

Homily for March 18, 2022

The Providence of God

Today we read about Joseph's brothers 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.”¹

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. 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.²

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”.

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. 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,

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

² 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.

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.