

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

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



Sunday, March 15: *"As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ...Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said, 'Surely we are not also blind, are we?' Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains'" (Jn 9:1-41).*

Interesting bookends to this story from John's Gospel. In ancient times, people assumed the bad things that happened to them or others...illness, blindness, poverty...were caused by one's sinfulness or that of one's parents—a sentiment that persists even today. Have you ever heard someone attribute some hardship they are facing as punishment for their sins? Perhaps you've said it yourself. Jesus dispels that myth by telling the crowd and the Pharisees (who are bent out of shape because Jesus healed on the Sabbath), it is those of us who claim to "see" and turn away from compassionate action that remain in sin.

Provision: PAY ATTENTION and CHOOSE. I imagine everyone reading this has heard, hundreds of times, the lessons of Jesus: the Beatitudes, the Judgment of the Nations; messages like "Love your enemies," "Be merciful," "Forgive and you will be forgiven." "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven." We are the ones who "see," and yet so many are still caught up in personal sins of commission and following the rules rather than facing the reality of personal and societal sins of omission and injustice. As you go about your day, pay attention to mistreatment or injustice occurring right in front of you; it's not as rare as you might think. Then make a conscious choice of how you will respond. Even if you choose to turn away, at least you will know what you need to repent. *"You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know"* (William Wilberforce, British slavery abolitionist, 1826).

Monday, March 16: *"They shall live in houses they build and eat the fruit of vineyards they plant"* (Is 65:17-21).

Pope Francis often talked about the dignity of work and the importance of self-sufficiency for humans to flourish. In the study of human development, the concepts of self-efficacy and resilience are considered an important steppingstone to healthy self-esteem, more so than one's accomplishments, awards, or skills. The idea that, with some effort on my part, "I am capable" and "I can bounce back from adversity" means more than "I am good at..." Parents are encouraged to let their children do for themselves, and to fail and try again—not something our result- and grade-oriented culture prizes.

With the rapid advent of AI, one thing that is not, in my view, getting enough attention is how it will impact our psyches. Job loss and significant economic issues are incredibly important, but we should also focus on our basic human need to do for ourselves. One only needs to look at the mental health crises of those in poverty (or conversely, the children of wealth) to see that self-efficacy matters. Our parenting God understands our need to eat the fruit of our handiwork.

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. I am not one who fears AI. Managed and within boundaries and the right settings, it has the potential to improve the quality of life for all. What I am much less sure about are those who pull the strings. We are facing a "sea change," and as we transition, it will be important for us to pay attention to how this change impacts our view of ourselves and particularly how our young people view themselves. Make sure in the rat race of performance and achievement, your kids and grandkids have activities they can do for themselves and for the joy of it, not demanding perfection or results. (Adults take note here too: your "net worth" is much more than your investments!)

Tuesday, March 17: *"See, you have become well; sin no more, so that something worse may not happen to you"* (Literal Greek). *"You look wonderful! You're well! Don't return to a sinning life or something worse might happen"* (The Message translation). *"Look! You are healed," he said to him. "Now that you have been set free, do not use your freedom to walk a path that leads to broken ways, or something worse may come to you"* (First Nations Version: An Indigenous Bible Translation of the New Testament). (Jn 5:1-16).

So how do these words of Jesus jibe with what we discussed Sunday? Some translations sound like Jesus is attributing the man's ailment to sinfulness. But scholarship says Jesus is instead cautioning the man to be careful not to use his new-found freedom in sinful ways. It reminds me of what Jesus says in Mt 12:43-45 about a cast-out demon coming back with seven new ones to occupy the soul of one who has not filled themselves with God. The best way to do this? Always remember God's healing mercy. Always remember to say thanks.

Provision: Say Thanks! Start each day with praise and thanks for the gift of another day. End each day (after your examen) to give praise and thanks! (And Happy St. Paddy's Day! 🍀).

