

7th Day St. Anne Novena The Exile

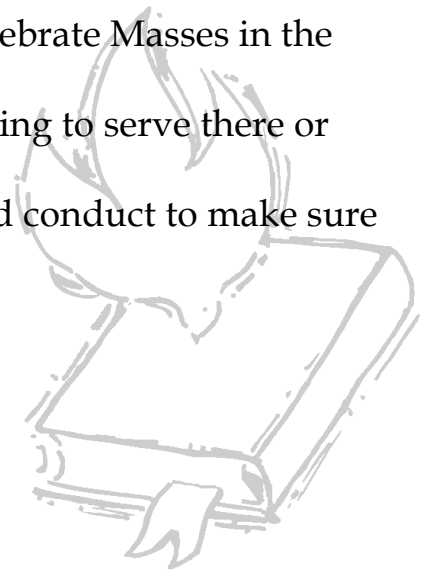
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 23, 2025

Ex 16: 1-5, 9-15
Ps 78: 18-19, 23-24, 25-26
Mt 13: 1-9



Of the many roles that I have served in the Joliet Diocese, one of them happened to be as a chaplain at the former Stateville Penitentiary in Crest Hill, IL (where those convicted of the worst crimes in the state were housed). If you have ever watched movies like “The Sting” or “The Blues Brothers,” you probably have encountered Stateville Penitentiary before.

Back in the day, Deacons Chuck Peterson and Bob Duncan both asked me if I would serve as a priest chaplain at Stateville Penitentiary. Because not enough priests were available to celebrate Masses in the diocese, both deacons could not find priests willing to serve there or even could pass the screening that the FBI would conduct to make sure the priest was able to minister at such a facility.



Because I am who I am, I told the good deacons that I would help with this ministry, if possible. As a result, I went through the FBI screening process and I went through the orientation meetings necessary to minister at Stateville. I passed everything I was supposed to pass (thank goodness!) and then I was visited Stateville every other week to celebrate Mass for the inmates.

I thought being a prison chaplain at a Maximum Security Prison such as Stateville would be difficult; I thought it would dangerous! What I came to find out was just the opposite. I found out that as a chaplain at Stateville, I was probably the *safest* person at the prison because I had no ulterior motive to serve there except to love the inmates in God's name and to offer them the sacraments. To be honest, the guards were not thrilled that I served there – in my role as chaplain, I was taking the prisoners out of their daily routine to which the guards were accustomed and for the safety of everyone involved, having a routine was necessary for everyone to remain safe.

Nevertheless, celebrating Mass for the inmates was special for those who sought out the Lord's grace – the “system,” so to speak, was nice

enough to allow me to serve the inmates in an atmosphere that was somewhat different from their daily life. I am supposed to serve as a representative of God to those seeking out love and forgiveness. The fact is that these individuals were placed in prison because they were convicted of committing egregious acts in the state and needed to face the consequences of their actions. That said, my role was to save souls, and if we can offer the Lord's grace to those convicted of the worst sins, I would pray the Lord would offer the same forgiveness to me for my own.

Every time I entered Stateville's "welcome center," I used to joke that getting into Stateville was almost like entering the chancery office of the bishop – outside of the "pat down," most everything else at Stateville was the same as the Blanchette Chancery Center of the Joliet Diocese. At each institution, you would have to show your identification, you would have to give a reason for being in the building and you needed to sign in before entering the facility. At Stateville, you also would have to put all your personal items in a locker (including all your keys and your coins) – I also learned to put my writing instruments in the lockers as

well because I found out that the prisoners would use the ink from the pens for their tattoos.

One time when I arrived at Stateville, I also noticed that there were a whole lineup of people on the other side of the welcome center who waited to visit with their loved ones incarcerated at the facility. For some reason, this lineup of people actually gave me hope – that lineup of people made me realize that no matter how bad the crimes that someone committed, there were still people who cared enough about these inmates that they took time to spend with them, to tell them that they were not alone.

These thoughts all crossed my time of reflection when I approached today's subject of the Exile from the Promised Land of a Chosen People who had lost their way because they were unfaithful to the covenant. As I was reading and reflecting on how Amos and Hosea in the north would warn the chosen people to clean up their act or they would lose their land – the people did not listen. As a result, in 722 BC, the Assyrian army conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and scattered the

Chosen People into what we call “the lost tribes of Israel” – we have no idea what happened to the northern tribes.

