

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead. They said amongst themselves, it may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him. And Joseph would have been just in the eyes of the world. He would have been justified and right to do just this.

To carry out his own form of vengeance and retribution upon them, to call them out for the wicked and evil things that they had done to him, the difficulties that they had caused in his life. Joseph's brothers deserve wicked and evil things. They deserve to be repaid. For the evil that they had done against Joseph. But the father knows better. Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you. And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.

Whether or not his father actually said this doesn't really matter. What matters is Joseph's response. What matters is Joseph's response that he recognizes vengeance and retribution are in the hands of the Lord, not in the hands of men. Am I in the place of God? Do not fear. Vengeance is the Lord's, not mine. The evil you meant against me, God has worked it for good to bring about that many people should be kept alive. Do not fear.

Joseph is not telling his brothers not to fear the Lord, not to fear vengeance, but not to fear it from him. For he knows it is not his place to preach vengeance and to seek out retribution. He knows that no matter how difficult his brothers have been, to put it lightly, it is not his place to go out and get even with them. He knows that the sins that they have committed against him, as difficult and as frustrating and as wicked and evil as they are, are even more odious, are more offensive, and more wicked and evil, for they are done not just against him, but against the Lord. And for Joseph to take vengeance against those who have made his life a living hell would be to take away that right and privilege from the Lord. And so indeed, Joseph shows forth the Christian response, the Christian life, because he recognizes his place.

Do you not see yourself in Joseph's shoes quite often? There are those who have done you wrong, who have harmed you, who have made your life difficult, who have troubled you over and over

again, who have been a thorn in your side for years, perhaps, or maybe just for the last week. And what is your response?

More often than not, our response is to get even. They come cold and jaded towards them. Our response is to seek the justice and the vengeance that truly belong to the Lord. We do not listen to the words of St. Paul, who says, Bless those who persecute you. Bless them and do not curse them. No, instead we throw curses and insults and hatred upon those who would dare to make our lives more difficult. On those who would seek our destruction. And we do it with a self-righteous judgment, saying, this is what the Lord would have wanted. Oh, how foolish we are. How foolish, indeed, are we to think that this is what the Lord desires, that man would dwell in discord with another man. That we would seek our own justice, our own vengeance. For perceived and real insults and difficulties. Insofar as we are able, we are actually called to live peaceably with one another.

Joseph is a picture of Christ, for he forgives his brothers, even though they essentially sold him into death. And he says, "I will provide for you and for your little ones." Joseph lives out St. Paul's command that if your enemy is hungry, to feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. And in so doing, you will heap burning coals upon his head. Joseph overcame evil with good. And not for the sake of destroying his brothers. The coals that Joseph heaps upon his brother's head serve as the catalyst for their own conversion, their own forgiveness, their own repentance.

Having seen the love of Joseph, the love of God through their brother, the love of Christ, they come to repentance, weeping over their sin, and the restoration of their family is begun. Joseph and his brothers live in harmony once again.

So indeed, it is the Lord's will for us. That we would forgive rather than get even, that we would seek peace and pursue it. Jesus said, be merciful. Even as your Father is merciful, judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you.

This is not to say that we don't care about the truth. But we let the Lord take his vengeance and his retribution. We allow the Lord to sit on his throne rather than taking it for ourselves, rather

than taking part of the office of the Lord to destroy wickedness and sinners. We submit to our Lord and pray for their conversion, for we deserve condemnation as much as any.

We do what our Lord first did for us, showing us grace and mercy, for yet while we were still sinners, sending his Son to die for us, overcoming evil with good.

For as much as we like to always place ourselves in Joseph's shoes, more often than not, if we're honest, we are in the shoes of his brothers. We harm more than we forgive. We are the thorn in other people's sides, even if we choose not to see it. We are always aware of those who are difficult to us. Rarely are we ever aware of how difficult we are to others. Rarely are we aware of how often we sin and cause problems, difficulties, and stress for those around us.

Be merciful. For your Father is merciful to you. Be merciful to those who persecute you, who stress you out, who are a burden to you and to your family. Because God has loved you, because God has indeed shown mercy upon you, He has sent his very Son to die for you, who has not done a single thing right for him.

You who are a constant thorn in the side of the Lord, who by your transgressions have constantly begrudged and belabored him, who have demanded from him that which is not yours, who have demanded from him over and over again his time, his attention, and his favor, even though you have done nothing to deserve it. You who have by your sins handed him over into the very jaws of death. To you, Christ has shown mercy.

He has not brought his vengeance down upon you, but has given his very Son to die for you so that your sins might be forgiven. He has given you his sacraments and his church so that you might be enlivened and strengthened, so that you might live in his grace and his mercy, transformed by his will, by his ways.

Joseph doesn't say this of his own accord, but because he is like his God and his Lord. He has been transformed by it. He has been molded by prayer, the scriptures, and his trials. And the Lord works all these things for good. If the Lord can bring good from Joseph being sold into slavery and

being perceived as dead by his father, the Lord can work the wickedness and evil done to you for your good.

Yes, even the neighbor who perplexes you, the friend or the family member who troubles you and is constantly asking for things of you, who is difficult to deal with. Yes, even the fellow Christian who always seems to need help from you. Yes, even your enemies who persecute you. Yes, even disease, when it assaults you.

The Lord works all this for your good. And he works it for your good in ways beyond our comprehension. He works it for your good. He promises. He promises. Even though you are blind now to his way and his truth, you will one day see it. As Christ our Lord returns on that glorious day to call you to him, as your salvation is made complete in Christ and is brought to its fullness, as you behold Christ with your own eyes and are made as he is.

Be merciful. Forgive. These are the marks of the Christian life. These are the marks of the one who is like his father. Give good things to those who hate you. Love those and bless those who persecute you. Do not repay evil for evil, but do what is honorable in the sight of all. Your reward will be great in heaven. For Christ has died for you. He has blessed you even though you have persecuted him. He has lived in harmony with you even though you have sought to live in discord with him. He has associated with you the lowly. He has not repaid your evil with evil. When you were hungry, he fed you with his own very body. When you were thirsty, he gave you his very blood to drink.

That you might not be heaped upon with burning coals in eternity but might be given a cup of blessing pressed down and overflowing with grace and mercy. That he might overcome evil with good. That you might have the peace and joy that your Lord desires to give to you. That you might have life everlasting with him, that you might learn from him how to love one another.

✠ In Jesus' name, Amen. ✠