

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Easter Week Two, 2025



Sunday, April 27: *"I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus"* (Rev 1:9-13, 17-19).

That's an odd threesome. "Kingdom" doesn't seem like it really belongs. It sounds incongruous with endurance in the face of distress. John has been exiled to the Greek island of Patmos, a place said to be reserved for violent criminals. The "distress [he has] in Jesus" is due to his active witness in Judea and Asia Minor in the years following Jesus' Ascension.

We hear later this week the disciples are overjoyed at being worthy of suffering for the faith. But facing constant persecution and abuse is distressing and draining. Finding courage and "endurance in Jesus" is essential for the fledgling community to survive and grow, which is why I think John places "the kingdom" right there in the middle. The Kingdom of God is central if we are to accept the stresses, big and small, we encounter in life. The kingdom is the wellspring which allows us to endure and flourish joyfully in the face of suffering.

Provision: Is the Kingdom of God the center of your life? This is particularly important these days when, for many, distress is a constant companion and endurance is essential. When the stresses of life wear me down, it's invariably because I have replaced the fulcrum of my life on something other than God's kingdom. Our theme for 2025 is "Courage in Community," and I believe this reminder from John is so timely. Let's keep our focus on the Kingdom of God—all of God's creation. Spend time today reflecting on what's at the center of your life.

Monday, April 28: *As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness* (Acts 4:23-31).

Provision: Has the Spirit shaken you? This all sounds very dramatic, but when the Spirit comes to us it is more often as Jesus describes it in today's gospel: *"The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit"* (Jn 3:1-8). To continue to speak the word of God with boldness, we first need to be aware, to pay attention to the wind of the Spirit when it appears. Occasionally, for some, it comes in like a gale so there is no doubt from whence it came. But if we commit to seeking God in all things, even the subtle summer breezes will provide the comfort, reassurance, and courage we need to speak out, even amidst the storms of resistance, sin, and hatred. Be open today to feel the Spirit shaking you oh so gently into action.

Tuesday, April 29: *The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common... There was no needy person among them* (Acts 4:32-37).

Fritz Kreisler, the late, renowned concert violinist is quoted as saying: *"I was born with music in my system. It was a gift from God. I didn't acquire it. So, I do not even deserve thanks for the music... I never look upon the money I earn as my own. It is public money, entrusted to me for proper disbursement. My beloved wife feels exactly as I do... In all these years of my so-called success in music we have not built a house for ourselves. Between it and us stand all the homeless in the world"* (as cited in *Challenge*, by Mark Link SJ).

Well now. This attitude is rarely seen today. I don't live this way, do you? This is antithetical to the extreme, so-called "crony capitalism" we see at work in many countries. We likely assume this sort of thing might only be possible in small austere communities, and yet, it is worth some consideration for all of us. When you hear the word "possessions," what do you think of? What do you "own" and how do these things define who you are? What about things like clean air and water, safe shelter, education, sufficient food, and healthcare that so many of us take for granted? Do you see these as things that constitute "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," "unalienable rights given to all humans by their Creator, and which governments are created to protect?" Or are they privileges for those who can afford them?

Provision: Look around. Who is needy in your life? I don't mean the family member who "needs" the latest tech or fad or concert ticket. You might have close family members who have unmet essential needs, or members of your church community or neighborhood. If there is no one you know who is truly needy, then perhaps *you need* to get out more! At the very least, those of us blessed with more than we need are called to ask ourselves what really matters in our life. How can we wisely share what we have? Do we vote and participate in public life based on what is good for our bank accounts, or do support a government that works to bring justice and dignity to those who lack the basics?

Wednesday, April 30: *The high priest rose up and all his companions, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and, filled with jealousy, laid hands upon the Apostles, and put them in the public jail (Acts 5:17-26).*

Throughout history, people have been jailed for protesting and speaking the truth. Such is the case for the Apostles in today's first reading. In kingdoms and autocracies, this suppression of rights happened all the time and still occurs, even to the extent of "eliminating" those who protest. One need only look at modern-day Russia today to see this reality. Of course, anyone who protests violently or destructively (say, by trying to destroy the seat of government and kill politicians) must be punished. But in a democracy, peaceful protests are a basic right. This is part of what, in the past, made America great. Don't you think this is the sort of thing we should be looking at when we consider greatness?

