JOSEPH SOLD INTO EGYPT
Gn 37,2-36

Prayer

All things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified

/Rom 8,28-30/

INTRODUCTION

In our common understanding God is the Lord of the world: creator, redeemer and leader and this is correct. Everything depends on him. Still, he doesn't intervene directly but chooses people and appoints them to their positions and responsibilities. God's election doesn't make people immune from mistakes and struggles – they force their way through life in all the small and big, sunny and shadowy moments. Not everything from their life is spectacular but their stories can teach and inspire.

Joseph, the last of the patriarchs, is the easiest to be identified with. He is usually regarded as a positive character and almost a sacrificial lamb. However, a careful reading of his story reveals his weak points as well. We can get much inspiration from his interaction with his brothers.

TEXT

This is his family history. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he was tending the flocks with his brothers; he was an assistant to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah, and he brought his father bad reports about them. [3] Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him a long tunic. [4] When his brothers saw that their father loved him best of all his sons, they hated him so much that they would not even greet him. [5] Once Joseph had a dream, which he told to his brothers: [*they hated him even more*] [6] "Listen to this dream I had. [7] There we were, binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf rose to an upright position, and your sheaves formed a ring around my sheaf and bowed down to it." [8] "Are you really going to make yourself king over us?" his brothers asked him. "Or impose your rule on us?" So they hated him all the more because of his talk about his dreams. [9] Then he had another dream, and this one, too, he told to his brothers. "I had another dream," he said; "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10] When he also told it to his father, his father reproved him. "What is the meaning of this dream of yours?" he asked. "Can it be that I and your mother and your brothers are to come and bow to the ground before you?" [11] So his brothers were wrought up against him but his father pondered the matter. [12] One day, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem, [13] Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers, you know, are tending our flocks at Shechem. Get ready; I will send you to them." "I am ready," Joseph answered. [14] "Go then," he replied; "see if all is well with your brothers and the flocks, and bring back word." So he sent him off from the valley of Hebron. When Joseph reached Shechem, [15] a man met him as he was wandering about in the fields. "What are you looking for?" the man asked him. [16] "I am looking for my brothers," he answered. "Could you please tell me where they are tending the flocks?" [17] The man told him, "They have moved on from here; in fact, I heard them say, 'Let us go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and caught up with them in Dothan. [18] They noticed him from a distance, and before he came up to them, they plotted to kill him. [19] They said to one another: "Here comes that master dreamer! [20] Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here; we could say that a wild beast devoured him. We shall then see what comes of his dreams." [21] When Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from their hands, saying: "We must not take his life. [22] Instead of shedding blood," he continued, "just throw him into that cistern there in the desert; but don't kill him outright." His purpose was to rescue him from their hands and restore him to his father. [23] So when Joseph came up to them, they stripped him of the long tunic he had on; [24] then they took him and threw him into the cistern, which was empty and dry. [25] They then sat down to their meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming

from Gilead, their camels laden with gum, balm and resin to be taken down to Egypt. [26] Judah said to his brothers: "What is to be gained by killing our brother and concealing his blood? [27] Rather, let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, instead of doing away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. [28] They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Some Midianite traders passed by, and they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and took him to Egypt. [29] When Reuben went back to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not in it, he tore his clothes, [30] and returning to his brothers, he exclaimed: "The boy is gone! And I-- where can I turn?" [31] They took Joseph's tunic, and after slaughtering a goat, dipped the tunic in its blood. [32] Then they sent someone to bring the long tunic to their father, with the message: "We found this. See whether it is your son's tunic or not." [33] He recognized it and exclaimed: "My son's tunic! A wild beast has devoured him! Joseph has been torn to pieces!" [34] Then Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned his son many days. [35] Though his sons and daughters tried to console him, he refused all consolation, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in the nether world." Thus did his father lament him. [36] The Midianites, meanwhile, sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward.

STRUCTURE AND SETTING

Joseph is the beginning of next of the ten histories in Genesis. The previous verse concludes the story of Esau (Gen 36) and a significant section of the book starts here going through Gen 50. It is shaped in a similar way like the history of Jacob in Gen 25-27:

- this is the story
- age
- 1st conflict
- 2nd conflict
- Separation of brothers

Setting for the story is provided in 2-11 by a threefold repetition of "they hated him" (37,4.5.8). The culmination is reached in v. 11 "So his brothers were wrought up against him".

