

The only Son from Heaven - but not the only son

III - Joseph

Joseph was not the only son of Israel. He was not even the *firstborn* son of Israel; although he was his *favourite* son, because he was the firstborn son of Israel's favourite wife.

Yes, for through deceit Jacob had wound up with more than one wife. Jacob, himself a diligent deceiver, had been outdone in deceit by his uncle so as to be married, not to his wife of choice, but rather to her sister, before becoming married to herself. And because Jacob had neglected his obligations to his first and lawful wife, God had shut the womb of Jacob's favourite wife for a while, and given him sons only by his first and lawful wife. Yes, for marriage *is* marriage, and marriage is sacred to God, and calls for faithfulness and fidelity, as an image and illustration of His own love for His favourite creature, that is: for Mankind. And as God's own love is one of suffering service, and shown in His faithfulness to His covenant promise to His people, so He command and calls for faithfulness to the covenant promise which constitutes a marriage, even if the one to whom we have given that promise is not or no longer our favourite.

The wedding vow establishes a *covenant* of love, an obligation to be good and do good to the one we promise to love before all others, and promise God to love before all others, except for God Himself; even if being good and doing good to that person comes to involve suffering and sacrifice, like the love that marriage is meant to reflect.

God honoured Jacob's marriage to the woman who was not his favourite wife, and forced Jacob, also, to honour his obligation to her, at least in this particular regard.

Joseph was not the firstborn son of Israel; although he was his favourite son, because he was the firstborn son of his favourite wife. As we have come to know about the life of Joseph, though, I am sure that we all consider Joseph the most significant son of Jacob. He would save his brothers, as well as his father, from dying much too soon; although he would not save his mother from what seems like dying too soon. And as such, he would save the entire people from dying out.

Sometimes things do not work out in ways that would seem good and right and appropriate to us. The most significant son of Israel, the saviour of Israel in his own lifetime was not the firstborn son of Israel.

And the Son of Israel who would in the fullness of time become the Saviour of Israel for all eternity would not be born as a son of Joseph, either, but rather the son of Judah, of Jacob's third son with his first and lawful wife.

Now, in the history of ancient Israel, Judah is most significant for having slept with his daughter-in-law, thinking that she was a prostitute. And through *this* union, ultimately, would the Saviour of Israel come into the world!

And then we even learn tonight that it was Judah who came up with the atrocious idea of selling his brother into slavery; which would ultimately be his own salvation, and that of his brothers, and the people. Sometimes things really do not work out in ways that would seem good and right and appropriate to us, not even when it comes to the things of God.

This is one lesson we learn from what we hear tonight: God truly works in mysterious ways as He rules the lives of men, and the history of all Mankind, and makes it into salvation history. We each have our part to play, however great or small, in the history of Mankind, and in salvation history, although we ourselves are not the Saviour; like Reuben, also, by the way, who initially saved Joseph from being killed by his brothers, as we hear it tonight, but otherwise seems somewhat insignificant. We cannot always tell how significant or insignificant a part it is that we play. In fact, we might have no idea ourselves of the part we play in the life of someone else, and in the history of Mankind, and in salvation history. God knows, though, and He is ultimately the one who works it all.

One lesson we should learn from this is to serve God faithfully and with confidence, and always strive to do all the good we can in all that which comes upon us in life, and to all those whom we come upon, and trust in God to make it all well worthwhile.

Ultimately God is the One who makes all things well. He does that in spite of our wrongs and wrongdoings, and even through our wrongdoings themselves. As Joseph would later say it to his brothers: *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be saved to life, as they are today.* Now, this does not mean that we should do evil in the hope that God will make good come from it. But it does mean that all things are in His hands; and that He can make good come from evil, in ways which we cannot not know.

Many of the sons of Israel were products of adultery. Joseph was the son of Israel through the sin of bigamy. And the only Son from Heaven would not be a son of Joseph, but of Judah.

Judah was not the firstborn son of Israel, either, rather, the firstborn son of Israel was Reuben, the rather insignificant one. It might seem to us, and it certainly seems to me, that it would fit very well into the general structure of salvation history if the only Son from Heaven had been born as a Son of the firstborn son; but then, that was not up to me, now, was it? And it would turn out that that was not how God would work things.

But the only Son from Heaven was born as a son of Judah. When the Son of God became Man, He was born of a daughter of Judah, and a daughter of David, and He adopted a son of Judah as His father, and a son of David, and was adopted into the tribe of Judah, as a Son of David.

But although the Son of God would not be a son of Joseph, though, Joseph does in many ways stand in His place in Holy Scripture so as to represent Him and His salvation.

Joseph would be glorified through suffering, for the salvation of his brothers, and his father, and his people. He would rescue Egypt and the whole world as it was known then from a severe famine. And he would rise from slavery to be the chief counsellor to the king, almost as Pharaoh himself, as Pharaoh said it: *Only with regards to the throne will I be greater than you.*

Our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and God Himself from eternity, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit in glory, and even in being God. Only of His own free will does He submit to the Father from eternity, in love, as does the Holy Spirit. For that is what love does, submits to the beloved.

And *Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her*, as the Holy Apostle Paul writes it, to win her as His Bride and give Himself to her, and all that is His, in order that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour - as it is the duty of a husband to give himself to his wife, and for her, with all that he is and all that he has, for that, also, is what love does.

For love of sinners the Son of God had Himself sunk into that well of sin which was the Baptism of sinners, to make Himself one with sinners and take upon Himself our sin to bear it for us, and His judgement against it. And laden with the sin of all sinners He had Himself sunk into the deepest depth of death, the judgement of God against sin, His righteous wrath at wrong and wrongdoing, His holy hatred of evil. He suffered Himself the fullness of death for us sinners, in our stead and on our behalf, the eternal death we have all earned with God by our sin.

And this He did to bring it about that many people should be saved to life, as they are today, as Joseph said to his brothers of his own sufferings, when they came to Egypt for bread, and came to stand before his judgement.

And after having suffered, the Son of God rose from death, and was raised again into the glory of God. And now He has sinners buried with Him in Baptism, with all our sin and all our guilt and impurity, and drawn up from it clothed in His own righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, to bring it about that many people should be saved to life, as they are today. And so, we shall not perish and die forever in His judgement, as was otherwise good and right, rather, we shall live and be with Him and share the fullness of His glory in His eternal Kingdom and His heavenly life.

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for bread, they were astounded and afraid to learn that the mighty man before whom they had to plead for their lives was none other than their brother, to whom they had done such great evil, and understandably so.

Of the Son of God the holy Apostle John writes: *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so, amen.*

He shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead; and all unbelievers shall see that He against whom they did such great evil, whom they rejected and gave over to death in their hearts and minds, and in their lives, He holds the keys of Hell and eternal death. Even so, amen. So, there.

Joseph forgave his brothers, though: *You meant evil against me, as he said, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be saved to life.* And he not only sold them bread, as they asked him to, he gave them a home in Egypt and provided for them for the rest of their lives.

The Son of God gives Himself to His Christians as the bread of eternal life. He speaks His promise of full forgiveness for all sin, given to all sinners, only on account of what He Himself has done for us, and eternal life with Him in glory. And with His promise, He gives His salvation, fully and for real, and freely and for nothing, to all who hear His promise and take it to heart. And by His promise of eternal life, He has His own heavenly life live in us, with His Holy Spirit, and keeps us alive to Him, by faith, until the end, when He shall come in glory to take all His Christians to Himself in His heavenly Kingdom of glory.

Blessed is He that comes, in the name of the Lord. Amen.