

# **3<sup>rd</sup> Day St. Anne Novena**

## **The Exodus from Egypt**

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Ex 12: 37-42

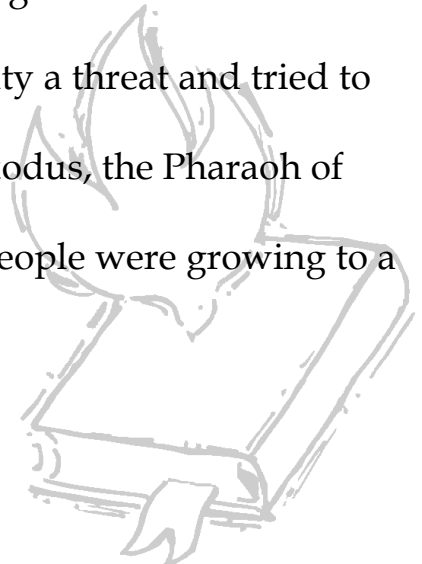
Ps 136: 1 and 23-24, 10-12, 13-15

Mt 12: 14-21

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As we are walking through the book of Exodus during this series of readings of our St. Anne Novena ("The Grandmother of the "New Adam"), I keep reminding myself that the Chosen People who were growing in number and in stature who once were the favorite children of the Pharaoh of Genesis had now become the Pharaoh's sworn enemies the next book over in Exodus. In the history of many faith traditions, when a religious group begins to grow, outsiders often see the religious group as a type of "threat" to many people.

In the early centuries of the church after Christianity began to take root and was growing exponentially, the Roman government and the Jewish believers of the age considered Christianity a threat and tried to eradicate Christians as a result; in the book of Exodus, the Pharaoh of the time realized the numbers of these Chosen People were growing to a



point that he was unjustly afraid they would revolt against the Egyptians. As a result, the Pharaoh enslaved the Chosen People to keep them under his thumb.

I know this story way too well! In my third assignment as a priest, I moved into the rectory of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Aurora, IL when I was told I needed to serve the kids at Vacation Bible School the first week at the parish. That particular bible school week saw kids getting ready putting together a play about the plagues that were set upon Pharaoh because he would not allow the Chosen People to leave Egypt (Ex 7: 14 – 11: 10).

At the bible school, the adult leaders asked me to be part of the play by playing the role of the **PHARAOH** (ugh!). In this role, the adults put a kind of a sack on top of me, some kind of flour bag over my head. In this play, the kids would cry out, “Moses says, ‘Let my people go!’” I would respond by crying out, “**NOOOOOO!**” Then, ten times during this play, the kids would “infect” me by putting food coloring in my water (blood), attaching clothespins to my sack (locust), toss hole punches at me (gnats) and attach circular post-it circles on my garment (boils).

If these insults were not bad enough for a priest to endure his first week at the parish, at least I was glad the adults never had the kids act out the *last* of the plagues, that being the sacrifice of that firstborn son of each family, the one to receive the father's inheritance. NINE PLAGUES WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH!

As the Exodus story is told (Ex 13), after the last plague, the Pharaoh finally relented and let the Chosen People leave Egypt, that place of slavery. Nevertheless, Moses knew that the Pharaoh would change his mind and come after them so he quickly ran out of town with the 600,000 men and their families. When Moses reached the Reed Sea, God helped Moses part the sea so the Chosen People could pass through it (Ex 14) and then, as the Egyptian armies forced through the sea to catch the Egyptians during their escape, the sea collapsed upon them and the armies died.

The remaining story from Exodus focused on the one-year stay the Chosen People spent at the foot of Mt. Sinai as Moses and God established the first set of laws ("The Ten Commandments") so that the Chosen People would follow God's plan for salvation (Ex 20: 1-17).

While God passed on these instructions to Moses, the story tell us how the Chosen People became restless. Thus, as God was speaking to Moses on top of the mountain, the Chosen People below built a golden calf to worship, to focus on their created God over the only God that mattered (Ex 32).

Believe it or not, we like to create our own gods in the world, focusing on these man-made Gods rather than the one who created us and the one who could bring us home. In our modern day form of idol worship (and we have created “American Idol” types in every age), we have created gods in sports, music, literature and all kinds of other gods that we use to replace the only God that matters. Then, when we die and then we have to answer for it, the one true God (Dt 6: 4 – the “Shema”) holds us accountable for our idol worship and the breaking of the First Commandment.

Being the parent that God was for us, God said them (as God says now) that if you are going to create other gods instead of the only one that counts, then we will be held accountable for our actions. In the Exodus story, God would feed the people, he would quench the

people's thirst, but the people were never satisfied with God so God would respond by punishing them and making them realize the consequences of their actions. The people would relent and then start that cycle all over again for the next forty years of that journey.

We are taught that, in the third book of the bible from Numbers, two generations of the Chosen People wandered through this wilderness. The families were counted in this book in a type of "census" that gave a concrete number to the tribes that joined Moses and Aaron in this journey. Then we learn in Leviticus that even the priests among the Chosen People were not following God's laws (namely Nadab and Abihu - see Lev 10), so God established 603 *more* laws in addition to the Ten Commandments that the Chosen People were required to follow.

As the story concludes with Deuteronomy, as the Chosen People reached the Promised Land, more and more of the Chosen People disobeyed God and God did not permit any of the original families to reach Canaan except for two: Joshua and Caleb. Neither Moses nor Aaron were allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience to the covenant as given through Moses; Fr. Lawrence

Boadt's summary statement had so much truth in his words.

At the very end of this story, as told in Deuteronomy, Moses summarized the journey and repeated the commandments given to the Chosen People in the book of Exodus: love your God, have no other gods but the one we have, do not use God's name in vain, keep holy the Sabbath day, put your focus on God on that sacred day, honor your father or mother, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie and do not covet your neighbor's wife nor your neighbors goods. Moses also told the Chosen People that eventually they would not be faithful to this covenant with God and they would lose the land that the Lord had given them.

As happens time in and time out, the Chosen People ignored God and ignored Moses, just like they would ignore the prophets, the story of Lazarus and even ignore God's direction today. The gods of this age are so tempting to follow but are fleeting – God has been the same for God is the alpha and end. In our lives even today, we get so consumed by the things of the world, then we die and then the whole purpose of this story and this Novena is to remind us that we fell and God had to

bring us back; God had to send us a vessel through whom he could pass the message of love through the power of the Holy Spirit. *That* is why we are here today.

When we re-read these stories and understand their meaning, we see constantly what God does to help us. Unfortunately, then we push that message aside and dismiss as we continue on with life and the temptations of the world. *That* is why these Masses are so important, so that we do not dismiss God we do not dismiss faith in favor of the human gods that consume us.

The message of this Novena is too important for us to push aside; we have a very short time left on earth (you and me both) – I am getting closer to my end than my beginning as well. The purpose of this Novena is to put our focus and our priorities in their right place. We have a chance for salvation if we follow God’s plan. That is why I am here today extending myself even more to taking care of all of you because all of you are worth it! You are good, holy people, whether you recognize it or not ,because God created you (God created me as well). We are all made in God’s image through his likeness and we all have

wonderful potential to do good, based on our gifts and talents our Lord has given us.

So we stand here today, knowing that the created gods of this world try to steer us away from the one and only God that counts. We pray to our one God, we ask our one God to be with us and give us strength to endure the world so we can share that story and its perils with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.