The main part of the story falls into 4 scenes, which can be divided based on the locality where the plot is taking place.

- Joseph in search of his brothers (12-17) (Hebron and Shechem)
- Joseph sold (18-30) (Dothan)
- Jacob's lament over Joseph (31-35) (Hebron)
- Conclusion (36) (Egypt)

The bottom line of the whole story of Joseph is a gradual distancing from his father's house (protection) culminating in Egypt. On his way he meets a man in Shechem ready to help him, but in Dothan he is sold by his brothers up to becoming a slave in Egypt. Joseph's story continues throughout Genesis and a gradual return and restoration of the family peace follows. Another line of thought is a gradual change of the brothers. The whole story is also a learning experience for Joseph and his human maturing.

LECTIO

2. "This is his family history. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he was tending the flocks with his brothers; he was an assistant to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah, and he brought his father bad reports about them."

The story is located in Canaan (v. 1), where Jacob stayed to live with his family. Joseph is introduced as assistant shepherd, not fully in charge of the flock but helping his brothers – sons of Bilhah and Zipah. These were the servant-women given to Jacob by Rachel and Leah. There has never been much love and affection between Jacob and the sons of Leah (Gn 34) and probably even less he had for the sons of the servant-women.

The bad reports Joseph brought are most probably untrue reports and lies, like those brought later by spies about the land of Canaan: "it happened to the men whom Moses had sent to reconnoiter the land and who on returning had set the whole community grumbling against him by spreading discouraging reports about the land; [37] these men who had given out the bad report about the land were struck down by the LORD and died" (Nm 14,36-37). That's why his brothers had really a good reason to hate him.

Rabbinic commentary: Joseph is called servant (lit. young man) because he used to act immaturely. He used to shape his hair and decorate his eyes to look better.

3. "Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him a long tunic."

The preference for one son is typical for Jacob's family: Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob and Rebecca rather preferred Jacob over Esau. Jacob loved Rachel more then Leah (25,28; 29,30). Leah is twice described as hated and now her sons hate Joseph – the son of the beloved Rachel. The reason for this preference was that Jacob considered Joseph's birth as a turning point in his life: staying at his father in law, he left for his home country after the birth of Joseph.

Patristic commentary: parents should have equal love for their children. But Jacob can not be blamed, since he foresaw Joseph's virtues. Jacob didn't favor Joseph as father his son, but as a prophet he understood a mystery (Ambrose). Jacob and Joseph stand for God Father and Son. Jacob loved his son, because God the Father loved his only begotten Son (Cesareus).

The long tunic prepared to Joseph is a sign of preference and special affection. We don't know exactly what it looked like. LXX and Vulgate translate as multi-colored, or consisting of several materials. It could be also an expression for a long garment reaching up to the feet. Tunic was a common dress for both men and women and was worn directly over the underwear. While working, it used to be tightened around one's waist to facilitate movements.

Patristic commentary: Joseph represents Christ. The tunic stands for many nations; Jesus divested himself of these. The variety of this tunic indicates that the Church has different forms of grace: martyrs, confessors, priests, servers, virgins, widows. This is the attire of our Savior. Joseph was sold and bought by the Ishmaelites and also our Lord was sold by the Jews and bought by the pagans. Ishmaelites with their perfumes indicated that pagans who would believe, would spread aroma of justice in the whole world (Cesareus).

4. When his brothers saw that their father loved him best of all his sons, they hated him so much that they would not even greet him

The hate becomes a refrain and characteristic for the whole text (v. 5.8). One of the signs of the brothers' attitude is that they couldn't speak with Joseph "in peace". This will be the main motive of the story: loss and restoring of peace within the family.

Patristic commentary: As the brothers get angry with Joseph, so the Pharisees get angry with Christ, because the Father loved him and he was dressed in multiple glories. He was worthy of being admired like God who gives life, as light able to illuminate those in darkness, to cleanse the lepers, to rise to life and rebuke the sea. The multi-colored dress is a symbol of many forms of glory that God the Father gave Christ through his human nature (Cyril from Alexandria).

6-8. "Listen to this dream I had. [7] There we were, binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf rose to an upright position, and your sheaves formed a ring around my sheaf and bowed down to it." [8] "Are you really going to make yourself king over us?" his brothers asked him. "Or impose your rule on us?" So they hated him all the more because of his talk about his dreams.