Wednesday, March 18: *"My Father is at work until now, so I am at work...." Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:17-30).*

Jesus uses a metaphor of an apprentice who watches and learns from the master tradesman as he did, modeling his carpentry skills after St. Joseph's. So, what does Jesus see his heavenly Father doing at this time in Israel's history? If he looks at the temporal world around him, he sees discord, violence, and upheaval, not unlike what we see today. Instead, he looks to the words of Isaiah and the Psalmist: *"In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you; and I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, To restore the land and allot the desolate heritages, Saying to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness: Show yourselves! (Is 49) "The LORD is gracious and merciful...good to all and compassionate toward all his works...The LORD lifts up all who are falling." (Ps 145)*

Provision: Be Jesus' hands and feet. God, through Christ, is still at work today. Often, it takes stepping back from the fray and the chaos and the rampant bad news to look for opportunities to be Jesus' hands and feet, doing the work of Christ. You know, in carpentry, details are incredibly important. I imagine Jesus learned to pay close attention to the people and the world around him. Today, look for the small things you can do to bring Christ to others and all creation.

Thursday, March 19: *"It was not through the law that the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world, but through the righteousness that comes from faith. For this reason, it depends on faith, so that it may be a gift..." (Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22).*

Today is Saint Joseph's feast day. In a Bible filled with supporting cast members, St. Joseph is number one in my book. Abraham, a lead cast member, conversed with God and was promised the world; St. Joseph dreamt of an angel telling him not to worry about this confusing issue of Mary's pregnancy. God appealed to Abraham's dream of patriarchy and being "exceedingly fertile;" Joseph was told to hightail it out of Judea and relocate in a foreign country to protect this son that wasn't quite his.

Mary's faith is always held up as a model and rightly so. But Mary was young and favored by God, and probably not very educated. Joseph was older, righteous, and well-versed in the law and the prophecies. He had a lot of life experience to overcome to follow God's will. He was, of course, gifted with grace. As are we.

Provision: LISTEN and CHOOSE. Have you been asked to take on a responsibility for which you feel unprepared or confused? Are you being called to leave behind what you've known as truth all your life? We've been taught to analyze everything and it's wise to think and pray and ask for advice. But at the end of the day, it is grace on which we must rely. Converse with God. Ask God to send the Spirit to help you sort out your doubts. Then listen. If you choose God's will, the Spirit will provide you the grace to see you through.

Friday, March 20: *"Many are the troubles of the righteous one, but out of them all, the LORD delivers him" (Ps 34).*

What is your opinion? Do you agree with this statement? Other translations use "evils" or "afflictions" instead of "troubles." I always assumed this meant the just person is troubled by the ways of the world, forlorn that there is so much sin surrounding them. But further study indicates something else maybe you already know: *"Those who fear the Lord are not exempt from troubles" (The Jerome Biblical Commentary, p.679).* In fact, *The Message* translation reads, *"Disciples so often get into trouble; still, GOD is there every time."* Wow. So, this is not about the Lord raising the just one above the fray, but the Lord being there when the just one falls prey to trouble!

Provision: Seek God in times of trouble...even (or especially) when you're the one causing the trouble! *"There are two kinds of people: the righteous who believe themselves sinners; and, the rest, who believe themselves righteous" (Blaise Pascal).*

Saturday, March 21: *"Let the malice of the wicked come to an end" (Ps 7).*

The Psalms, of course, are based on an "us versus them" mentality, one that is pervasive today. By labeling "them," "the other," "the enemy," "the wicked," we cast judgment which is God's purview. We also build boundaries and walls instead of bridges. *The Message* translation reads, *"Close the book on Evil, GOD."* Do I think we are seeing rampant evil and cruelty right now? Yes, of course, and frankly, I can't understand how anyone can see it any other way; it is completely contrary to Jesus' teachings. But my prayer and work this Lent is to avoid hate and labeling, even as I continue to call out the wickedness I see. *"Close the book on Evil, GOD."* I like that.

Today's Provision: Let's CHOOSE our words. This is hard for me, and in the privacy of my own home, I can spew some vitriol! Is it hard for you, too? I am so tempted to use Jeremiah's words today: *"Let me witness the vengeance you take on them!"* And yet, in my heart, I know this is not the way of Christ. Each morning, think about the day ahead. Will you be challenged to check your anger and frustration? I'm trying—not always succeeding—but trying to say a prayer for the person or people who is, or could, incite my ire. I pray too, for God to soften my heart and to love. It's our choice.