

2nd Day St. Anne Novena **Sibling Rivalry**

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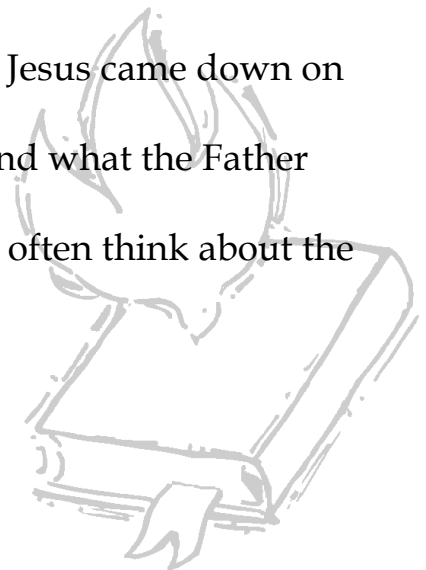
Ex 11: 10 – 12: 14

Ps 116: 12-13, 15 and 16bc

Mt 12: 1-8

Many of the themes that we just read in today's scripture readings are the subject of my homily for the Fourth Day of our Novena together (the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time). The theme of that sacrificed lamb being paralleled to what Jesus did on the cross, an event that the author of John's gospel places on the 14th Day of Nissan (the time when baby lambs were slaughtered for the Passover Meal later that night) is the same time when Jesus died on the cross. John's gospel offers is the message that Jesus is the "new" lamb of God who fulfills the Passover sacrifice, one that no longer needed to take place since Jesus was the last sacrifice that fulfilled that Passover Story.

I often reflect about this theme because when Jesus came down on earth to re-educate us on the will of the Father and what the Father wanted us to do in order that we enter heaven, I often think about the



role of “father” in the secular world as well. If I may be so bold as to “reduce” the role of parent in two forms, namely the parent who want to serve as a child’s “best friend” as opposed to the other role of parent who has to mold and discipline a child in order to prepare that child for the world in which they will enter after leaving mom and dad’s protective care, most of you know what happens when a parent is a best friend instead of a disciplinarian to the kids.

In the case of scripture, when we encounter a Father who protects his children, loves his children and, at times, a father who forms and disciplines and conditions his children, this is much more difficult to do than the parent that serves as a “best friend,” so to speak, and allows the children to do what they do without any repercussions from their actions. No one said the life of the parent is easy; sometimes a parent needs to discipline their children for the sake of their well-being.

Unfortunately, this is the part of the scriptures we do not want to focus because we do not like to think about the bad things we do in life or the times in life we have to correct others for the bad things they do. That said, the Old Testament rather clearly tells the story of God serving

both as a best friend and a disciplinarian; we who hear the stories embrace the former but often are uncomfortable with the latter. The Old Testament teaches us that when we children do something wrong, we need to be corrected, otherwise we will be conditioned to do that wrong over and over again (as was the case in the Old Testament story).

We learned about this story the hard way in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3). When Adam and Eve lived in a place where the Lord promised they not be corrupted less they eat from that tree of knowledge, they ate from the tree anyway and were punished by the Lord removing them from the Garden of Eden. When their older son Cain murdered their younger son Abel in Genesis 4, the Lord punished Cain by making him a “restless wanderer” on the earth.

As I stated on the first day of our Novena, the Bible is more of a story than it is a history. Just think about this... Adam and Eve brought two sons into the world: Cain and Abel. If these were the only four human beings on earth... from where did the wives come? The idea of this story is to tell us why Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, how Original Sin entered the world and how Cain killed Abel out of jealousy,

how murder was introduced into the world.

The book of Genesis most often demonstrates today's theme of "sibling rivalry," teaching us that, although the oldest son often received the namesake and bulk of the father's inheritance, in certain cases it was the younger son who received the father's approval and inheritance, leading the way to the Son of God receiving the same (even though Jesus was not born of a human father).

According to Jewish custom, the oldest son within the family usually received the father's birthright and a "double portion" of the inheritance over the others (Dt 21: 15-17). In the book of Genesis, we encounter at least four stories that this was not the case. With Cain & Abel (Genesis 4), Ishmael & Isaac (Genesis 21), Esau & Jacob/Israel as well as Ruben and his other ten brothers & Joseph (Genesis 37-40), the younger son received the preferential treatment by the father.

When Samuel looked for the new king of Israel in 1 Samuel 16, none of the older sons of Jesse were found worthy of this title; Samuel travelled to the fields, seeking out the youngest son David, who was tending the sheep, and God told Samuel to choose David over the other

brothers. Even the story of Jesus broke the rules of Jewish inheritance; theoretically, Jesus was not the firstborn son of Joseph because Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph had to *adopt* Jesus into the Jewish lineage so that Jesus could *adopt* us into his.

