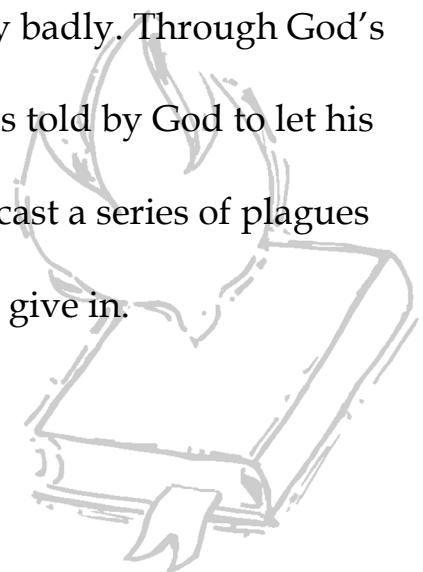


**Homily**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT - B**  
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
July 31 - August 01, 2021

Ex 16: 2-4, 12-15  
Ps 78: 3-4, 23-24, 25, 54  
Eph 4: 17, 20-24  
Jn 6: 24-25

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One of my favorite bible activities for children happened a few years ago when a *Vacation Bible School* program was taking place at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Aurora, IL. The focus of the summer activity that year was the story of the Exodus and the emancipation of the chosen people from the country of Egypt, that land of slavery. I recall just arriving at the parish as an Associate Pastor that year and was asked by the bible school folks to take part in the skit the kids were putting on about the Exodus story. The activity in question was derived from the beginning chapters of the Book of Exodus, a story about a mean Pharaoh who was treating the chosen people of God very badly. Through God's messenger, a person named Moses, Pharaoh was told by God to let his people go. Pharaoh refused. In God's anger, he cast a series of plagues upon the Egyptians, but the Pharaoh would not give in.



During Bible school, I was asked to play the role of Pharaoh. As I stood among the kids in my Pharaoh outfit (and mind you, this was my first week at the parish and none of the kids knew me), all the kids were yelling at me, “Let my people go!” and then I would cry out in response, “NOOO!” Then, just as it was described in the Bible, the kids inflicted the plagues upon the Pharaoh who was played by the soon to be very humbled priest. When we reached the part of the story where the water turned red, the kids put food dye in my glass of water while my back was turned. When the gnats were mentioned in the story, the kids threw paper hole-punches at the priest-turned-Pharaoh. When we read the story of the Egyptians being affected by sores, the kids stuck little Post-It circles all over the Pharaoh. And when we read story about the attack of the locusts, the kids clipped clothespins on the Pharaoh’s clothing. Poor, poor, Fr. Pete!

As we continue this story from the book of Exodus, the story builds to its crescendo in chapters 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>. In this story, the Lord became so outraged with the Pharaoh and the Egyptians that a final plague was

thrust upon them, a sacrifice of death upon the first-born male of each Egyptian family. So that the Chosen People would be spared this same fate, the Lord instructed Moses that the Jewish children could avoid this wrath if his people spread the blood of a young, sacrificed lamb on the door posts of their houses. By doing so, the Lord would recognize this mark of sacrifice and “pass over” the house, subsequently allowing the children of the family to live.

As we know from the story, the first-born children of every Egyptian family was killed on that particular evening. As a sign of contrition, the Pharaoh relented and permitted God’s Chosen People to leave Egypt in search of their Promised Land. This sentiment was momentary, though, as the Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army to capture the Jewish faithful once again. As we read in this tale, the Lord led the Chosen People through the Red Sea to free them from Egyptian rule. And when the Egyptian Army attempted to follow the Chosen People through the Red Sea, the Lord collapsed the waters of the Red Sea upon

the oncoming armies, vanquishing the Egyptian forces in the same waters.