The dream is reported from Joseph's point of view (i.e., narrated by him). The fact the family had flocks doesn't exclude occasional field-work, but it might be an image only with no factual substance.

Joseph earns only hate from his brothers for the 3rd time in a row (as he will later from his father – v. 10). Their question if he is going to be a king or ruler over them predicts already what was about to happen in Egypt, where Joseph will be ruler and next to the king. This will be more clearly hinted on in the second dream.

Patristic commentary: The bowing of the sheaves is like bowing to the risen Christ, who will be seen and adored by eleven apostles in Jerusalem and all the saints once they will be raised. (Ambrose).

9-11. Then he had another dream, and this one, too, he told to his brothers. "I had another dream," he said; "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 When he also told it to his father, his father reproved him. "What is the meaning of this dream of yours?" he asked. "Can it be that I and your mother and your brothers are to come and bow to the ground before you?" 11 So his brothers were wrought up against him but his father pondered the matter.

The second reported dream, instead of agricultural imagery uses astral terms, but the message to communicate is the same: Joseph is exalted over his brothers. The bowing of the heavenly bodies corresponds to his royal position (The Babylonian king Nabonides had a dream, where he was greeted by the sun, the moon and the stars). Thus both of his dreams hint on Joseph's control of the food supply and his royal function in Egypt.

Both of the dreams have a similar content and message. Most probably they refer to/predict only one and not two distinctive moments when the family will bow down to Joseph. The repetition of the dreams shows certainty of its fulfillment. The repetition of two dreams with the same point is typical for Joseph's story: pharaoh in Egypt had two similar dreams foretelling the same thing: cows from Nile and ears of grain growing (Gn 41).

Now even the father gets upset and reproaches Joseph with harsh words. The reaction of the brothers is heightened: hate is transformed in jealousy, which in the Biblical understanding leads to violent actions: "Phinehas, son of Eleazar, has turned my anger from the Israelites by his zeal for my honor among them… because he was zealous on behalf of his God and thus made amends for the Israelites" (Nm 25,11.13). Most likely, the brothers are already seeking revenge at this point.

There was nothing wrong with the dreams, nor with the people. What was wrong was their attitude towards the dreams. The brothers explain the dreams from their point of view, instead of seeing in them God's message. Joseph's version of the dreams is a result of his young age and lack of reflection.

Patristic commentary: The dream is seen as a prophecy about Christ, who was the beloved of his Father, sent as a shepherd, and raised from the dead. The sun, moon and the stars are Mary, Joseph and the eleven apostles at the Mount of Olives (Hypolit).

Now the following scenes offer a description of how the hate of the brothers developed and caused division in the family for the next 20 years.

12-14. One day, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem, 13 Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers, you know, are tending our flocks at Shechem. Get ready; I will send you to them." "I am ready," Joseph answered. 14 "Go then," he replied; "see if all is well with your brothers and the flocks, and bring back word." So he sent him off from the valley of Hebron.

The location of these areas is significant. Shechem is the site where Jacob's sons massacred the local population (34,24-30) as a revenge for violation of their sister. Joseph's task is to find out if everything is all right (if there is peace). Instead of external factors endangering the family peace, there is a substantial lack of peace within the family, since the brothers "hated" Joseph 3 times (v. 4.5.8) and were jealous of him (v. 11).

Patristic commentary: Jacob foresaw the mystery of the incarnation sending Joseph to his brothers, like God who is in search of the lost sheep. Joseph, looking for his brothers, was wandering in the desert, just as Jesus searched for people who got lost. (Ambrose / Cesareus).

15-17. When Joseph reached Shechem, [15] a man met him as he was wandering about in the fields. "What are you looking for?" the man asked him. [16] "I am looking for my brothers," he answered. "Could you please tell me where they are tending the flocks?" [17] The man told him, "They have moved on from here; in fact, I heard them say, 'Let us go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and caught up with them in Dothan.

This short scene only delays the meeting and confrontation between the brothers. Joseph wanders like a lost sheep in the desert: "We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way" (Is 53,6). He has to be advised by an unknown stranger to his brothers and has to make 14 more miles farther from home to find them in Dothan (Dothan was inhabited from the Early Bronze Age through the Hellenistic Period. There was an extensive fortification and city-walls in use over long periods).

