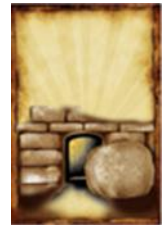


# Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings  
Preparing for Lent, 2025



I've been praying all week about our focus for this Lent. Here are things that came to my heart. They may or may not speak to you, but I will follow where the Spirit leads. I feel powerless, angry, and despondent these days, but I don't feel fear. This realization made me reflect on how I can be in solidarity with those for whom fear is very real right now: immigrants, of course, but also other ordinary people whose livelihoods, and in some cases, lives are at risk (farmers, medical personnel and researchers, park rangers, those who rely on Medicaid health clinics...the list goes on). So, my focus for Lent will be this: How will I **FAST** from escapism, anger, and isolation, to reach out every day to protest what is going on and to make a difference for someone? How will I **PRAY** continually each day, not for myself and my own salvation, but in a real and determined way for specific people and intentions (realizing, of course, my salvation depends on how I work for others)? How will I **GIVE**, not just money, but my time, my compassion, my willingness to sacrifice in an authentic way. Will I allow this decimation of global aid, social services, and compassion to bring me to a greater awareness of the fear and suffering in our world? How will I **ACT** on that awareness?

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**Sunday, March 2:** *"As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just"* (Sir 27:4-7). *"Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?"* (Lk 6:39-45).

Do I consider myself to be "just?" I know I am a sinner, but I like to think I fall somewhere on the spectrum of justice and righteousness. But what's this "furnace" I need to survive? Where does that come into play? Yes, yes, I know all about that wooden beam in my eye. It's the one I want to use to beat some people over their heads!!

**Provision: Patience, Mercy, Action.** Perhaps the "furnace" some of us face right now is not allowing anger to get the best of us. Compared to the tribulation undocumented mothers, fathers, and children endure, my "test" is nothing. So... will I **FAST** from anger? Will I be patient? Will I show mercy, not only to those caught in the furnace, but to those I blame for feeding the fire? What action will I take today to comfort someone being burned by the flame?

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**Monday, March 3:** *Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me"* (Mk 10:17-27).

One could author a dissertation on all the lessons contained in this passage from Mark. Is Jesus being literal? Do those of us who are rich in material things need to divest everything and become poor? Or is Jesus focused on the one thing that stands in this individual's way? Jesus refers to the commandments about how we treat others, not our relationship with God. Why? Jesus tells the man he will gain heaven by selling everything and giving to the poor; following Jesus is an invitation, not a requirement. Hmmh. And, given what has happened to the word "Christian," at least in the US, what does this invitation to follow Jesus mean?

**Provision: What would Jesus suggest you sacrifice?** This is a great imaginative **PRAY**er exercise: You approach Jesus. You've lived a good life; maybe not as spotless as this man presents himself, but you've toed the line pretty well. You look at Jesus and he looks back at you with love. What do Jesus' loving eyes see? What does he suggest that *you* need to sacrifice to gain eternal life (i.e., what, in your actual lived existence, is more important to you than God)? Will you do that, or will you go away sad? What does it mean for you to follow Jesus?

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**Tuesday, March 4:** *"Appear not before the LORD empty-handed ... The just one's sacrifice is most pleasing, nor will it ever be forgotten"* (Sir 35:1-12).

There are lovely metaphors in this passage: Works of charity are as an offering of fine flour, giving alms a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. As we begin Lent, we will hear much of this same sentiment from God through Isaiah (although God is more brusque!): Don't sacrifice your animals to me or sit around in sack cloth and think this will earn you my esteem. Do you imagine that I am as shallow as you?!

**Provision: Appear before the Lord each night empty-handed.** It is said St. Pope John XXIII prayed each night: "Lord, I have done all I can for your Church today. But it's your Church, so I am going to bed!" So, a twist on Sirach's words: **GIVE** all you can to others each day. Offer praise and thanksgiving to God each night. Come to God with hands emptied in service of God's least children. Your sacrifice will never be forgotten. (If you haven't read *The Story of the Other Wise Man*, by Henry van Dyke, it is worth the read at any time of year: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10679/pg10679-images.html>).

