

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

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



Sunday, March 22: *When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary sat at home... When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (Jn 11:1-45).

I picture this scene, a traditional Shiva mourning ritual, one of the oldest in Jewish society. We hear many Jews had come to mourn with the sisters, so it makes sense that when Martha goes out to meet Jesus, Mary stays at home, sitting with the mourners. But a little thought comes to my mind: I wonder if Mary isn't just a wee bit angry at or at least disappointed in Jesus delaying his arrival. A messenger likely reported back that the news of Lazarus' illness had been delivered. I can see Mary and Martha by Lazarus' sick bed as he progressively gets worse, pacing back and forth waiting and watching for Jesus to show up.

Provision: CHOOSE to be honest with God about your feelings. Have you ever experienced disappointment or even anger when Jesus does not "show up" at all or in the way you want him to? It saddens me when people turn away from faith when their fervent prayers are not answered. When it happens to me, I need to remind myself, "God is not a vending machine." When we pray, "Your will be done," we are called to acknowledge that God's way and will are not our way or will. But that doesn't mean we can't express to God how we feel.

I was at a Lenten retreat last week where we actively "lamented." We were encouraged to write our own psalms and tell God honestly how we feel about losses or disappointments in our lives, because...spoiler alert... God already knows! It can be freeing and healing to express ourselves so openly. Consider writing your own psalm. The lament psalms begin with complaining and whining (like Ps 22), and then, somewhere in the middle, turn to praise and thanksgiving. It's okay to vent to God! God can take it!

Monday, March 23: *The two old men hurried to her. "Look," they said, "the garden doors are shut; give in to our desire and lie with us. If you refuse, we will testify against you that you dismissed your maids because a young man was here with you." "I am completely trapped," Susanna groaned. "If I yield, it will be my death; if I refuse, I cannot escape your power. Yet it is better for me to fall into your power without guilt than to sin before the Lord"* (Dn 13:41-62).

(Trigger alert). This is a sordid story, and forgive me for saying, but it calls to mind the despicable news stories we hear today about sexual abuse of young women at the hands of powerful men. It is a sad reality: we don't change much.

There are many messages and lessons embedded in this long passage. Daniel, a young man, takes a risk to call out the hypocrisy and evil he sees. Are there situations we witness that call us to take a risk to protect someone? Today, though, the Spirit inspired me to focus on what Susanna says. She cries that yielding will be her "death" (the LXX translation reads "sinning in the sight of the Lord"), but of course, refusing also means death, in this case, by stoning. I pray we have moved passed the point of blaming women for the sins of lustful men, but alas, I am not so sure.

Provision: Do not suffer for the sins of another. I have sat with people...men, children, but especially women...who suffer toxic shame—indeed the death of their spirits—due to the sins inflicted upon them by others. It is so important that people know the Lord sees the truth. Do not suffer from the sins others have committed against you; they are not your sins to carry. The Lord hears your cry and will fill you with love, mercy, and healing. If you are aware of someone suffering from abuse, don't turn away. Be there for them. Take a risk. Call out evil. It might just save someone's life.

Tuesday, March 24: *"O LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry come to you. Hide not your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; in the day when I call, answer me speedily"* (Ps 102).

The author of this psalm is pretty demanding: "I'm crying out in distress, here. Hear my prayer, don't hide your face, incline your ear and oh, BTW, answer me ASAP!" This is a good example of what we spoke about on Sunday. There are lots of "lament" psalms. I'd venture at least 70% of all the psalms start with some kind of lament. Even more brutal are the imprecatory or cursing psalms that point out to God who is oppressing the author or their community. And there's always a call for revenge that shows up in those! (A useful resource: <https://www.criovoice.org/psalmtypes.html>).

Provision: Express your desires to God. In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola uses the Spanish word "demandar" in telling us how we should ask God for the desires we have in prayer. I'm hesitant to demand anything of God, but I understand the use of this word. It shows passion, it shows awareness of our needs, it demonstrates to God that we take our relationship with God seriously...and that we trust God. The psalms are full of what is called "Hebrew hyperbole;" they too express great passion. As you sit in prayer today, fervently ask God for what you desire (but remember to end the prayer as Jesus does at Gethsemane: "thy will be done").

