to identify the desire we have for our relationship with him. We are not talking here about praying for specific intentions, e.g., to do well on a test or for healing. This type of prayer has more to do with the way we want to live: *"Lord, I need courage today to accept your will in this suffering I am experiencing."* *"I need your strength today to resist the temptation that keeps me from doing my studies (so I can do well on my test!)."* *"Teach me to look at others with lovingkindness so I will not curse them as they cut me off in traffic!"* *"Let me listen for the lesson you want me to learn in this scripture passage."* God rejoices when we ask him for the graces he desires for us. Make God happy today. Ask and ye shall receive.

**Wednesday, March 7:** *"Take care not to forget the things which your eyes have seen... teach them to your children and to your children's children."* (Dt 4: 1, 5-9)

My kids and I were watching the Olympics and musing about a video from a hockey game played back in 1960. Of course, the quality of the video was so far from what we see today, and none of the players were wearing helmets. The goalie wasn't even wearing a mask! And yet, the interview with some of the players, now in their 80s and 90s, revealed truths that are timeless, about lifelong friendships and sacrifice, teamwork and dedication. We hear God say, "I am making all things new." Through God's gift of our intelligence, we have made amazing strides in technology, most--but clearly not all--of which has benefited humankind. People of faith look to God to guide us as God makes things new through us, yet it is essential that God's timeless truths be taught and retaught to the generations that follow lest we forget and lose our way to the Promised Land.

**Today's Provision—Reflect on Essential Truths:** In this era of immediate gratification, elders are particularly challenged to teach our youth essential truths: that real love and friendship is based on patience, sacrifice, and forgiveness that arise, not from sporadic online contacts, but face-to-face struggles and compassion; that real happiness is found in serving rather than ourselves; that peace can only be found in God's unconditional love and mercy. Spend time in prayer reflecting on what you see as essential truths. Ask yourself: "Does my life model for others, particularly for our youth, faith and trust in God's providence and love?" (I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the young people in the US taking a stand for their right to life in the wake of the most recent shooting in Florida. They have much to teach us about the essential truth of standing up against violence and injustice.)

**Thursday, March 8:** *"Your fathers tested me though they had seen my works." (Ps 95) Others, to test (Jesus), asked him for a sign from heaven.* (Lk 11:14-23)

Perhaps you've heard the expression, "What have you done for me today?" to acknowledge that we are valued (in a business sense) not by what we have done, but what we can do now. Investment paperwork always has the disclaimer, "Past performance is not a guarantee of future results." Even though the Israelites have seen wonders in the desert, even though the crowd following Jesus has seen mighty deeds, they are still skeptical. Are we any different? How do we put God to the test?

**Today's provision—Look Back (and Forward) in Gratitude:** Reflect on times when God has worked miracles in your life. Can't think of any? Well, the sun rose this morning. And so did you! There's nothing that can change you and your life more readily than gratitude. Testing God over and over leads to disappointment; we will never be satisfied. Instead, say thank you for your life and the awesome gifts and works God brings us every day.

**Friday, March 9:** *"I will love them freely."* (Hos 14:2-10)

Whenever I encounter these five words from Hosea, I am always moved and amazed. In Hebrew, the word "freely" as it is used here means something akin to "I volunteer." God says, *"I know what I'm getting myself into. I know I will 'heal their defection,' only to have them turn away again and again. I get it. But my love for them is not about what they do. It is about who they are. My love for them is ultimately about the way I choose to love."*

**Today's Provision —Choose to Love Freely:** Do you love God freely? Or is your love contingent on having prayers answered or blessings given? I often wonder how true my love for God would be if I faced the poverty, violence, and injustice so many of my fellow human beings endure daily. Have you ever loved someone else without the fear of losing them or of not getting loved in return? There's a big difference between loving out of need and needing out of love. Spend time today considering the love you have for others and for God. Is your love given freely?

**Saturday, March 9:** *"Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself."* (Lk 18:9-14)

I'm fascinated by the little nuances in gospel stories. Here, Luke says, the Pharisee "took up his position," i.e., he has his own seat right up front where everyone can see him. Then Luke tells us he says the prayer "to himself." Of course he does. He's not going to say this prayer aloud! He knows it's prideful and hurtful. Though he's not conscious of it, it is, in a literal way, not a prayer to God at all, but to himself and his own self-righteousness. Now the Pharisees get a bad rap in the gospels. If you read historical documents like "The Antiquities of the Jews," you find that many were good men, dedicated to the people and their wellbeing. But this fictional one is obviously impressed with himself. Too bad. His pride blinds him to the most powerful and life-changing facet of God's love: mercy.

**Today's Provision—Recognize the Sin of Pride:** *"The parables are interested in possibility, not culpability."* (John Shea from *Stories of God*.) This parable is not about sinful behaviors. It is about awareness of our sinful nature. The tax collector knows his actions are wrong. Perhaps he feels pressure to provide for his family, so he continues even though it eats him up inside. We don't know the reason, but we do know he recognizes himself as a sinner. And that quite frankly is the essential first step in any true, intimate relationship with God. Reflect on times you may have looked down "from your position" on someone you thought was not as pious or holy as you, whose appearance made you question their faith or even their right to be in church in the first place. Pride is insidious and causes us to miss out on God's greatest gift of mercy. Try to nip prideful notions in the bud.