Rabbinic commentary: the man who showed Joseph the way was the Angel Gabriel in human form. He was sent by God in order to be fulfilled the promise given to Abraham.

18-20. They noticed him from a distance, and before he came up to them, they plotted to kill him. [19] They said to one another: "Here comes that master dreamer! [20] Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here; we could say that a wild beast devoured him. We shall then see what comes of his dreams."

After a short delay (12-17), now the attention is focused on the situation in the camp and point of view is that of the brothers. It develops the idea of the distance from the father (11), where their jealousy can be displayed. They plot against Joseph – this expression is never used positively: "He turned their hearts to hate his people, to treat his servants unfairly" (Ps 105,25).

Their plan to kill Joseph is very explicit; they speak directly about killing, or murdering. This verb is not juridical but rather is used of illicit taking of human life: "when they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." (Gn 4,8). When they will be explaining the facts to his father, they will never use the prepared explanation about the wild animals eating Joseph. It will be Jacob, when they present Joseph's tunic: "He recognized it and exclaimed: "My son's tunic! A wild beast has devoured him! Joseph has been torn to pieces!"" (37,33).

Rabbinic commentary: First they were shouting arrows from a distance. Then they set dogs against him, since it wouldn't have been considered a murder. Only at the end did they decide to kill him directly.

21-22. When Reuben heard this, *he tried to save* him from their hands, saying: "We must not take his life. [22] Instead of shedding blood," he continued, "just throw him into that cistern there in the desert; but don't kill him outright." His purpose was to rescue him from their hands and restore him to his father

The text describes the result of Reuben's action, before it effectively happens: "he *tried* to save him" should be "he saved him"). We don't know why he wants to save Joseph. First he gives a general principle: "We must not take his life", where "take life" is an expression of homicide: "a homicide who has killed someone unintentionally" (Nm 35,11). Reuben's motive for making this suggestion remains hidden from his brothers, while it is disclosed to the reader: "His purpose was to rescue him from their hands and restore him to his father". The responsibility in the ancient world doesn't stem from a feeling of fellowship, but from the obligation to respond to the authority – here *pater familias*.

23-28. So when Joseph came up to them, they stripped him of the long tunic he had on; [24] then they took him and threw him into the cistern, which was empty and dry. [25] They then sat down to their meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with gum, balm and resin to be taken down to Egypt. [26] Judah said to his brothers: "What is to be gained by killing our brother and concealing his blood? [27] Rather, let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, instead of doing away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. [28] They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Some Midianite traders passed by, and they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and took him to Egypt

The actions of the brothers follow with speed, violence and determination: "they stripped him of the long tunic he had on (like an animal of its skin); then they took him and threw him into the cistern… they then sat down". First of all, the striping of the clothes would cause a quicker overheating in the heat of the desert. More than that, the tunic as sign of his father's love will be a sign presented back to the father when Joseph doesn't return home.

Patristic commentary: The stripping of Joseph is a foreshadowing of Jesus (John 19, 23-24). The tunic was marked with blood. It represents the body of Jesus but not his divine nature: they were able to take away from him his clothes, but not his immortal life. (Ambrose).

The pit is most likely a cistern cut in the limestone and used for storing water. Oftentimes they were plastered with waterproof plaster to prevent loss of water. Such cisterns might have been muddy, due to the pollution brought by rain water (dust, etc.): (cf. "there was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud" (Jer 38,6)), but this one was dry. Surprisingly, the narration doesn't report about Joseph's reaction, or defense. Only later we learn about Joseph's defense: "To one another, however, they said: "Alas, we are being punished because of our brother. We saw the anguish of his heart when he pleaded with us, yet we paid no heed" (42,21).

Patristic commentary: Joseph in the cistern is Christ who descended to dead. Jesus and Joseph were both sold for the same price. Joseph descended to Egypt, Christ came to the world. Joseph saves Egypt from the lack of grain; Christ liberates the world from the lack of God's word.

The brothers' meal is in a sharp contradiction with Joseph being hungry in the cistern. The caravan passing is quite plausible, since Dothan lies close to the main trade route through Palestine – Via Maris going from the Sea of Galilee and the plain of Jezreel along the coastal plain to Egypt.

