Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Third Week of Easter, 2026

Sunday, April 19: *"Conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning, realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors"* (1 Pt 1:17-21). "*Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in"* (*The Message* translation).

I am attracted to the lovely image of our life as a sojourn, but prayer and reflection lead me to see a deeper relevancy in the words of this reading. In the US, there has been a lot of press recently about the divisions in the Roman Catholic Church and the legitimacy of Pope Leo's papacy, just as there were with Francis. Some of the sound-bites are, as usual, false or blown out of proportion, and yet there is a movement afoot to discredit the current leadership of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes all things new. Conspiracy theories abound, and are the way of the world now, fomenting divisiveness and breaking apart families and communities.

Provision: Rely on your informed conscience. So, what are we to do? Make sure you are informed, not by naysayers and hysteria, but by rational thinking, reflection on Scripture, and prayer. Be reverent and discerning. Pay attention to Jesus' words about what it means to be his follower. Foster a deep consciousness of God and pay attention to your conscience. The Spirit is never divisive but looks to unite all. A book I've recommended in the past, *The Future of Faith*, by Harvey Cox is an enlightening read. It won't appeal to those committed to tribal boundaries between religions and denominations handed down by our ancestors but is for those who eagerly await the Age of the Spirit, when *"the veil shrouding the nations will be destroyed."* Let us have reverence for the work of the Spirit in our lives and in our world.

Monday, April 20: *"Yes, your precepts are my delight…teach me your statutes. The way of your decrees let me grasp…and in your teachings grant me grace. The way of trust I have chosen"* (PS 119:23-30, Hebrew translation).

A perfect prayer to follow up on yesterday's reflection! It can be hard to discern, at times, what are truths and what are lies. It is time for all of us to put aside the pundits who represent our selected political/religious worldviews and trust in the Word of God.

Provision: Pray for grace. To paraphrase an idea attributed to theologian, Karl Barth, we must look at the newspaper (or screen) in one hand with the Bible in the other. Some good habits to adopt if you can: limit screentime watching or listening to the unending drone of opinions from those who make their living giving you their opinions. There are some good commentators (I like the historian, Heather Cox Richardson, on Substack) that are worth reading, but very few news sources are unbiased. If something seems too outlandish—and let's face it, a lot of things are today—check it out on Snopes. That site will validate or debunk many, but not all, stories. But the best advice: when you do decide to check out what is happening in the world, start with a prayer for grace. Ask the Spirit for wisdom and discernment. Trust God's Word will lead you to the truth.

Tuesday, April 21: *"The crowd said to Jesus: "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert"* (Jn 6:30-35).

I call this the "What have you done for me lately?" gospel! In context, it appears the crowd Jesus is speaking with is the same cast of thousands who were just fed from the five loaves and two fish. Hello?! Some quickie research indicates that scholars think some of the narratives from Chapters 5 and 6 in John's Gospel might have been mixed up, but my incredulousness remains: "Folks, what does this guy have to do to dispel your doubts?" Or maybe the question is, "Is there *anything* he can do to get you to abandon your long-held opinions and world views?"

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. I haven't sprung one of these admonitions on you in a while. 😉 We heard in yesterday's reading from Acts that Stephen was doing all kinds of "great wonders and signs" among the people, yet his accusers say this Jesus the Nazorean that Stephen preaches will "change the customs that Moses handed down to us." Imagine you are living back in this time. How would you have reacted to the words and great signs of Jesus and his followers? Would you have believed, or would your worldview keep you locked into what you've always known? What signs, good or bad, are you seeing today that you fail to accept or even recognize because of fear of change?

Wednesday, April 22: *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them…many paralyzed and crippled people were cured. There was great joy in that city* (Acts 8:1-8).

Provision: **Work miracles. Bring joy!** What things "paralyze or cripple" your country, your community, your family? What signs could you perform to bring about great joy where you live? We say we can't work miracles. I guess that depends on how we define miracles. Many years ago, I was helping at a dinner for the poor in my city. As people were leaving, we gave each some toiletries that might last them a few days. One man smiled and said to me, "Oh, I was praying for this! It is a miracle!" A small bag of toiletries. He looked around for a moment and said, "It is all a miracle." I never fail to get the chills and feel the same sense of humility that washed over me that late afternoon. So humbled by this man's gift to me, much, much greater than what I had given to him! *"There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle"* (Albert Einstein). Go out and work a miracle today!

Thursday, April 23: *Philip ran up and heard [the Ethiopian eunuch] reading Isaiah the prophet and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?"* (Acts 8:26-40). *Jesus said, "it is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God'"* (Jn 6:44-51).

Jesus is referring to the words of Isaiah (54) and Jeremiah (31) when he says all will be taught by God. But in the reading from Acts, the Ethiopian eunuch claims he cannot understand Isaiah's words in chapter 53 unless someone instructs him. In his commentary on Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrew scholar Robert Alter writes: *"In the coming era of the new covenant, every person will be inwardly informed of what God expects, and no teachers will be required" (The Hebrew Bible, Vol 2,* p 967). As Christians, we believe the era of the new covenant has come in Jesus, and Lord knows, teachers and preachers (myself included) still abound, teaching and preaching all kinds of interpretations of the word!

Provision: LISTEN. What is your opinion? Do we need teachers? I am not a biblical scholar, and yet over the years, I've learned so much about Scripture from great teachers and translations. But I am always amazed at what I learn each time I sit down to listen before I write. I must listen each day to what God is saying to *me*, and I hope you are listening to what God is saying to *you,* too. Philip explained something to the Ethiopian he might never have learned, and yet, I am sure God instructed that "foreigner" just as God spoke to the hearts of the Samarians, just as God speaks to each one of us about what God expects in any given situation we encounter. Let's make sure to always listen for God's word.

Friday, April 24: *The men traveling with him stood speechless, they heard the voice but could see no one* (Acts 9:1-20).

Who were these guys traveling with Saul? What happened after they saw him fall to the ground and when they heard the disembodied voice? (I like to imagine one of them was a guard at Jesus' tomb—totally freaked out!) We learn later in Acts that, at the flash of light, they all fell to the ground, but the others did not hear the words Jesus said. At least they didn't abandon Saul on the road, but did they hightail it out of Damascus once they had delivered him? Were they baptized as well? We'll never know, but we can imagine the experience changed them forever.

Provision: Be open to Jesus' call. Not many have dramatic calls like Paul, but if we are blessed, we have heard God call out to us in subtle ways. Have you ever experienced such a call? If so, it's good to reflect on that call when you feel down or when it seems God is absent. Have you ever witnessed someone turning their life around? Maybe it's a loved one who has abandoned faith or someone struggling with addiction. No lightning, but a profound experience nonetheless; one that can change those who watch it happen. If you've not experienced Jesus' call, pray about it. Ask Jesus to make himself known to you and then pay close attention as you go about your days. Listen for the voice in your heart.

Saturday, April 25: *"Blessed the people who know the joyful shout; in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk"* (Ps 89). *"Happy the people who know the horn's blast. O Lord, they walk in the light of your presence"* (Hebrew translation).

A good follow-up to yesterday's reflection and a wonderful way to end the week. If we listen for "the horn's blast"—the call to recognize God's "miraculous intervention" or simply God's presence in our midst, we can be joyful, even amid sorrow, strife, or danger.

Provision: LISTEN. Make a point to listen carefully, deeply today to the word of God present in nature, in other people, even in the wind. Use the readings for today to practice *lectio divina*: what words or images speak to you or move something in your heart? Dwell on them. Make a point to look for God, present in some small way and give thanks. *"Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord!"*

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