

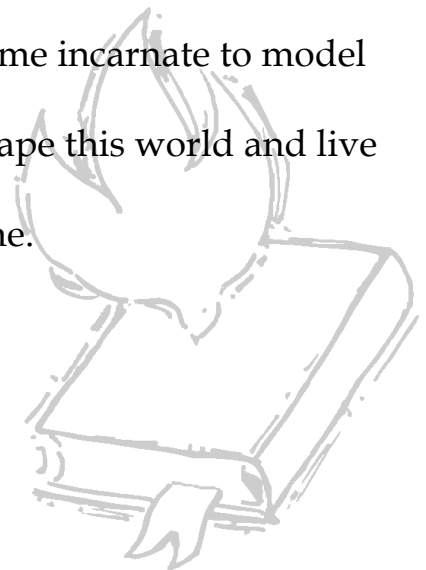
4th Day St. Anne Novena

The Passover

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July 20, 2025

Gn 18: 1-10a
Ps 15: 2-3, 3-4, 5
Col 1: 24-28
Lk 10: 38-42

Throughout the theme of this Novena (the Grandmother of the “New Adam), the weave that runs through the entire Old Testament Story focuses on our infidelity to the covenant and our inability to follow God’s parameters, both in the past and even in the present. We have learned that in this journey, God has to play the two basic roles that parents in every age have to live if God’s children wish to enter the kingdom of heaven – God has to be a parent that loves and a parent that discipline. Most parents find the former easier to do than the latter, for obvious reasons. God realized that as children of faith, we could not learn this lesson on our own so God had to become incarnate to model the type of life we have to lead if we want to escape this world and live in the Lord’s everlasting world that is yet to come.



As we learn from the story told to us in scripture, the brothers who cast off their young brother Joseph made it possible for Joseph to save his family from a horrible famine that plagued the Chosen People in Old Testament times. As the story continued, Joseph died and life moved on, with a horrible Pharaoh replacing a good one and enslaving a Chosen People too large to control. As we move the story from Genesis to Exodus, God realized that he needed to intervene as a parent would to protect His children. Thus, God chose the person of Moses to lead these Chosen People out of Egypt, which became a land of slavery for the Chosen People.

In this story, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush (Exodus 3), laying out the plan concerning the release of these enslaved people from the Pharaoh's hands. As a result, Moses instructed the Pharaoh that if the people were not released from slavery, a series of plagues would be inflicted upon the Egyptians. The Pharaoh ignored God's admonitions, so, as a result, God inflicted ten plagues on the Egyptians from putting blood in their water to infecting the Egyptians with lice, gnats, dead cattle and the like.

The last of these plagues concerned the killing of the oldest born male of each household who, according to the customs of the time, would receive the bulk of the father's inheritance and their namesake. To spare the Chosen People from this eradication, God instructed Moses as to what would need to be done for the Chosen People to be spared from the wrath of God. God told Moses that, in order to protect the oldest male child in each family, the parents were to sacrifice a young lamb, take the blood of that lamb and smear it on the posts or lintels of their house doors. If God saw the blood on the lintel of the door, then the angel of death would "pass over" the house of that family and the oldest male, their heir, would be spared of death (Ex 12).

As with other occasions in the Old Testament story, what the Chosen People were asked to do was make a "covenant" with God so that they would be saved. In this particular case, this story references what is called a "Suzerain" covenant, where the superior (God) instructs the inferior (man) what to do in order to keep in the Lord's graces.

We have encountered many covenants in the Old Testament prior to this story. During the first covenant that God made with Adam and Eve,

the Lord instructed them to stay within the garden provided for them; as long as they did not eat from the tree of knowledge, both Adam and Eve would remain uncorrupted, pure and full of the Lord's grace. As the story tells us, a serpent tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit and Eve then tempted Adam to do the same. This "Original Sin" became the model by which most of our lives since have been corrupted through them temptations into which we fall in life.

As we learn from the story, Adam and Eve broke the covenant. The Chosen People constantly broke the covenant with God in the Exodus from Egypt, worshipping golden calves and the like instead of the one God that would save them. The judges broke the covenant, as did the kings. We lost the Promised Land because we broke the covenant, both in 722 BC, 586 BC, 70 AD and in so many ways today as well.

As we learn in this story, as long as we hold on to God and the covenant established for us, we have a chance for salvation. The tradeoff is that we are called to be faithful to God, which we often are incapable of doing. God is willing to take on the heavy burdens of our lives, as

long as we place our burdens on God and replace our yolk with one whose yolk is easy and whose burden is light (Mt 11: 30).

The condition for this protection is being obedient to a God who would carry that heavy burden for us. Even today, no matter how heavy the burden may seem, as long as God is with us, the burden is bearable because God gives us the strength to endure. As we learned even from this Passover story is that God would hold God's end of the covenant between a superior and an inferior; is called the "Suzerain" covenant; in the story from Genesis 15 – only God passed through the covenant; Abraham did not. In this story, God promised to take on all the heavy lifting, so to speak; all we needed to do was hold on to God and God would take care of us.