Provision: Consider the Scripture of your life. After writing about scripture for almost 17 years, I am always amazed, not only by how much of what we have reflected upon in the past is still valid, but how much hasn't changed over the millennia! We make progress but then get rich and lazy. We fall back into apathy and attitudes that make society ripe for strongmen and autocrats. We will be reading from Acts of the Apostles throughout the Easter season. Read these stories, not as history, but to learn lessons on how to live the scripture of your life.

Thursday, May 1: *"We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:27-33).*

"God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God and God in them" (1 Jn 4:16) Do you believe this? Things that come from God come from love. Anything that is not of love is not of God. If we believe each soul is made in God's image and if we believe faith is a gift from God, how can we ever judge any one person based on how God created them?

Today's Provision: Obey God. We are not talking about behavior here. Civil laws are needed, ones based on a just and fair balance between the dignity of *every human being*, their individual rights, the common good, and the safety of society. Any laws or customs that oppress people strictly because of their race or religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality—any laws not based in love and mercy are not of God. We will not be judged on how well we followed the rules of men. We will be judged on how well we have loved.

Friday, May 2: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid? One thing I ask of the LORD, this I seek (Ps 27).*

Provision: What do you fear? What do you seek? The psalms can provide a great starting point for this kind of thoughtful, meditative prayer. There are lots of declarative statements and rhetorical questions to lead us to consider the meaning for and in our own lives (as we talked about on Wednesday—the scripture of our lives). What do I fear? For me, some are based on me and my ego, some are based on the state of the world. I fear being rejected or feeling like there is nothing I can do to make things better. I fear the loss of cognition and abilities that can come with age (my hips remind me of this every day!) I fear the pain we continue to inflict on children and innocents through war, gun violence, and abuse. I fear the destruction of Mother Earth. As the psalm says, I really do seek to dwell in the "house" of the Lord all the days of my life; by that I mean being able to see and be with God in every situation. Give this prayer a try today. Journal your thoughts. Honestly sharing our fears and desires is a wonderful way to become closer to God.

Saturday, May 3: *"Philip said to Jesus, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us" (Jn 14:6-14).*

What the heck is Philip asking here? What does he expect Jesus to do? "Sure, no problem, Phil. I'll just summon God right now. I'm sure the Father is not busy with other things!" Talk about a brazen request, especially from a Jew! You can hear the disappointment in Jesus' response. These guys just don't seem to get it.

I too can forget Jesus has indeed shown me the Father in the person of himself. And he reminds me in the Judgment of the Nations (Mt 25) where I can see God everyday: in the poor, the hungry, the naked, the prisoner, the stranger. Am I bold enough to touch God, to look into God's eyes today?

Provision: Is Jesus enough for you? *"Jesus was experienced as the breakthrough in the history of humanity. ...He was on a par with God. His word was God's word. His Spirit was God's Spirit. ...To believe in Jesus is to agree with this assessment. We do not need to use the same words, same concepts, or same titles. We do not need to use titles at all. But if we relegate Jesus and what he stands for to second place in our scale of values, we have already denied him and what he stands for. ...Either you accept the 'kingdom' as Jesus understood it or you don't. You cannot serve two 'masters.' ... Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus reveals God to us, God does not reveal Jesus to us. God is not the Word of Jesus, that is to say, our ideas about God cannot throw any light upon the life of Jesus. To argue from God to Jesus instead of arguing from Jesus to God is to put the cart before the horse. This, of course, is what many Christians have tried to do. It has generally led them into a series of meaningless speculations which cloud the issue, and which prevent Jesus from revealing God to us" (from *Jesus Before Christianity*, by Albert Nolan, O.P., 2001, pp. 165-166).*