

# Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings  
Seventh Week of Easter, 2024



**Sunday, May 12:** *He presented himself alive to them, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ...they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:1-11). "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened" (Eph 1:17-23).*

It's been a while since we've discussed the important difference between "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of Israel." Considering the theocratic rumblings in the US and the wars in the Middle East and Africa, perhaps it is time to resurrect this topic. Jesus says very little about the kingdom of Israel. He refers to the kingdom of God, or more often, the kingdom of heaven. It seems though, even now, the Twelve are still hung up on the idea that the kingdom of Israel is the main goal. They just don't get it. They still must be enlightened by the Spirit.

**Today's Provision: "May the eyes of your heart be enlightened."** When we look through the eyes of human ego, the vision is narrow and usually about control and power, which is of course what drives theocracies. The eyes of our hearts broaden our vision and allow us to see through the smoke and mirrors. Pray today that the eyes of your heart are open and able to see beyond the narrow scope of those who wish to align countries with their specific definition of God, a God who defies definition: "*Si comprehendis non est Deus—If you think you have grasped him, it is not God you have grasped*" (St. Augustine).

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**Monday, May 13:** *"The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken" (Ps 68).*

I guess we might as well keep on the touchy subject of politics and religion! "*God gives a home to the forsaken.*" The burning issue of immigration is not going away. It is only going to get hotter as the world gets hotter, pushing people north for their very survival. There is no definitive way to assess the numbers of widows and orphans among those seeking refuge, but some statistics say upwards of 70% of those seeking to save their lives are women and children. (Sources: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states> and <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>). We cannot turn our backs and hide in our enclaves. We must demand that our politicians find compassionate ways to deal with the forsaken at the border.

**Today's provision: Have compassion.** Countries need sound immigration policies. There are good reasons to ensure those coming to our countries are people of goodwill. And it is a complex problem not easily solved, but it demands compassionate—not draconian—action now. I remember Pope Francis saying several years ago that if every faith community in the world would take responsibility for just one family that we could make a huge difference. Think about starting an effort in your faith community to look for ways to sponsor or support a family. Educate yourself. Don't rely on the talking heads and influencers. Make sure you understand the complexity and think creatively how you might work on solutions in your own community. Make your voice heard in your state and on the federal level. Don't forsake the forsaken. Be God's hands and feet and heart in the world.

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**Tuesday, May 14:** *"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:9-17).*

A late priest friend and colleague of mine with whom I used to run retreats would start the retreats with this statement: "Most of you think you made a decision to come on this retreat, but actually, it was the Holy Spirit who led you to this very place at this very time." In other words, God chose you and invited you. Now, of course, you get kudos for being alert to and following God's subtle nudges, but it's good to remember that with all our belief in self-determination, God, who wants for our welfare and not woe (Jer 29:11), is always quietly inviting us to come closer.

**Today's Provision: Be alert for the invitation.** Too often, I find myself on autopilot, not taking the time to consider where God is inviting me at any given time. Of course, our nightly examen can help us to look back on the day, and to become more aware of God's presence in our lives. But you may want to consider intentionally stopping at mid-day to do a mini-examen: "Where is God? Where am I?" Don't get into "analysis paralysis" by discerning every little step of your day but pray the Spirit will keep the eyes of your heart always enlightened and alert to God's invitation.

**Wednesday, May 15:** *"Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one"* (Jn 17:11-19).

Jesus' prayer for oneness of the disciples continues in tomorrow's gospel as well: *"that they may be brought to perfection as one."* It doesn't take long for the early communities to start defining "Christianity" for themselves. Somehow, I don't think Jesus was referring only to the Twelve when he said this.

**Today's Provision: Strive for unity.** According to a 2024 study by Princeton Theological Seminary, there are, "perhaps shocking[ly] 47,000" Christian denominations worldwide (<https://omsc.ptsem.edu/the-annual-statistical-table/>). In his book, *A Conspiracy of Goodness* (1992), theologian Donald Messer takes a strong stand: *"Denominationalism is a scandal to the world and a sin before God"* (p.23). He believes we will be judged harshly for carving up the Body of Christ. I concur. Go back to Augustine's quote from Sunday. What is your opinion? Do you think God, the Source of all, wants division in God's name? Consider what you might do to foster unity in Christ's name. (The aforementioned book is a bit academic, but an inspiring read with examples of how we might fulfill Jesus' desire for oneness.)

