

### **Homily for March 17<sup>th</sup> 2017**

Today we read about Joseph's brother plotting to get rid of their younger brother – whose place in old dad's heart – he seemed to be Israel's favorite - was more than they could stomach. Either throw him out or they would throw up!

This reminded me of a humorous line from the well-known philosopher, Peter Kreeft. In reflecting on the Joseph narrative, he mused:

***“If one Egyptian tailor hadn't cheated on the threads of Joseph's mantle, Potiphar's wife would never have been able to tear it, present it as evidence to Potiphar that Joseph attacked her, gotten him thrown in prison, and let him be in a position to interpret Pharaoh's dream, win his confidence, advise him to store seven years of grain, and save his family, the seventy original Jews from whom Jesus came. We owe our salvation to a cheap Egyptian tailor.”***<sup>1</sup>

Although worth a good giggle, I laughed really hard the first time I heard this; these words do present a theme pertinent to today's readings and Feast. The theme is the Providence of God. The Catholic Encyclopedia has this to say about the Providence of God:

***God's providence is the Act by which in His wisdom He so orders all events within the universe that the end for which it was created may be realized. That end is that all creatures should manifest the glory of God, and in particular that man should glorify Him, recognizing in nature the work of His hand, serving Him in obedience and love, and thereby attaining to the full development of his nature and to eternal happiness in God.***<sup>2</sup>

This theme comes through most beautifully in the Joseph narrative. From the perspective of the reader, this seems to be a story about a very human family with very real relationships that are in one way or another disordered and distressed. We heard this clearly in the reading for today. It is not until we get to the very end of the story that Joseph speaks words revealing the providential nature of all that has happened from chapter 37, where the story starts, to chapter 50, verse 20, when he says to his distraught brothers, to whom he has revealed himself:

***20 Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.***

As St Theresa and Avila said: “God does write straight with crooked lines”. This is something we discover not only in the Joseph story but also in the life of St. Patrick. Patrick, was born in the year 387 in Scotland, he was raised by affluent parents of Roman rank. At age 16, Patrick was kidnapped and forced into slavery, much like Joseph, where he had to herd sheep for a Druid high priest in Ireland. In his 6 years of captivity, Patrick learned the Celtic tongue and saw the beliefs and rituals of Druidism.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/795167-if-one-egyptian-tailor-hadn-t-cheated-on-the-threads-of>

<sup>2</sup> glorify Him, recognizing in nature the work of His hand, serving Him in obedience and love, and thereby attaining to the full development of his nature and to eternal happiness in God.

In his early twenties, Patrick escaped Ireland and returned home to Scotland. He entered religious life but soon discovered he longed to minister to the Irish people. He had a vision at the time, which he recorded in a letter entitled, *Confessio*. It states:

***“I saw a man coming, as it were from Ireland. His name was Victoricus, and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: “The Voice of the Irish”. As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Foclut, which is beside the western sea — and they cried out, as with one voice: ‘We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.’”***<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, this is what he did. During the thirty years that his missionary labours continued he covered the Island with churches and monasteries, dying in 461 at around the age of 74. In his *Confessio*, he expressed his understanding of the providential purposes of God this way:

***I give unceasing thanks to my God, who kept me faithful in the day of my testing. Today I can offer him sacrifice with confidence, giving myself as a living victim to Christ, my Lord, who kept me safe through all my trials. I can say now: Who am I, Lord, and what is my calling, that you worked through me with such divine power?***<sup>4</sup>

May we be inspired to remember that in what can, from our perspective, seem like the very human unfolding of our lives, when we can see what Peter Kreeft saw in Joseph’s mantle, when we can see our lives with the faith of a Joseph and Patrick then we do understand that we have been created to glorify Him, recognizing in nature the work of His hand, serving Him in obedience and love, and thereby attaining to the full development of our human nature and to eternal happiness in God.

People learning to live this way can in the refrain of today’s psalm exclaim:

***Remember the marvels the Lord has done.***

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<sup>3</sup> <https://divineoffice.org/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ibreviary.com/m/breviario.php?s=ufficio\\_delle\\_lettore](http://www.ibreviary.com/m/breviario.php?s=ufficio_delle_lettore)