

*Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed!*

On the evening of a summery Easter Wednesday, I found myself contemplating nine chapters from the latter part of the Book of Genesis. As pious as this sounds, I must admit – it took place from the comfort of a front-row seat at the Theatre Royal in Bath, during a performance of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. The scripture came to life before our eyes.

The musical was a joyful treat worthy of the Easter Octave – resonant with the paschal mystery. Of course, the show could not compare with the far greater drama that unfolded before our eyes during Holy Week. For in that sacred week, we witnessed the very mystery of our salvation lived out in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, for the fraction of the price of a theatre ticket. Easter glory does not diminish the story of Joseph. On the contrary, it is to recognise St Augustine's insight: that *the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New*. When we step into the story of Joseph in the light of Holy Week, we begin to see striking parallels of Christ Himself. If the Easter Vigil could be extended by a few more Old Testament readings from the seven given by the Church, I'm sure the story of Joseph could be squeezed in between the story of Abraham and Isaac, and the triumphant exodus of God's people led by Moses through the Red Sea. Like the Exodus, Joseph's story is a premonition of Passover and a vision of heaven.

Joseph was the beloved son of Jacob. Jesus the beloved Son of God the Father. From the very beginning both were loved, set apart for mission carried out through suffering. Poor, poor Joseph was according to the Church Fathers a type of the suffering servant. Joseph was rejected by eleven jealous brothers, thrown into a pit, and left for dead. Similarly, Christ was abandoned by His disciples and handed over to death. The eleven disciples scattered in fear, just as Joseph's eleven brothers turned against him. For both, suffering is only half the story. Joseph's prophetic gifts were recognised, and in Egypt was lifted to a place of authority at the right hand of Pharaoh. Christ, too, descended into suffering and death, then God lifted him up, seated at the right hand of the Father. The Risen Christ lives and reigns for ever and ever, as the text of the Exultet and so many of our wonderful prayers conclude. Like with Joseph, humiliation gave way to exultation, even in the closing pages of the first book of the Bible.

Meanwhile, far from Joseph's glory, his father and brothers endure hardship of their own. In the land of Canaan, famine takes hold – *those Canaan days (they used to know)* were now marked by

hunger and uncertainty. Their suffering drove them toward Egypt, toward the very one they had rejected, not yet realising that he will be the source of their salvation.

When Joseph's brothers encounter Joseph in Egypt, they do not recognise him at first. It is only later, through the provision of grain in their time of need that his identity is revealed. So too with the Risen Christ: He is not always recognised immediately. Next Sunday's gospel (on the road to Emmaus) recalls that the disciples' eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread. The grain Joseph provides is meaningful. He offers the finest wheat to a people facing famine. Through him, lives are saved. But this, too, points to Jesus. For Christ offers not just bread for the body, but Himself as the Bread of Life, meeting the deepest hunger of you and me.

Joseph's famous coat was interpreted by a sixth century bishop as representative of the diverse nations who would follow Christ. Just as the sons of Jacob had tribes named after them to express the breadth of humanity loved by God. *Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations into the peace of God's kingdom. Lord, have mercy!* Joseph forgave his brothers from a position of great power, with revenge easily possible. But God used his suffering for good. In the same way, from the Cross, Christ did not condemn but said: *Father, forgive them.* Mercy and wisdom are found both in Christ and his Old Testament type.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday with the psalmist we: *Give praise to the LORD, for he is good, his mercy endures for ever. Let the house of Israel say, His mercy endures for ever.* With St Peter in our second reading, we bless the Lord with delight: *for, according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.* Lord have mercy! ...and also: *grant us peace.* Jesus said to the eleven, twice: *Peace be with you.* Inner peace is one of the signs of our having welcomed the presence of the Risen Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, the story of Joseph points us to Christ. The difference is this: we do not sit in the audience, but stand on the stage as Easter people (as St John Paul II put it); singing, living, dancing the good news of the resurrection, where mercy is stronger than failure, and where the Risen, Conquering Son comes among us and says, *Peace be with you.* In these 50 days of Easter may we truly recognise Him in our midst and say with Thomas the Apostle, *my Lord and my God.*

*Amen. Alleluia.*