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**Thursday, May 16:** *"Father, they are your gift to me"* (Jn 17:20-26).

I remember receiving a little prayer card from my mom when I was a child: *"What you are is God's gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God."* Jesus tells us today that we are God's gift to him. At various stages of my life, I have wondered if Jesus read the fine print on my return policy! No, Jesus does not "return" any one of us, but he does "regift" us. Through the Spirit, we are all called to make the most of the gift of love we have been given.

**Today's Provision: What gift will you give to God?** This sounds like a fun prayer exercise for the day! Ask yourself: What will I give God today? Think creatively about your plans for the day. Ask the Spirit to enlighten you and lead you to use your God-given gifts to spread love. Then, at the end of the day, wrap it up as best you can—not perfect, mind you—but as a gift from the heart and present it to God. It will be just what God wants!

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**Friday, May 17:** *He said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? ...Feed my lambs." "Simon, son of John, do you love me? ...Tend my sheep." Simon, son of John, do you love me? ...Feed my sheep"* (Jn 21:15-19).

There is an interesting nuance in this passage, one I find so endearing and empowering. We know Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, "the rock, the foundation," a nickname, as Anthony DeMello says, for Simon Peter to live up to. Here, he addresses Peter by his given name, "Simon, son of Jonas." After all the headiness and power of the past three years, with all the drama that has unfolded... "Simon, do you love me?" Jesus addresses Simon Peter at his core, at his very heart, as if to say, 'Yes, I gave you a new name, but this grace has been within you all along.' Jesus empowers us with our faith. Do you hear him calling you by your real name? What is he calling you to do for his flock?

**Today's Provision: Listen for your real name:** In T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Naming of Cats*, he explains that cats have three names: one the family calls it; another peculiar name all its own; and the third known to the cat alone. It is on this name that the cat sits in "profound meditation" and "rapt contemplation." *"I have called you by name and you are mine"* (is 43:1). Very often, life gives us "names." Maybe it is the role we play—parent, child, boss, doctor—along with all the societal expectations those "names" carry. Unfortunately, many suffer from "names" given in childhood—stupid, bad, worthless, sinful. These are not our real names in God's eyes. This is fodder for deep reflection and prayer. Ask God to reveal to you the loving name you have been given and by which God calls you. *"No longer will you be called 'Forsaken' or 'Desolate,' but you will be called 'My Delight!'"* (Is 62:4, adapted).

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**Saturday, May 18:** *"[The Lord's] eyes behold, his look probes the sons of man. The Lord probes the righteous and the wicked and the lover of havoc he utterly hates"* (Ps 11, Hebrew translation).

I can't help but imagine that as the Lord's eyes behold and probe the sons of man, as "his searching glance" is upon us every day, the good Lord doesn't just say, "What the... are they thinking!?"

I chose to use the Hebrew translation for this psalm since, to me, the word "havoc" implies something different than "violence" or "brutality," the words used in other translations I consult. Havoc is spread by those who purvey fake news, who plant false seeds of discontent, who look to incite violence. Unfortunately, we are seeing anarchists, or in some cases, people from the opposing camp infiltrating demonstrations, causing or adding to the havoc already there. This has been the case in some of the college campus protests happening now in the US. I know I can cause havoc, even if it is just within myself, when my thoughts and rhetoric become heated or combative.

**Today's Provision: Be a lover of harmony, not havoc.** How will you spread harmony today? Perhaps a break from the newsfeed might help. Instead, use the time to sit with God in nature. Consider doing a "Whole (and Holy) day, week, or month: Eat whole foods, refrain from the news and negative speech, feast on gratitude, and bring body, mind, and spirit into a place of holy harmony and wholeness. Let the Lord behold you and say, "Now, that's more like it!"