

***Third Sunday of Lent***  
***March 3, 2024***  
***Year of the Most Holy Eucharist***  
***Reflection #10***

*“And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12).*  
*“. . .and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21)*

We will conclude our study of Jesus and the Eucharist, pre-figured in the Book of Genesis, with this reflection upon the life of Joseph. As you may recall, Joseph is one of the twelve sons of Israel (formerly Jacob). He is a favorite of his father who showers him with gifts and affection. The most famous gift he received from his father would be “the Coat of Many Colors” or, as Andrew Lloyd Webber would famously name it, his “Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.” Needless to say, this would cause friction between his brothers and himself. Coupled with this, Joseph also was given, by God, the ability to interpret dreams. Sacred Scripture recalls two of his dreams which further separated him from his brothers. Desperate to rid themselves of his presence, his brothers planned to murder him and conceal this from their father. Ruben, the oldest of Israel’s sons, managed to convince the rest not to go through with this dreadful action. Instead, Joseph would be sold as a slave to a caravan of Ismaelites destined for Egypt. As a prisoner in Egypt, Joseph would befriend Pharaoh’s chief butler, a resident of the same prison, interpreting one of his dreams which foretold his eventual return into Pharaoh’s service. Later, Pharaoh would have a dream which no Egyptian wiseman could interpret. The chief butler, remembering the young Hebrew, would advise Pharaoh to seek his council. Joseph’s interpretation predicted seven years of prosperity for Egypt followed by seven years of famine. Now aware of the impending disaster, Pharaoh would appoint Joseph to a position of authority overseeing Egypt’s grain storage. Once the lean years arrive, Joseph is able to feed the people with the food surplus he had stored. It is in this time of famine; Israel must send his remaining sons into Egypt to purchase the needed grain for their survival. Joseph, now unrecognizable to his brothers, demands one brother stay behind, the others leave Egypt once they have secured their grain and return to their own land. They will only be allowed to return and purchase more grain and free their brother, IF they return with their youngest brother. As their grain supplies begin to be exhausted, the brothers are forced to return to Egypt bringing with them their youngest brother, Benjamin whom Joseph threatens to arrest after planting his own chalice in Benjamin’s grain bag. The Book of Genesis describes the brothers, standing in front of Joseph, pleading with him to be allowed to return home. In a moving scene, Joseph, unable to control his emotions, reveals himself to his brothers to their utter shock. He begs them to return home and bring his father Israel into Egypt. Israel, after being instructed by God to move into Egypt, is able to finally see his beloved son Joseph once more.

Despite the time needed, I felt it necessary to recount the story of Joseph for you. The Church Fathers taught the saving action of Jesus was foretold, in the story of Joseph. As Joseph, through his sufferings, saved his brothers, Jesus will, by His own suffering, save you and I. However, I ask you, who suffers in the story of Joseph? Whereas many would say: “Joseph suffered most due to his years of slavery,” I propose it was his brothers who suffered most.

Returning to the story, Joseph's slavery, in spite of its brutality, only lasted as long as he was a prisoner. For his brothers, their slavery began by their succumbing to their first temptations of envy and jealousy. These chains of sin would be tightened as their hatred for him grew. The final cell was locked the day they lied to their father about Joseph's "supposed" death by the jaws of wild beasts. They are finally freed, fed and forgiven through the suffering of their brother Joseph. Joseph's suffering saves his entire family.

In like manner, the sufferings of Jesus free us from the chains of our own sinfulness. Not content with just releasing us from our own spiritual bondage, Jesus desires to feed us too. The food He offers is greater than that offered by Joseph to his brothers. By His Words and Actions, grain ground into bread is changed into His Most Sacred Body. In this time of Lent as we recall His Passion, let us joyfully praise and adore Him. He has presented each of us with the gift of His Body in the Eucharist, which strengthens us as we endure these years of famine separated from Him and the loving banquet we call Heaven.