

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

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



Sunday, April 26: *"But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice... "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep" (Jn 10:1-10).*

We hear in this passage *"the Pharisees did not realize what Jesus was trying to tell them."* I admit I am confused by this reading as well. Is Jesus saying he is the "gatekeeper" or the "shepherd?" Then he says, "I am the gate for the sheep." And in tomorrow's reading he says he is the "good shepherd." From a literary standpoint, it's unclear, and we know how literal the Pharisees can be (remember Nicodemus and being born again!). If Jesus is the gate, is God the gatekeeper? And is he telling the elders that, as shepherds, they must enter through him in order to lead the flock to salvation?

I am reminded of Chapter 34 in Ezekiel, when lambasting the shepherds of Israel, God says, *"I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest. The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal"* (v. 15). Jesus is all things: the gatekeeper, the gate, the good shepherd, and, if we want to take it further, he became one of us, a sheep led to the slaughter. Jesus is all things.

Provision: LISTEN for the good shepherd's voice. I seem to be hearing this wisdom from the Spirit a lot these days, so I pass it along to you. There are so many voices that call to us, some good, some wicked. Some enter through the gate of truth, and some are thieves and robbers, trying to steal our souls. Are you able to hear Jesus' voice amid the noise? It's hard to do if you're not in the habit of listening for him. His is not often the loudest voice, but the small still whisper heard after the storm. We must be willing to be silent and persistent in silence to recognize Jesus' voice. See if you can spend some time in stillness and quiet today to listen for the good shepherd's call to follow.

Monday, April 27: *"Do not deem profane what God has made pure. . . . who was I that I might hinder God?"* (Acts 11:1-18, literal Greek translation, David Bentley Hart).

The story of Peter's vision in Acts 11 is pretty strange but let's look at what it represents. Peter is told to slaughter and eat all the wild beasts and reptiles and birds he sees. He emphatically rejects this due to Jewish dietary laws. (A clarifying note: in Mark 7:19, a phrase is added to Jesus' discussion about ingesting what is clean or unclean: *"Thus, he declared all foods clean."* This phrase is not found in any Greek translations and is assumed to have been added later, based on Paul's writings, e.g., *1Tim 4:4-5; hence, the early Jewish-Christians adherence to Jewish laws.)

The vision is symbolic of God's call for the new Jewish sect to reach out in fellowship to Gentiles and is a precursor to the decision about dietary laws at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). The wind of the Spirit is blowing free, breaking down barriers, removing restrictions, and making all things new and pure. *"For everything created by God is good, and nothing that is received with thanksgiving is to be cast away, for it is made holy by God's word and by prayer."*

Provision: "Who am I to hinder God?" None of us wants to think we stand in God's way, but we may do just that by: judging others...deciding who gets to come to table and who does not... not forgiving others...not forgiving ourselves...mistreating God's creatures and creation...refusing to accept Spirit-driven change...not caring for the poor and oppressed...not calling out hypocrisy. By not asking in any given moral situation, what would God have me do? These questions are great for prayer, ones we can ask ourselves in our nightly examen: Where did I further God's will today? Where did I recognize purity where others see profaneness? Where might I have hindered God today?

Tuesday, April 28: *When [Barnabas] arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart (Acts 11:19-26).*

What sort of things does Barnabas "see" in Antioch that show him the grace of God? He sees people from different walks of life, Jews and Gentiles coming together, sharing, and helping each other. He sees them dealing fairly in business, avoiding temptation, teaching others about Jesus, even if the details get crossed up a bit; even if all the Is are not dotted or Ts crossed. The grace of God doesn't always look like what we expect.

Provision: Look for God's grace. How wide is your definition of God's grace? Imagine you arrive at a new workplace, school, or church. What sorts of things would you expect to see if you were hoping to see God's grace? Have you ever ventured out for the day purposely looking for God's grace? This is a great prayer experience. Open your heart and mind and look for the unexpected. Be so aware that you can be surprised by God's grace!

Wednesday, April 29: *"And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world"* (Jn 12:44-50).

Thomas Jefferson, who was a deist, supposedly cut out of his New Testament everything other than what the evangelists reported were the words of Jesus. While the context of Bible stories is essential to our understanding, it's an interesting prayer exercise to focus just on Jesus' words. Most faith practices and doctrines come from scholarly interpretations of what people think Jesus meant, or from the early church as it struggled to define how to live his teachings. But I wonder: What are the things we've come up with over the years that have Jesus scratching his head, saying, "Where did they get *that* idea?" Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn, even when we misinterpret or even ignore his words.

Provision: LISTEN to Jesus' words. Jesus makes it clear: the words themselves will be our judge. Each night when I pray the examen, I try to look at my day in terms of Jesus' words: *"Forgive and you will be forgiven."* *"Do not be like the hypocrites."* *"Stop judging."* *"Beware of false prophets."* *"What you do for the least of these, you do for me."* Reflect on Jesus' words that speak the loudest, the clearest to you. Use them to inform your prayer each day, trying not to judge yourself too harshly. Jesus does not condemn you but just asks you to continue to pay attention and do your best.

Thursday, April 30: *"I have given you an example so that, just as I have done for you, you may do as well. Amen, amen, I tell you, a slave is not superior to his lord, nor is an apostle superior to the one sending him. If you know these things, how blissful you are if you do them"* (Jn 13:16-20, literal Greek).

These verses follow the washing of the feet at the Last Supper. The first scene (that gets the most attention) is Jesus' exchange with Peter. Theologians say Jesus is indicating the need for disciples to be thoroughly "washed" by Jesus' Spirit, but also the importance of partial "washings" to keep them in the Spirit. Poetically, Jesus is telling us that we need to allow him to care for us if we are to care for others. This second part reminds us we are and will never come close to being equal or greater than him (even if we portray that in a meme 😊) but we should not fail to follow his example; it is the way to bliss!

Provision: How has Jesus washed your feet? This is a good follow-up to yesterday's reflection about Jesus' words that speak to you. For me, Jesus speaks to me through his words of empowerment, and I have experienced his care in that way, too. Just as he has empowered me through his mercy and love, I try to do so for others; this is what brings me joy! How have you experienced his care and love? How has his example led you to blessedness and bliss?

Friday, May 1: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?"* (Jn 14:1-6).

Such comforting words! Legend says Saint Bridget dreamed there would be a lake of beer in heaven! But God's house is here and now (although I've yet to locate that lake) not some place far-off in the sky. So, each day, we pray the Spirit will help us prepare for the heaven we will encounter that day, even if it is hard to find.

Provision: Start packing! Here's a fun prayer exercise: Make a list of things you are packing for heaven, both today and for when we leave the earth. We can't take with us the things of this world, but we will indeed carry with us the heart of the life we have lived. If we plan each day, then we won't have to worry too much when we face the end of our lives. What's on your list? What provisions are you stockpiling?

Saturday, May 2: *"If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it"* (Jn 14:7-14).

Gosh, how many times have I prayed for an intention in Jesus' name, only to have my prayer go unanswered! This reality drives some people away from faith: 'Jesus says this, but I don't see it happen. Why should I believe?' I struggle too, but I rely on a quote from Anthony de Mello, SJ, one I've shared with you before: *"If you had the choice, which would you choose: the granting of your petition or the grace to be peaceful whether it is granted or not?"* (from *Taking Flight*, p.26).

Provision: Reflect on this prayer if you struggle with petitions that seem to go unanswered. The story is that this prayer was found in the pocket of an anonymous slain American Civil War soldier; I've shared this in the past as well:

*"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing I asked—but everything I had hoped for.
Almost in spite of myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all, most richly blessed."*