The concept of sibling rivalry is not that much different than what exists in our families from today's age; often, the children of the father often fight for the inheritance, completely contradicting what we really are supposed to do in the world of faith. Who cares about that financial inheritance which lasts a brief moment when the spiritual inheritance that we often disregard will last for the rest of our existence?

Those of the earth seek the wealth of the world; often that desire turns into greed and vanity. For those of that beyond the earth, we truly should be seeking is that love of God, which is given to us overflowing so that we can give it away. This is what mercy, not sacrifice really means. Mercy is taking care of others completely, emptying ourselves (a type of *kenosis*), emptying ourselves of whatever we have for the sake of taking care of other people. When we live this way, then we are closer to living like Christ and are that much closer to

reaching heaven. That is the problem – we are still a kind of “Cain and Abel” people, coveting what one has over the other and then sometimes trying to hurt the other to receive what we want in this world. Cain killed Abel; Ishmael was the firstborn son but Isaac received the inheritance from Jacob; Esau was the first-born son but was tricked by the second born Jacob to give up his inheritance over a bowl of Lentil Stew (that must have been *one really good bowl* of lentil stew to give up your inheritance!).

Joseph was the second youngest of the brothers within the tribes of Israel / Jacob yet Jacob chose Joseph as his favorite ahead of all the other older brothers. As a result of their jealousy, the brothers cast Joseph into a hole and then sold him to a group of Ishmaelites in order to get rid of him. The Ishmaelites sent him to the Pharaoh of Egypt and Joseph subsequently was enslaved until Joseph helped interpret Pharaoh’s dreams of the Egyptian famine, allowing the Egyptians to survive during a horrible crisis. Joseph became the Pharaoh’s prime minister and, when Jacob’s family came to Egypt during a time of starvation, Joseph saved his family from sure death and reunited with his father.

All these individuals from Genesis, these sons who were *not* the first-born of their father, all took a role in receiving an inheritance that technically was not theirs. A few books later, Solomon chose David as the king that would unite the tribes of Israel, *not* the oldest of the family but in fact was the youngest of the brothers.

This theme of the younger son given favor over the other brothers is a theme that parallels itself to Jesus in the scriptures. Jesus was *not* born of a human father at all, yet Joseph *adopted* Jesus so that Jesus *could adopt us*. That Jesus took us in, even though we were unworthy of our Father's love and did not deserve what he gave us shows us the purpose of God's life in relation to us. God sent his only Son into the world because the Father loved us, even when we do not love our Father.

If we understand what "Our Father" did for us, then we also understand that the placement within our family is irrelevant to God, especially when we live the life worthy of God's love, when we become "useless servants" within our family (Lk 17: 7-10). What we really seek is to be least and last among our brothers and sisters, the butt of the joke within our families, in a way. We learn from Christ's example no matter

how much a person feels entitled to possess, the true gift is when the person gives it away to the vocation the person is called to live, whether it be a parent, a priest or anyone else in between.

Sometimes we get envious of what other people possess without realizing that what God offers us is overflowing and is more than enough. That God overflowingly loves us and helps us and guides us and leads us is the true gift that we must give away to find favor with the one who created us and the one who can bring us home. Sometimes we realize that the person who is considered *least* or *less* in the community is the one who often lives this love of God more than the rest of us. I think about all the good souls of the world who have suffered, who have been ridiculed and mocked and who stand in the front of heaven's line while those who claim to be older, wiser and more important are relegated to the end of the line, according to God's standards.

When we talk about the story of St. Anne giving birth to Blessed Mary, a daughter protected from Original Sin who came into the world unrecognized by others but of special place with God, we understand how the story of the lesser becomes the greater, most often the case

because of humility and love. We learn that this lowly Mary became the Mother God as an unstained vessel serves as the first tabernacle of faith by virtue of being “the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1: 38). When we learn about the lesser being greater and the greater being lesser, *then* we understand how all these stories come together in the scriptures that lead us to the story of Jesus Christ.

We learn from these stories during the Novena about what happens when we put on humility instead of pride – the latter destroyed the kingdom while the former raised the kingdom, through the examples of Ss. Joachim & Anne, St. Joseph and his Blessed Wife and the grandson we call “The New Adam” and “The Savior of the World.”

Let us learn these stories of faith and the lesson of humility that comes from the stories themselves. Let us learn that the only inheritance we should be striving to reach is everlasting life with God. When you learn that the Lord is with thee and the Lord is with me, then we realize that no matter where we fall in the family tree, that we truly are blessed by God, that we are given overflowing the love of God, which we are called to give away. *That* is what we are trying to do here and why we

are a family of God. *That* is why we make this sacrifice to attend these Masses and to offer the Lord's grace for the sake of the other. Please know we pray for you, the humble children of God; continue to pray for me and for all people that we meet. This is our prayer.