

Devotions for the week of Easter V, May 4-8, 2026

Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter – Prayer for the Week

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

I make no claims to special insight in this regard, but I find myself sometimes wondering what heaven will be like. Will I be able to remember these days on earth? Would that compromise my eternal joy if I could? If I were able to remember these days and compare them to those eternal days of heaven, what would be the greatest change I notice? Would it be a world freed from pollution? Will I see flocks of passenger pigeons or other extinct species? Will I notice that people are just nicer, and no one is afraid? Right now, I sometimes shop at a Fred Meyer grocery store in a somewhat rough part of town. There are eight parking places reserved for the police by the entrances. I am afraid to ask how often they are used or what metric was used to determine that this was enough for that store.

I think, however, that there will be a bigger change which I will notice, and that one will be inside me. I will be a completely different sort of person in heaven. No more fear, jealousy, pride, or greed; instead, the Ten Commandments will perfectly describe me. They will no longer accuse me. They will describe me. I will be utterly devoted to God. I will honor his name, keep his sabbath, and love my neighbor perfectly. If you get a chance, read a little in Psalm 119. The psalmist seems to be there in some ways.

The prayer asks God to give us the gift that we may love God's commands and love the things God commands us to love. I find some people difficult to love. I need his help to do that. There is still that old man clinging tightly to me. He does not desire the promises of God but would make for himself a sham paradise, twisted and corrupt. He needs to be drowned daily in Baptism and left in a grave. I need God help for this. I cannot shed him.

Of course, the world does not help me. It casts me back and forth in many changes. We are experiencing some of those changes right now in these days of pandemic. The world would confuse and bewilder me, leading me to take my eye off the promise which can deliver the true joy which God has in mind for me. Help me God. Keep my mind and heart and life fixed on that truly solid ground.

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter - Acts 6:1-15; 7:2a, 51-60

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said,

“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹² And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵ And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ² And Stephen said:

“Brothers and fathers, hear me... ⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 6 and 7 record the first martyrdom in the post-Pentecost era, the first Christian martyr. It is a story which sets a pattern for much which follows in the next 2,000 years. You may want to read the whole account.

These verses are chosen because they draw our attention to an important fact about Stephen on this day. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Simple logic might suggest that to be on the side of God should insulate the partisan from the assaults of the enemy. If you are overcome by the enemy's hatred, it must mean that something more powerful has overcome your ally or you have been rejected by your powerful deity. But Acts is firm in this: Stephen has the Holy Spirit. It was that Holy Spirit who first got him into conflict with the leaders of the day and that Spirit filled his mouth and deeds up until he dies with forgiveness on his lips. The Spirit never left Stephen, even though he was brutally killed.

Our familiarity with the story and the subsequent 2,000 years of Christian history can dull our sense of the strangeness of this text and what it says about the Kingdom of God. God's kingdom is utterly upside-down when you view it from the perspective of this world ruled by the devil. What looks like defeat, disaster, even death, is not a loss in God's strange scorekeeping. It has for some time felt like Christendom is in retreat in North America. It retains strength in some quarters, but in many ways, the church seems like a fragile and weak thing when one compares it with what it had been a generation or two ago. Some have wondered if the Spirit has left us. But that is worldly scorekeeping, imagining that the measure of the presence of God is feeling successful and blessed. I am sure Stephen felt fear as the rabidly angry people forced him outside the city walls and it became apparent what they intended to do. I am sure the impact of stones on his flesh hurt him. But thanks to this text, I am also sure that the Holy Spirit of God never left him. We may be dismayed by what is happening. But we cannot be dispirited. Count on Him for the confidence, courage, and endurance to face the days ahead.

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter - Psalm 146

¹ Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

Which world leader or important figure was exposed as a hypocrite or a fraud this week? The psalmist seems like he is speaking directly to this generation when he urges us not to trust in princes. They cannot save us. They can only govern us. The real foe is not bad tax policy or failures to properly oversee the state. Our real foe is death. In the days of the pandemic, many turned to scientists like Dr. Fauci and hoped that he and others like him might be the ones to rescue us from this dreaded disease. After all, it worked with Jonas Salk and polio a couple of generations ago.