Wednesday, March 25: *"Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will. Your justice I kept not hid within my heart...I have made no secret of your kindness and your truth in the vast assembly"* (Ps 40).

Today is the feast of the Annunciation. Luke's story of Gabriel coming to Mary appears in the Catholic lectionary numerous times each year. I often wonder if there is anything new to say, but as always, the Spirit comes through! The author of this psalm expresses to God the risk they are taking by speaking freely of God's kindness and mercy. I think of Mary and the huge risk she took, not hiding what was growing under her heart. She made no secret of God's truth. Thankfully, Joseph was there to protect her and yet there were likely people around Nazareth who had their doubts.

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. Is God calling you to take a risk? How willing are you to be honest about God's role in your life? I find when I talk of faith and God's truth, some people turn on their heels and walk away; either they don't want to listen, or their truth is different from mine. Others are doubtful about what it means to be Christian; rightly so, given what we see represented as Christianity in public life. We take a risk, as Jesus did, to call out hypocrisy of the leaders of church and state. *"Jesus was not brought down by atheism and anarchy. He was brought down by law and order allied with religion, which is always a deadly mix"* (Barbara Brown Taylor from *Truth to Tell*). Pay attention today. Where might God be asking you to take a risk, to bring forth God's truth and justice? Pray to Mary for courage.

Thursday, March 26: *God also said to Abraham: "On your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages"* (Gn 17:3-9).

God waxes poetic in this passage! He gives Abram a new name and tells him all the wonderful things that are coming to him: he'll be "exceedingly fertile," have nations and kings descend from him, and the whole land of Canaan, to boot! God will establish an everlasting covenant with him. Then, as sort of an afterthought, God says, "And, oh, BTW, you and your descendants need to hold up your end of the bargain as well." We know that doesn't happen. But God never turns away. Though we stumble and fall, only to get up and fall again, God remains true to God's covenant.

Provision: Give thanks for mercy. In his book, *Stories of God*, John Shea writes, *"The Israelites are never submissive, never resigned to their oppression and exile. They expect rescue and expect it from the very God under whose judgment they are suffering. Yhvh (Yahweh) keeps his promises."* I like the sort of faith this statement implies. It doesn't mean we take God's mercy for granted. It does mean that no matter how or how many times we mess up, God's fidelity will keep us afloat. Give thanks today for the innumerable times God's mercy has rescued you.

Friday, March 27: *"I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer"* (Ps 18).

In the play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, there's a song sung by the father, Tevye and his wife, Golde called, *"Do you love me?"* The couple, 25 years into an arranged marriage, are discussing love as their daughter prepares to marry. Golde scoffs when Tevye asks her the question and instead refers to all the things she has done for him over the course of the marriage rather than answer the question directly. If God were to ask you, *"Do you love me?"* how would you answer?

Provision: "Fall in love. Stay in love. It will decide everything." The psalmist tells God they love God, then enumerate all the reasons why. But has it ever occurred to you to love God just for being God? Despite blessings and hardships, joys and sorrows—just being in love with God. Consider praying "Morning Prayer," often attributed to Pedro Arrupe, SJ, but actually written by Joseph Whelan, SJ.: *"Nothing is more practical than finding God; that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends; what you read, who you know; what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love. Stay in love. It will decide everything."*

Saturday, March 28: *"I will make with them a covenant of peace; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them... My dwelling shall be with them"* (Ez 37:21-28).

Beautiful, hope-filled words to lead us into Holy Week...words of peace we all need at this time of strife and violence.

Provision: LISTEN to God's desire. On Thursday, God reminded us that it is up to us to do our part to keep this covenant of peace alive. God's desire, God's dream is for peace. Some may get caught up in an Old Testament worldview that peace for those "chosen" comes about through destruction of those around them. But, as Christians, through Christ's life, we learn it is never a peace brought about by war; it is an everlasting peace planted by nonviolence and love. We are all chosen, and we all have an opportunity to listen to God's desire for the world. Open the ears and eyes of your heart today and listen. What is God's desire for you?