

# Provisions as We Become A New Creation

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Fifth Week of Easter 2021



**Sunday, May 2:** *"Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth."* (1 Jn 3:18-24)

Or, said another way, "Put your money where your mouth is!" "Put some skin in the game!" Talk is easy and cheap. But so is money at times. I was talking with some colleagues recently about how hard it is to get people these days, at least in my corner of the world, to commit their time to social justice causes. I live in an affluent area and most everyone I know is very generous with money and material possessions. This is wonderful and necessary to meet the immediate needs of those less fortunate, but it doesn't often bring about change: neither societal change nor the change of heart we seek for ourselves.

People are so busy, particularly those with young kids, and especially during this crazy time of pandemic. School work, sports, music lessons, etc., piled on top of our own work schedules barely leaves time to breathe. And yet, what are we demonstrating to our children? Are we teaching them that their desires always come first? Is that what Christ taught? Are we living Christ's commandment to love or just mouthing the words?

**Today's Provision: Look at your priorities.** I don't need to elaborate on what this means. Step off the treadmill and look at your life. If you are raising children, how does the life your family is leading nurture the type of people you hope your children will become? Are you balancing body, mind, and soul? If the "soul" part is occasional attendance at worship or prayers before dinner, perhaps you want to do some rethinking. How do I demonstrate love for all of God's Kingdom by what I do and how I attest to the truth?

**Monday, May 3:** *"...After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once..."* (1 Cor 15:1-8)

I've never found a clear explanation of when and where this appearance to 500 people occurred. It seems like a big deal so you'd think it would be recorded somewhere in Acts or in a gospel. Some say it refers to Mark 16:7 when Jesus tells the women (who, BTW, Paul, he appeared to first!) he will see them in Galilee. But regardless, isn't it nice that Paul can point to this as "proof." If you were pressed, what would you point to as proof?

**Today's provision: Let your life be your proof.** Let us pray that when people look at us, they need to see nothing more than our lives and our joy as proof of the Risen Christ. How do you make Christ "appear" to others?

**Tuesday, May 4** *They appointed presbyters for them in each Church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.* (Acts 14:19-28)

Think of the faith and trust Paul and Barnabas – and all the early missionaries – have in the Holy Spirit! They have a lot of ground to cover, so they entrust the new faith communities to men and women they believe will be true to the inspiration and wisdom of the Spirit. These community leaders don't go through years of theological training before they receive the stamp of approval. Paul and Barnabas listen to the Spirit and trust her guidance. I wonder sometimes with all the reviews and approvals that most teaching of the faith has to go through now, whether we are "hindering" God, putting the Spirit to the test to satisfy our need for control.

**Today's Provision: Do you trust the Spirit?** I am not downplaying the importance of and need for Scripture study and study of the kerygma, the first teachings of the Apostles. There is a lot we can learn from these early teachings. Faith doesn't need to be complex; in fact, it should be rather simple, but that doesn't mean it is a checklist experience either. It requires discernment and a healthy personal relationship with the Trinity.

Here's a prayer I've shared before by Mark Link, SJ (d. 2017). I say this prayer all the time: at the beginning of the day, before I begin a new project, or convene a meeting. It is simple but profound:

*"Father, you created me and put me on earth for a purpose.*

*Jesus, you died for me and called me to complete your work.*

*Holy Spirit, you help me to carry out the work for which I was created and called.*

*In your presence and name –Father, Son, and Spirit—*

*I begin my ... day, writing, meeting, reflection, etc.*

*May all my thoughts and inspirations have their origin in you and be directed to your glory. Amen*

*(from Challenge, 1993)*

**Wednesday, May 5:** *"He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you."* (Jn 15:1-8)

I am notoriously bad at gardening. (I share the story that when I was asked to bring to a spiritual reflection group a tool I use to garden, I brought my checkbook!) So my husband bought me one of those hydroponic herb gardens for Christmas, and oh my goodness, these things grow like wildfire! The neighbors wind up receiving bunches of dill and mint and whatever else is growing out of control. I have learned what it means to keep up with pruning. Now, if I could only apply it to the rest of my life!

**Today's Provision: What needs pruning in your life?** We've talked about the need to discern God's will as we look at what is overgrown in our lives. Sometimes, God does the pruning for us. For many, this pandemic year has been one of pruning the overgrowth; for others, it's been an excuse to let things grow unchecked. While pruning has practical applications, are you looking at how pruning applies to your spiritual life as well? It's so important to allow God's voice to guide us.

Take a look at what is draining the soil of your life. Then take a look at why that might be. Are you overly invested in some things that would grow better with less tending? Are you parched, in need of living water to help you bloom? This gardening analogy is perfect for the life of our souls. Be creative. Play and pray with these images to help you see how God wants your garden to grow!

**Thursday, May 6:** *"I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete."* (Jn 15:9-11)

As I read this, I had to ask myself, "Am I filled with Christ's joy?" This led to the second question: "Do I really know what Christ's joy is?" Did the disciples know when he spoke these words to them? Do you? He says these words before his death. They are not about the joy of the Resurrection and its triumph over death. What is Christ's joy?

I like to imagine it as a parent who feels joy in seeing a child overcome a difficulty or succeed at a hard task. I remember the surprise and joy on my young children's faces when they achieved some milestone, like their first steps, or when they discovered something new in nature. That's joy.

**Today's Provision: Imagine Christ's joy.** I think Christ is joyful when we finally realize the unconditional nature of his love and mercy. He tells us of his joy when, as a lost sheep or coin, we are found and return to him. I think Jesus feels joy when we try and fail and then get up and try again. Spend some time imagining how Christ finds joy in you—because he finds joy in each one of us—and then let that joy fill your heart as well.

**Friday, May 7:** *"I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."* (Jn 15:12-17)

I wonder what Jesus means here because frankly, there are lots of times I don't know or understand what the Master is doing! But I am sure that Jesus does not want us to be slaves. He wants us to be his friends and friends with each other. He wants us to do what we do out of our love for him; not to avoid punishment or to get preferential treatment, but for the sheer joy of being able to walk alongside him and learn from him. Wow! That thought brings tears to my eyes and the warmth of his love to my heart!

**Today's Provision: Be Jesus' friend.** Think about good friends and what good friends do. They talk about deep and essential things. They laugh together and they cry together. They have fun and they mourn. Good friends vent to one another and admit when they don't understand something. And sometimes, good friends hurt each other. The depth of the friendship is tested, but stands the trial and grows deeper. Do you allow Jesus to be this kind of friend to you? And are you this kind of friend to him?

**Saturday, May 8:** *Serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song.* (Ps 100)

Gladness and joyful songs are in short supply these days and for good reason. The past year has been difficult and painful for so many. But we know from psychological studies that, in the case of mild depression or anxiety, your mood follows your actions. (Those who suffer from more serious forms, of course, require clinical intervention and should be supported in doing so.)

Singing to God may be hard for you right now. Perhaps you feel God is nowhere to be found. But see if you can muster the energy and hope to lift your voice, joyful for the life and blessings God has given you. Think about times God has been there for you in the past and have confidence God will be there for you again.

**Today's Provision: Sing.** Our dear mother would say it was her act of charity to the others in her pew NOT to sing! I inherited her "tin ear" I guess, but darn it, I like to sing! I like to dance! I like to come before God in song and dance and so far, I haven't noticed God wearing earplugs, so I will continue! Find your deep gladness. Find your joy. Serve God by coming before God with joyful song!