I am all for obedience to the duly constituted authorities. What is more, as an academic myself, I think we need to listen to those who have studied deeply the causes and potential treatments for disease. But I will not entrust myself to them, not wholly, not really. Only One gets that place in my praise and trust. That One of course is God. For medical science can at best only delay death's war against me. If I observe all the recommendations of my doctor, eat right, exercise every day, and live a thoroughly safe and healthy life, I will die anyway. Trust not in the princes of politics or the sciences. They cannot help you that day. Only One can help you when death comes for you. He has conquered your death by taking it to himself on a cross and shattering its power on Easter morning.

I will praise the LORD for as long as I have my being. That will be a very long time indeed. I am blessed. For I have God as my helper. He has an eye on me. He made this universe and he will reign forever. I am secure.

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter - I Peter 2:1-10

¹ So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a

holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

My first Call out of the seminary was to a small suburb on the north side of Salt Lake City which was 92% LDS and in which lived a fair number of the LDS hierarchy. It was an intensely Mormon place. Living in a community dominated by the LDS presented multiple challenges and blessings. The LDS, if you are not familiar with them, have some distinctive practices and cultural markers. There are dietary distinctives. They abstain from alcohol and tobacco. They will not drink coffee or tea. While they do not wear distinctive outerwear, they do dress modestly. This is both a sense of modesty and because they wear very distinctive undergarments which are not to be seen by those outside the LDS church. We rather counted this practice of modesty a blessing. Not long after we moved to Oregon my wife returned from the grocery store on a warm summer day and declared that most of the human population really should observe the BYU dress code.

Of course, one does not have to live in such a community long or dig very deep to find that there are Mormons who do not strictly adhere to these practices. But these practices generally do distinguish them from the larger society. What do you think distinguishes a Christian from the larger society? 50 years ago, North America was a Christian society and so this question might not have even been asked. But in the intervening decades something has happened. Our American society is not so obviously Christian as it used to be.

So, we ask what makes a Christian different? Peter seems to be asking that question in the reading we are given to consider today. The first Christians were noted for their rejection of a permissive sexual ethic in which the strong abused the weak. They expanded the scope of the people whom they supported and loved to include anyone who was a follower of Jesus. They

valued people regardless of class and wealth in a way that the Roman world did not. A slave was just as much a child of God as any wealthy man.

Peter calls us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, set apart to proclaim the excellence of the one who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. The 21st century church has an opportunity to rethink and reimagine our fellowship and our life together. Some things have not changed in this time, others have. What makes us Christian? We need to ask that question of ourselves now. Study your scriptures. Listen to Jesus as he defines the Christian life. To what holiness and good is he calling you and the rest of us? Pray for discernment.

Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter - John 14:1-14

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Jesus makes a startling statement about us in this passage. Read verse 12 again. Jesus says that we will do even greater things than he has done because Jesus is going to the Father. Jesus walked on water. Jesus fed the multitudes. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus cast out the demons and so much more. Will we do greater things? Yes, we do them now.

One day Jesus fed 5,000 people along the Sea of Galilee. It was a great miracle. Yet, today, God's people feed many millions. Some years ago, a young man graduated from Concordia High School in Portland, Oregon. He went on to college in Blair, Nebraska and then to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. His name is Art Simon and you may know him as the founder of an organization called Bread for the World. It has fed countless people. He has not miraculously

converted five loaves and two fish into a feast for thousands, but he has done what is just as miraculous: people have generously opened their wallets to feed hungry people whom they do not even know.

Of course, not all of us will do something so dramatic. I knew woman in my prior parish who taught Sunday School for 69 years. Fourth graders were her favorite. She taught the grandchildren of her first classes. On her confirmation day her Pastor pulled her aside and suggested that she teach. She never really stopped. I think Vera was 4 foot 10 inches tall, maybe less. Some of her fourth-grade charges overtopped her. For nearly 70 years she did what Jesus did. She welcomed, loved, and taught the little children. Did she do the great thing or did her Pastor, who asked a feisty confirmand to teach, do the great thing? Both of them and neither of them, for it was Jesus working in her all along.

Jesus connects this to prayer for us. Pray today that Jesus will continue to do His Father's great work through your life. He promises to listen to you. Trust that promise and pray today.