That said, we still had a part in this covenant – we had to be faithful to God. We learn in this story that if we do not do our part, there are consequences for being unfaithful; if the Chosen People did not stay faithful to the covenant, they would... and DID... lose the land. That is the basic theme in the Old Testament concerning the "Suzerain"

Covenant – stay faithful to God, which we are utterly incapable of doing on our own.

A “Parity” covenant is one that exists between two equal parties, two people like you and me talking together, making an agreement between us so both of us can benefit. In my priesthood, I have tried to live off the “Parity” covenant - I love “win-win” situations with the people I serve and the people that serve us. I help you, you help me and all of us benefit as a result. This is the way we have accomplished so much at our parishes on a dime!

The way either type of covenant would work in the Old Testament is that you would split an animal in half, you lay each half of the animal on each side of a road and then both parties would pass through the split animal. This action was a type of “blood oath” that two parties would make to seal this agreement.

When God made his first covenant with Abraham, Abraham was instructed to split animals in half. When this happened, the story tells us in Genesis 15 that *only God* passed through the split animals, not Abraham. Why is this the case? We are told in this story that only God

passed through the sacrifice because only God held up God's end of the covenant and we could not hold up ours.

As we learn over and over again, God *always* holds God's end of the covenant – God is God – and we most often do not hold ours That is the problem with life; that is why we cannot live without this liturgy because God established this liturgy so we could get to heaven. We cannot live without God without this Mass, without this sacred liturgy (the Holy Sacrifice, the Memorial of this Sacrifice, the Perpetual Last Supper). Without God in our lives, we are going to fall.

When the time of Passover came and God told Moses what to do with the split lamb's blood to be put on the lintels the Jewish people's homes, the Chosen People knew that these divine covenants always involved a sacrifice of animals, one sacrifice after another. Because the Chosen People made this sacrifice, their eldest male was spared from death. So, every year on the day of Passover (the 14th day of Nissan in the Jewish calendar), the faithful Jewish family gathers around the table and celebrates that Passover with the meal of lamb and bitter herbs. At

this meal, the family gives thanks to God for this gift of sparing their families during a time of crisis.

When we move to the New Testament and the story of that last supper in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we come to learn that the Last Supper described in these gospel very likely took place on the night of the Passover Meal so that the meal commemorates Jesus' Passover with his disciples on the night before he died. In the gospel of John, though, the author placed this meal on the night *before* the Passover Meal for a specific reason. The focus of the last supper John's gospel is not concerning the Passover Meal but the washing of the disciples' feet, modeling the way we need to live our lives.

Furthermore, the gospel of John places the meal one day earlier to parallel Jesus's death on the cross at the same time when those young baby lambs were being slaughtered in preparation for the Passover meal itself. *Symbolically*, in the gospel of John, we learn that Jesus is the last sacrifice necessary for our salvation, that Jesus is *the last lamb* that needed to be sacrificed for the salvation of the world.

If we understand that message, if we understand that what we celebrate on this altar is a *perpetual* sacrifice, the same Last Supper that continuously gets celebrated, if we want to get to heaven then we must do what God tells us, gather each week to share in this meal and realize that without this sacrifice, we lose our hope in reaching heaven.

The problem with the Old Testament is that the books keep reminding us of how we did not follow what God told us to do and ended up losing what we had in the process. Certainly in today's age, Roman Catholics as a group do not follow these teachings, either. The Pew Research Center reports that in the last twenty years, the numbers of faithful in the Catholic Church has grown from 1.2 to 1.4 billion Catholics. How many of them attend Mass on a weekly basis or on a daily basis? How many people actually invest themselves to be worthy of the title, "Catholic?" Are we Catholics by name only or by practice? Where has this growth taken place? Certainly this growth is not found in the Americas or Europe – we are closing way too many Churches for our own good.

If we want to get to heaven, if we want to see the miracle of getting to the other side, then we must be invested in this meal constantly, that we must be attached to God constantly, that we must renew this covenant every time we come to Mass. At each Mass, we recite a basis creed that has been handed down over the last 1700 plus years that was given to us by St. Athanasius in the council of Nicaea. The question is do we *believe* in what we say and do, whether we hold up our end of the covenant or whether we do not and we fall as a result.

This meal has meaning and we made a promise to attend it this week; that is why we need this Mass because we are going to fall without it, without God. *Without God*, we are dust and unto dust we shall return. *With God*, notice that Abraham's wife was able to bear a son; notice that *with God*, St. Anne in her older age was able to bear a daughter. Notice that *with God*, this unmarried daughter who had not been with man such as our Blessed Mother was able to give birth to the Savior of the world. With God, the impossible becomes possible – *that* is theme that weaves itself throughout the entire set of scriptures, if we stop and pay attention to the story and its meaning.

Let us give thanks to the fact that God continually feeds us,
continually wants to love us, continually wishes to give us this bread of
life and chalice of salvation so that we have a chance to get to heaven.
Let us not take what we have been taught for granted. Let us constantly
come back and receive what God has given us and let us dedicate
ourselves to inviting others to this table, both those in our family, those
in our Church and to every person that we meet. This is our prayer.