We just reflected on how the prophets Isaiah and Micah in the Southern Kingdom also warned the people to clean up their act or lose their land – the people from the Southern Kingdom did not listen to them, either. As a result, the Chosen People were exiled from the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC as well.

This theme of ignoring the warnings of the times is a common theme that happens over and over, whether it be in the scriptures or in life. For this reflection, I thought about the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). In this parable, the Rich Man disregarded a poor man like Lazarus and lived a hedonistic life until he died and fell into the pit of hell, while Lazarus rested on the bosom of Abraham in heaven. In the parable, the Rich Man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to earth and to warn his relatives about the oncoming doom if they did not change their ways. Abraham replied, “If they are not going to listen to Moses and the prophets, they are not going to listen to Lazarus.”

I reflect on this story today because when Isaiah and Micah went to the south and pleaded with the people to change their ways, they were ignored; when Jeremiah pleaded as a last chance effort to change the ways of the Chosen People in the south, not only did the people not listen to Jeremiah... they literally wanted to *kill the messenger*; they wanted to kill Jeremiah. Jeremiah survived the assault but the Babylonian army destroyed the Southern Kingdom and the Chosen People were exiled to Babylon (modern-day Baghdad, Iraq). The Babylonian armies then made Jeremiah watch Jerusalem burn. We have no idea what happened to Jeremiah but the book attributed to him and the sequel called Lamentations is a lament on what happens to people who do not listen to God.

I liken this type of disobedience to a disrespectful child not listening to a parent in any era who puts their foot down and says, “enough is enough!” with their kids. Using this metaphor, the kids of the Sixth Century BC did not listen Jeremiah and, as a result, the Babylonian army kicked them out of their house and put them in a “time out” for fifty years.

During this time, another prophet named Ezekiel lived by the river named Chebar. While in exile, Ezekiel was writing reflections about how the water of the river was flowing to the east and the water was going to bring them life and salvation, renewing the covenant once lost. The second part of the book attributed to Isaiah (Chapters 40-55) also was written during this time of exile and references the Chosen People having their bones resurrected and such and that they would have a chance for a new life again.

In these texts, we learn about what is going to happen if we return to God with a contrite heart, but the fact is that people disobeying God was like a parent of disrespectful children in such a way that God finally acted and the children did not like what the parent had done to them. This applies to our current times as well – when we push the envelope so far, eventually the teacher or parent has to do what we do not want them to do and yet... we push that envelope anyway to see how far we can go before our teacher or our parent cracks. *That* is the theme on which we focus today.

We learn today that our disobedience has consequences, yet we then and today keep pushing that envelope to see how far we can disobey before the parent chooses to respond. This has been the theme we have been driving home this entire Novena – *Infidelity to the covenant, as given to Moses, will lead to disaster and destruction. Disobey God and you will lose your land.*

The message we learn in the second part of Isaiah is that, eventually, a new Messiah, or Emmanuel will serve as a new king who will restore that which was lost. In the Old Testament, the kind of Messiah for which the Chosen People were waiting was a more historical one that would restore Canaan *the way it was.*

When the New Testament revealed this Messiah as Jesus, the Christ, the idea of “Messiah” took on a whole new meaning. In the New Testament, Jesus became incarnate, the Jerusalem to which he was pointing us was not the one on earth *but the one in heaven.* We learn in the New Testament that the characters of the Old Testament were bound by that Original Sin of Adam and Eve, thus they acted accordingly. When Jesus became incarnate as the “New Adam,” he

redefined the role of Messiahship and the Jerusalem we really need to seek.

The problem for us is that we do not like following the good shepherd, the new Messiah; we continue to prefer desiring the things of the earth. This always has been our downfall; that is why these Novena Masses are so important because they make us turn to God and remind ourselves what our purpose in life truly is.

If we wish to enter heaven, we need to rid ourselves of the earthly, created gods that will lead to our demise and focus on the New Adam and New Messiah that will lead us to the New Jerusalem, otherwise we continually will live in this exile. Please be diligent in following the ways of the New Messiah; please continue to pray to God. Please continue to be invested in this Novena please keep focused on the only God that can help us escape this world of exile and enter into the world of the Lord's grace through the example of the grandson of St. Anne, the Savior of the world. This is our prayer.