

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Lent Week Three, 2026



Sunday, March 8: *When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay, and he stayed there two days. Many began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world"* (Jn 4:5-42).

Show of hands please: How many consider this gospel story one of Jesus' great miracles?

Like the skeptics in this Thursday's gospel, we may require some sort of dramatic sign from heaven to believe in Jesus (even though he has just driven out a mute demon...as if that weren't enough!) "Come on...the conversion of a community of despised Samaritans—at the invitation of some floozy no less—that's not a miracle...is it?"

Provision: CHOOSE to PAY ATTENTION and LISTEN. No leper is cleansed, no flow of blood dried up, no blindness or deafness cured. But healing happens, not only for the woman at the well, but also for her community. And love and joy begin to flourish. This does not happen because of a laying on of hands or clay made soft with spit or washing in some pool or river. "*We have heard for ourselves.*" Wow! The Samaritans choose to listen and believe simply because of Jesus' words of love. Make a conscious choice to pay attention when you read Scripture. Listen to the words God is speaking, not to some ancient peoples, but to you. Let your heart and soul be healed by love.

Monday, March 9: *"There were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town...to hurl him headlong [down the hill]* (Lk 4:24-30).

Really, what are the people of Nazareth so bent out of shape about? By his comments, Jesus intimates that the people in his native place are pretty much the same as the "chosen people" of old, rejecting the prophets sent to save them. The Nazarenes (who were considered "back-water" folks to begin with) take great and even a murderous offense at this insult. How would you respond if suddenly Jesus or his messenger showed up at your congregation and insinuated that you were all a bunch of hypocrites?

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. "*The Scriptures can often offend, but they are not meant to offend. They are meant to challenge. They only offend us if we do not want to be challenged*" (Walter Modrys, S.J.). I struggle with the lesson from this gospel almost daily. I pray God will point out to me how I might be living as a hypocrite. I've suggested in the past that, if you haven't, you might read the "Grand Inquisitor," a story within the book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky for an idea of how Christ might be "received" in modern times. I look at modern-day martyrs, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Alexei Navalny, and how, for their commitment to the gospel, they paid with their lives. Pay attention and use your informed conscience to ask: Am I living true to the words of the prophets, to Jesus' words? Or do I walk the path of least resistance, not questioning the status quo?

Tuesday, March 10: *"Remember your mercies, O Lord"* (Ps 25).

I imagine God hearing this prayer and answering us, "Oh, I always remember my mercies. Mercy is my name. The question is: "Do *you* remember my mercies?"

Provision: Recall God's mercies. A few of the readings this week have to do with remembering God's rescue: In Exodus, Moses is instructed to use the same staff he used to part the Reed Sea, in front of all the people, to draw water from the rock; in Deuteronomy, Moses says, "*take care not to forget the things your own eyes have seen;*" in Hosea, God tells the people their "*piety is like the dew that early passes away.*" Like the Israelites, we may take our blessings for granted and our memories can fade, particularly when the community is enjoying the fruits of God's bounty and mercy. It can happen to us as individuals as well. In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola suggests that we take note of the mercies and consolations God has provided to us over the years, to store them up for times of desolation or suffering. Spend time today recalling God's mercy and blessings. Record them in your journal to access when you are feeling low.

Wednesday, March 11: *"Observe [these commandments] carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations...be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory, but teach them to your children and to your children's children"* (Dt 4: 1, 5-9).

There is a communication strategy employed by the current US administration called "muzzle velocity" (I try to avoid *ad hominum* attacks, so if you are interested, look up the term and it will lead you to the source.) It represents the speed at which a gun can fire; the faster, the better. In communications, it's the idea of "flooding the zone," inundating the media and the public with rapid-fire news and sound bites so that what is front-page news this morning gets relegated to the

back pages (or even disappears!), forgotten by evening. The "opposition" can't keep up and the public gets overwhelmed. This of course is becoming more dangerous due to AI. In times like these, it is good to go back to the basics as Jesus reminds us in today's gospel; or, better yet, the basics as Jesus teaches in Friday's gospel: Love God, love yourself, love your neighbor. Don't let these words slip from your memory. Teach your children what it means to love.