**Ash Wednesday, March 5:** *"Rend your hearts, not your garments"* (Jl 2:12-18).

*Kriah*, Hebrew for "tearing," is the ancient ritual of tearing one's garments to show grief. It is first recorded in Genesis when Jacob (Israel) tears his clothes upon hearing of Joseph's assumed death (37:34). It is used as a sign of grief, a reaction to blasphemy, atonement for sin, or as a sign of rejection of another. Modern Jews still pin a small piece of torn fabric to their clothes when grieving a loved one; some still tear their clothes but do so while standing as a sign of strength and trust in God. God asks us here to rend our hearts but is not asking us to take on more pain. Instead, rending our hearts is about opening ourselves up to God's grace and mercy.

**Provision: PRAY to rend your heart this Lent.** This is something we don't like to do. We don't want to be vulnerable, especially now when people in power are preying on those who are seen as weak. Consider though, these words from Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*: *"And every human heart that breaks, in prison-cell or yard ▪ Is as that broken box that gave its treasure to the Lord ▪ And filled the unclean leper's house with the scent of costliest nard. ▪ Ah! Happy they whose hearts can break and peace of pardon win! ▪ How else may man make straight his plan and cleanse his soul from sin? ▪ How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in?"* Allow the Lord Christ to enter in.

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**Thursday, March 6:** *"Choose life, then...by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him"* (Dt 30:15-20).

"Holding fast" to something suggests an anxious or important situation. (I remember fishing with my dad. He would say, "hold fast" to the fishing rod! I don't recall ever losing one, but that might have more to do with me not hooking many fish!) In Sanskrit, "satyagraha," a word coined by Gandhi for his peaceful resistance movement, translates loosely into insistence on or holding firmly to TRUTH. I think this is what Moses says to the Israelites. Hold fast to your faith, to God's commandments. It was essential to their happiness; it is essential to ours. But we need not do so with anxiety. Although at times, we might feel we are holding onto God for dear life, it is in the letting go of our dear life (both metaphorically and someday, literally) we can experience the peace and happiness found in heeding God's voice.

**Provision: Holding FAST to Faith.** Ok, so it's not the same definition of "fast" ...or then again, maybe it is. In the gospel, Jesus talks about losing our lives (or souls, in Greek) so as to save ourselves. We fast from relying solely on ourselves and our own will. We deny ourselves, accept what is given to us each day, and follow Jesus in his path of peaceful resistance. Hold fast to faith today, and fast from following the typical path of least resistance.

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**Friday, March 7:** *"Is not this the fast I choose—to unlock the shackles of wickedness, and loosen the bonds of the yoke, to set the downtrodden free?...Yes, to offer your bread to the hungry and bring the wretched poor into your house...and [your fellow human being] do not ignore"* (Is 58:1-9, Hebrew translation).

*"These lines against social injustice may reflect...the dire state of Judahite society in the early fifth century, B.C. E... [but] exploitation of the poor and indifference to suffering are prevalent in virtually all societies, including affluent twenty-first century America. That is precisely what imparts a sense of timeless relevance to this prophecy"* (The Hebrew Bible, Vol 2, by Robert Alter, pp.816-817).

**Provision: PRAY with the Book of Isaiah.** It's a lot to read. Sixty-six chapters, so two a day would take you almost to Holy Week. There is some whiplash involved, so quickly does the prophet move from the people's abject sinfulness to God's unconditional love. Read it reflectively, not as history, but as how it applies to us today.

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**Saturday, March 8:** *"Repairer of the breach," they shall call you, "restorer of ruined homesteads"* (Is 58:9-14).

I can't think of another descriptor that we would want to strive for than "repairer of the breach." But what is the breach to which Isaiah refers? Given the context, I can see the argument that the breach is between the people and God, but I can also see that it could as easily be the breach within the community. When the people extend help to their neighbors in need, they mend the breach with God.

**Provision: ACT to repair and restore.** One of the challenges of repairing breaches, building bridges, and restoring homesteads is you need two sides to work together. Often, there can be more than two sides which really complicates things, and these varying sides can be at odds. This happens between nations and within communities and families. Identify a breach that is causing you pain or a ruined "homestead" that might be rebuilt. See if you can **FAST** from any resentment or anger you feel. **PRAY** for courage. **GIVE** it a go and **ACT**. Take the first step to extend a hand and begin the work. (As I write this, we pray for Pope Francis and his full recovery. May God grant him strength and healing.)