A much discussed question is the presence of two groups: Ishmaelites and Midianites in the story (best seen in v. 28). There is no satisfactory explanation and most likely they are to be seen as alternative designations of the same group of traders. Another explanation (although less probable) is that the Midianites pulled Joseph out of the pit and then sold him to the Ishmaelites. It might be that one is more general and the other one more specific (nomadic traders – tribe). A literary explanation of this fact would indicate the presence of two originally independent narrations merged together.

The products they are carrying seem to be local. Jacob later sent the same products to Egypt as a present: "Put some of the land's best products in your baggage and take them down to the man as gifts: some balm and honey, gum and resin, and pistachios and almonds" (43,11).

Rabbinic commentary: Ishmaelites used to trade with oil and asphalt. Since God wanted to spare Joseph such a smell, he made them carry gum, balm and resin.

Judah's suggestion seems to be logic in their eyes: blood of the victim calls for vengeance ("The LORD then said: "What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!" 4,10) and it brings no profit to them.

The price for which Joseph was sold was a usual price of young male slaves in the Babylonian period as well as in Israel: "for persons between the ages of five and twenty, the fixed sum shall be twenty shekels for a youth, and ten for a maiden"(Lv 27,5). It was definitely a good deal for them, since the revenue of a shepherd, if employed by others, might have been about 8 shekels a year. Acting this way, they unknowingly helped to fulfill Joseph's dreams.

Rabbinic commentary: The price was 20 pieces = 5 shekels, which is the price for the first-born son. The share of each brother was ½ shekel and that's the yearly contribution for the temple of Jerusalem.

29-30. When Reuben went back to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not in it, he tore his clothes, [30] and returning to his brothers, he exclaimed: "The boy is gone! And I-- where can I turn?"

Ruben's action of tearing his clothes is a sign of mourning: "The one who bears the sore of leprosy shall keep his garments rent and his head bare, and shall muffle his beard" (Lv 13,45) and this cry foreshadows Jacob's reaction coming soon (33-34).

Rabbinic commentary: Where was Reuben meanwhile? He went to Beer-Sheba to see Jacob.

31-33. They took Joseph's tunic, and after slaughtering a goat, dipped the tunic in its blood. [32] Then they sent someone to bring the long tunic to their father, with the message: "We found this. See whether it is your son's tunic or not." [33] He recognized it and exclaimed: "My son's tunic! A wild beast has devoured him! Joseph has been torn to pieces!"

The fact that Joseph's brothers present the garment pretending Joseph had beet eaten shows their feelings and respect towards their father. They deceive him with clothing and a kid, like Jacob had deceived his father Isaac with clothing and a kid (27,9-11), gaining thus the first-born right and his father's blessing instead of his brother. His own sins return to him in his old age.

34-35. Then Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned his son many days. [35] Though his sons and daughters tried to console him, he refused all consolation, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in the nether world." Thus did his father lament him.

Jacob mourns his son through 3 characteristic expressions: tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth and mourning: "David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Rend your garments, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn over Abner." (2Sam 3,31). Such a public mourning would normally last one week but Jacob refuses to be consoled. The netherworld (sheol) is for him a proof of God's judgment by which he will be condemned to go to the place of wicked ones.

36. The Midianites, meanwhile, sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward

Even though Jacob had given up hope for Joseph, we are reminded by the narrative that it is in fact beginning of a new period in Egypt, in the house of Potiphar, a royal official.

MEDITATIO

1. People need models with whom to identify themselves and famous people to inspire them. Among the patriarchs, Joseph is the easiest to identify oneself with. He is the spoiled son who through adversity becomes a mature character and capable leader. Unjustly persecuted and sold to slavery by his own brothers, he becomes generous to those who made him suffer. Rejected by his closest relatives, he becomes source of their salvation. But it is not only a human struggle for success. Though not much visible, there is God behind everything – his providence turns the darkest deeds of men to their final good. All the realism of his ordinary life and struggles is interwoven by optimism of God's providence.

His story shouldn't be read only as a delightful and entertaining narration, but this deeper message should be captured: God doesn't appear physically in the ordinary life-circumstances and they are often full of struggles. Still, our faith tells us about God's providence that is behind everything. It can turn also our darkest moments to good. Where people see no way out of their problems and no solution, God opens new ways. And this is for us a source of optimism.