We are told in our Catholic Tradition and our Catechism of the Church (#1221) that this story of the Chosen People crossing the Red Sea serves as a prefiguration of the Sacrament of Baptism. We read in this story how the Lord continually fed the Chosen People in the wilderness with a type of “bread from heaven” called “manna” (the story from our first reading). And when the Chosen People arrived at their Promised Land, they commemorated this story with a special meal commemorating this Passover event, a meal which we as Catholics understand is fully realized at Jesus’ Last Supper, the same meal which we celebrate at this Mass today.

If I were to reduce the Bible to the two most important sections, I would rest my argument with the story of the Passover and Exodus that I just described from the Book of Exodus and the Last Supper and Passion Narratives from the Gospels. For as an Old Testament people who now have encountered our Savior, we believe that the Passover of

the Old Testament has been redefined and fulfilled in the Gospels through the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Unleavened Bread, the image of the Lamb of God, the prayerful condition of those preparing for the sacrifice are revealed to us at this table and at this cross. In fact, we are often told in faith that the sacrifice on the altar is the hinge that connects the Old Testament to the New and the New Testament to our lives. As our Catechism of the Church teaches us, Jesus' Last Supper in the gospels serves as the last and most definitive Passover Meal presented in the sacred scriptures. From paragraph #1340, the Catechism states,

By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

Al celebrar la última Cena con sus Apóstoles en el transcurso del banquete pascual, Jesús dio su sentido definitivo a la pascua judía. En efecto, el paso de Jesús a su Padre por su muerte y su resurrección, la Pascua nueva, es anticipada en la Cena y celebrada en la Eucaristía que da cumplimiento a la pascua judía y anticipa la pascua final de la Iglesia en la gloria del Reino.

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of John and the “Bread of Life” narrative through these five weeks, Mother Church has instructed her priests to present this connection between the Passover Story and the Last Supper so that we all recall once again why this particular meal plays such an important role in our Christian lives, a role that Mother Church defines as “the source and summit” of our Christian faith (Lumen Gentium 11, The Catechism #1324). At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the priest receives the bread and wine from members of the community as a gift that we all present to God in thanks for the gift of life that God presented to us at the beginning of creation. The bread is unleavened, which means its content is made up of simple wheat flour and water. This unleavened bread is symbolic of the passage from Exodus, where the chosen people of God, fleeing from the land of Egypt, baked their bread without yeast because they had no time to do it otherwise. In the context of the Catholic faith, we are taught that Christ “becomes” the yeast to make that bread rise;

he is the manna that has become the bread of life. And as we receive communion, we grow in our love of Christ to go out and serve others.

During the Eucharistic Prayer, the most solemn prayer at our liturgy, the celebrant takes those hands and places them over the gifts of bread and wine. It is at this moment that the priest asks the Holy Spirit to work through those hands and change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. We are taught that there is no visual difference of what we see, but there is a substantial difference, a difference made possible through the work of God within the celebrant. Thus, from that point on, the bread and wine are changed in a way that it can never be changed back. We believe that God has made his presence felt in the gifts we have been given and that God is truly present within our midst.

And so, when we gather at this Mass, we are taught that this Mass is a ritual action, instituted and led by Christ, so that we fulfill the prophecy of God and share in this meal together. All the stories from the Old Testament have been brought to a climax in this ritual act that begins at the altar and is fulfilled on the cross.

When we truly recognize how God has been revealed through the ages and at this table, then our faith becomes redefined as well. We recognize that we are not just attending a nice meal to receive God and move on with life. We recognize that our salvation and our historical relationship with God are dependent on understanding the stories of our faith and engaging in this meal which connects us with our salvation history. We come to this meal because we realize that our entire Christian life rests and depends on this gift of God today.

As we journey through this “Bread of Life” story in the Gospel of John, we begin to realize that every story that preceded it, from the showering of manna in the desert in the Old Testament to the multiplication of loaves in the New, serves as a prelude to the last and most important meal that infinitely makes a true difference in our lives, the meal we share today and every day we gather at a Catholic Mass. Let us fittingly gather around the altar, having reflected on God’s word and cleansed ourselves of sin, and continue the journey together to the



Promised Land of God's presence. Let us constantly share this story of salvation with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.