Today's Provision: CHOOSE love. *"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve: The Lord, or the gods [of those] in whose land you are living. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15). As I write this, my country is bombing Iran and ICE agents are rounding up thousands of good people whose only crime is seeking a better life for their families. But I'm not folding up my tent and moving on. This is my home. I can't allow myself to be overwhelmed. Daily, I must choose love, even for those I see as enemies of love, and demonstrate for the coming generations what real love looks like. As you go about your day today, look for opportunities to choose and teach love.

Thursday, March 12: *"Faithfulness has disappeared"* (Jer 7:23-28). *"Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste ... Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters"* (Lk 11:14-23).

What does "faithfulness" mean to you? Following the rules of your chosen practice? I think that's one aspect of faithfulness; it can keep people focused. For me it has to do with maintaining hope in the promise of the Spirit and living my life according to the commandment to love. Of course, I'm not always faithful, but that's where trust in God's mercy comes into play.

The gospel today probably doesn't need much in the way of explanation given the current state of the world. Lots of division, and I'm sorry to say, lots of leaders looking to scatter, to divide and conquer. Two questions to ask ourselves: What do you think Jesus means by being "with" him? And what does it look like to "gather" rather than "scatter?"

Provision: PAY ATTENTION to what it means to be "with" Jesus. Some think this is about converting people to Christianity. Remember, Christianity wasn't a "thing" in Jesus' mind; in fact, he wasn't trying to establish a new religion at all. He was trying to get people to remember the wise teachings of the law and the prophets. I'm sure some will disagree, but to me, being with Jesus means loving *all* people. In fact, rejection or condemnation of those who are not Christian seems to me to be scattering, rather than gathering. What is your opinion? How do you read Jesus' words today?

Friday, March 13: *"Assyria will not save us, nor shall we have horses to mount; We shall say no more, 'Our god,' to the work of our hands"* (Hos 14:2-10).

This reading from Hosea is one of my favs. Right after the verse I chose for today, God tells us, "I will love you freely." How wonderful is that! But today, I am thinking about the other "gods" that I look to to "save" me: my country or my community? Nope. I think my community would try, but each person has their own need for salvation. Horses? While Hosea means military might, I think for us as individuals, it means wealth and possessions, things to take away the threat of hunger and poverty. Do I put so much emphasis on what I have so as to make it a "god?" Do I "worship" what I have? And "the work of my hands:" my accomplishments, my ego, my pride. Am I like the Pharisee in tomorrow's gospel, worshipping myself?

Provision: PAY ATTENTION to the "gods" and God in your life. I think I can say that I don't look at these things as "gods," but I spend more time maintaining and protecting my possessions and the "work of my hands" than I do intentionally praising and worshipping God! Now, I believe Paul's admonition to "pray always" is not about locking ourselves up in a monastery (although this can be a true call for some), but to be continually aware of God's blessings and presence with us, to share what we have, and to worship God by always being thankful for God's free love and mercy. Try to pay attention today to those pesky little "gods," that demand our focus and infuse them with prayers of praise and thanksgiving for God's presence in our lives!

Saturday, March 14: *"Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD...For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings"* (Hos 6:1-6).

Theology is the study of God, the nature of God, "a rational inquiry into religious questions." I like studying theology. For the most part, it expands my knowledge of God, but frankly, doesn't often serve to expand my faith and trust. Those blessings come from personal encounters with God, times when I am able to love another; not just to show love, but to actually love. Because this is what God desires; this is God's heart. Not the "love for show" as the Pharisee in today's gospel, but the true and humble love of someone who knows they are a sinner, willing to love other sinners.

Provision: Pray for the grace of real love. In the classic, *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran writes these words about love: *"When you love, you should not say, 'God is in my heart,' but rather 'I am in the heart of God.'"* And, true love, *"if it finds you worthy, directs your course."* Pray today for the grace to reside in God's heart, to let real love direct your course.