2. There is a saying, that every sin/mistake of the parents is punished on their children. Every human sin has an impact on the sinner himself or on other people around him. Here we have the finest example how Jacob's preference for one of his sons turns usual sibling rivalry into hatred and up to the point of murder. And Jacob seems to be blind to the results of his attitude towards his sons. The tragic consequences will affect the family for more then 20 years, until circumstances bring brothers together and make them repent. On the one hand, it seems that Jacob is the cause for everything. His favoritism for Joseph put everything in motion. On the other hand, he is also a victim of his own upbringing and early life: he is preferred by his mother and deceives his brother; he has to flee from him to another country (Gn 27-30).

This is the kind of family-heritage that everybody carries with him. It is more on subconscious level, but it is there. Knowledge of own family and its history is fundamental. This is not in order to blame and judge parents (or predecessors) for their mistakes, but rather we can learn from their mistakes and avoid them. Things tend to be repeated and we follow the usual family-patterns to a certain degree. This statement shouldn't cause us to distance from the family roots – we grow from them anyways. Rather this awareness and knowledge of the family-patterns can help us to know ourselves too, predict own development and correct what can be corrected.

3. Dreams were normally regarded as God's revelation in the ancient world and Genesis in no exception to that. Why, then, is God sending those two dreams (sheaves bowing down to Joseph and the sun, moon and stars worshiping him) making the bad situation even worse? They only accelerate and instigate the hate towards Joseph leading ultimately to his selling as a slave. The way the dreams are reported doesn't suggest they are intended to be revealed by Joseph to his brothers. They are used by the narrators to increase the tension of the plot, but the message to Joseph is more important.

Joseph's career is announced in the prophetic dreams which tell about his superiority and his being lord. The later story shows us how Joseph used his high position and the granted privileges: taking care for those in need and showing generosity to his persecutors. Much time has passed since those dreams and Joseph had to go through many internal changes in order to reach that maturity

This is the correct way to understand election, position and responsibility. A long time might be necessary for gaining this understanding. As long as people use their position to stress the self-importance, they brought jealousy and hatred on themselves. When they start to understand it as an impulse to care for others, it is source of blessing for all parts involved.

4. Sometimes people have a hard time to confess their faults and to admit having acted wrongly. Still, that is not the way to resolve problems. Joseph's brothers try to hide their involvement in Joseph's case presenting Joseph's tunic to their father. Seemingly they cover their crime but they can never resolve their father's grief (he insists on mourning for him until his last day) and they can not cover the remorse of their conscience. Only later in Egypt they will remember: "we are being punished because of our brother. We saw the anguish of his heart when he pleaded with us, yet we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has now come upon us" (42,21).

If injustice and guilt remain unresolved, they return somehow to the one who has committed them, or even worse to somebody else and this might concern whole families over generations or completely innocent people. We bear our past with us. Honestly recognizing one's faults is not a sign of weakness but rather of strength and character. It is also a way to get rid of the guilt and heal the relationships. As long as people cover things pretending that nothing happened, it remains there. Only what is accepted can be corrected!

5. Why did Joseph's brothers act the way they did? The answer on this question is hard! We might only speculate how far it was the result of partiality in the family-education, their character or influence of the general society. It seems that the more distanced they are from their father the worse they act: first they hate Joseph three times and were wrought up against him. Shepherding the flock of their father some fifty miles from home, they move yet farther away from their father, completely out of range of his control, and it is there they commit the biggest crime. The results make it clear that Jacob also has made errors in the education of his sons, but we don't know how far he could have prevented all that happened. Had they been prepared for the challenges of their times?

Have today's parents made mistakes if their children live wrongly? Of course, every parent makes mistakes. But they belong to education. Our life is "life" and not a school-book example. The rapid changes in the present society make it even more challenging to make the children prepared for everything. The parents also do what is in their abilities and submit the rest to God. They pray for their children and grandchildren with free heart and strong trust in God.

As the children grow, they need a growing degree of autonomy and independence. And even such distance can be an impulse to change. Joseph's brothers changed in Egypt – far from their father and without his immediate influence. I believe that everything good invested in children by their parents remains in them and sooner or later will come out and help them to find the way back. Provided it is in them, not even distance will be an obstacle.

Prayer

Almighty God and Father! You love all people without taking part for anybody of them. You have given us the gift of freedom and you want everybody to find the way to you. Sharing this way to you as our common task and living in fellowship, we can help each other to advance towards you. Teach us impartiality towards others; give us large heart and generosity so that we are grateful for what other people have; grant us wisdom so that we use the means and talents you have given us for the benefit of the whole human family.