

## 5<sup>th</sup> Day St. Anne Novena

### The Judges

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

July 21, 2025

Ex 14: 5-18

Ex 15: 1bc-2, 3-4, 5-6

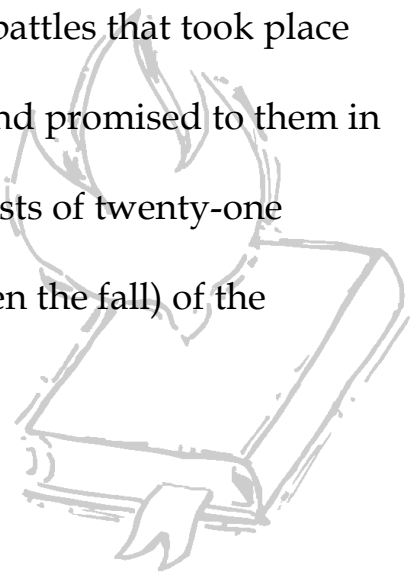
Mt 12: 38-42

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In those days there was no king of Israel Everyone did what was right in their own sight (Jg 21: 25)

As we continue this journey into the Old Testament trying to find a way to be connected with God, we learn that Joshua and Caleb were the only two (of 600,000 men) that were faithful from the original generation of Chosen People that God permitted to enter Canaan. As for the next generation of men and their families, the land of Canaan was still a difficult challenge – those who entered the land still had to conquer those who took over the land to re-establish their kingdom.

The book of Joshua graphically describes the battles that took place that allowed the Chosen People to reclaim the land promised to them in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Book of Judges consists of twenty-one exceedingly graphic chapters of the rise (and often the fall) of the



Chosen People's leaders that ruled each tribe. Much of what you read in these chapters is R-rated material; for anyone who claims that the bible is "boring," all you have to do is read the books of Joshua and Judges to encounter some really horrible things that are done by many of the protagonists.

The book of Judges references the death of Joshua and the question of who would protect the Canaanites in their new land. In Judges 2, the Lord "raised up" judges to protect the tribes; the people in each of these twelve tribes looked to their local leaders to protect them. Depending on which scholar tells the story, "judges" have been described as leaders, as protectors and to some even "warlords" whose reign usually ended up causing worse for the people under their care, resulting in the author stating that each person ended up living according to their own standards rather than God's.

Starting with the third chapter of Judges to its conclusion, the author(s) tell the story of thirteen of these judges, six of them with major stories (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson), each supposedly delivering Israel from great danger. We are told of six

judges who stories are told in passing (Shangar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon). The thirteenth, Abimelech, continues the story of Gideon with less than a successful conclusion.

For the most part in these stories, most every time we hear a story about any given judge, for the most part we hear these stories about these so-called judges, by the time the story finishes the story about each of them, the plight of the Chosen People became much worse than which it started. Essentially the Chosen People found out with one judge after another, *none* of them united the kingdoms of Israel; none of them brought long-enduring peace. All of them practically made the situation worse rather than better after their reign.

This story of each judge essentially repeated itself with the message that when we turn away from God and we focus on the way of man, then every person ended up “on their own,” so to speak. This is the plight of us all – we all know those temptations in life affect every single one of us, from the pope all the way down to every one of us. We all get tempted; we all have the ability to fall in one way or another because we are all sinners. We learn in all the Old Testament stories (and in the

stories today) that we need God and the constant nourishment of the word and the sacrament to keep us focused on what will get us to heaven.

Unfortunately, even in today's age we still suffer the plight of the judges – the world continues to lure us away from God; this is what happens when we replace the Lord our God with our man-made ones – what we are fed on television or media or newspapers or radio... or each other at times... and people continually attempt to instill their values and their perspective of life on us rather than us allowing God to keep us directed on how to love our neighbor and the Lord, our God.

In the book of Judges, we keep seeing that many of these leaders of the faith were not good leaders at all and their subjects were worse off than before the judge came to power. The Chosen People under each judge's care would lose their moral compass.

Four times in the book of Judges do we read the concluding line, "In those days there was no king of Israel; everyone did what was right in their own sight" (Jg 17: 6; 18: 1; 19: 1 and 21: 25). The book of Judges often summarized that when it came to the leaders of the time, every

man was for himself; the world was “dog eat dog” and “An eye for an eye” (Lex Taliones).

I was thinking about this theme in my own life. I am about to turn sixty years old on August 15. I often reflect about so many of those individuals who have lived even half my life cycle have lived much holier ways than I could ever live. I reflect on those lives and often encounter their humility and their child-like innocence that escapes a lot of the people in power because God provides that power to serve, not to rule and with this power is supposed to come a humility to give it away to others as God has given to us. We are supposed to use this gift of power to serve others, not rule over others, to love others, not beat others down.

This is the plight that negatively affects the judges of scriptures, and, quite honestly, with us as well. The judges just did not want to serve; they wanted to conquer and destroy. They did not want to serve God; they wanted to *become* a god. This disposition is so contrary to the way we are supposed to live our lives.

So by the end of this book, the tribes of Israel were so disjointed, were

so separated and were so scattered that they had no one to bring them together until we get to the last judge named Samuel, who was assigned by God to find a leader to bring the tribes together. This is the story for our next homily concerning the rise and fall of the kings.

In our gospel reading today, we focus on how Jonah found that great humility in the belly of the fish which strengthened him to warn the people of Nineveh to change their ways or lose their land. For a short while, the people of Nineveh heeded that warning. For a period of time, God remained with the people of Nineveh in such a special way that they found peace. That is why we come here today, to find that peace.

We come here today to find the kind of peace that our Lord can offer us, a peace that we cannot get out in the world, even though we constantly turn from the Lord seeking a peace that the world will never be able to offer. During this mid-point of our Novena journey, we come here to pray and realize that God can offer us what the world never nor ever could. We come here to this shrine to realize what can happen if we put our faith in God, encountering all these miracles that took place for those who had true faith, if not physical miracles then certainly spiritual

ones. No matter what happens to us in this world, “neither height nor depth nor angels nor principalities nor present things nor future things nor powers nor any other creature will ever separate us from the love of God through his son our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 8: 35-38). If we have humility, if we have faith, hope and love (virtues that many of the judges sorely lacked), then we can encounter a presence of God that they never could.

Let us learn that lesson together; let us learn not to be like the judges in the scriptures who, at their worst, turned away from God and suffered dearly for it. Let us learn not to be like the bad kings in the scriptures; rather, let us learn how to love and be at peace with one another, so that no matter what happens in this world (the world is the world), God will always be God and with God, all things are possible. Let us allow that possibility of an eternal life by living like Christ and sharing that Christ with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.