



Rev. Justin Panzer, District President

## President's Office

### April Devotion

**“So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it ... Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.”**

**(Genesis 37:23-24, 28)**

As we are in the Easter months of celebrating the joy of Jesus' resurrection and what that means for our lives, I am reminded of the story of Joseph. It is a rags-to-riches story, or perhaps more correctly a riches-to-rags-to-riches story. Joseph lived a luxurious life in the household of his father, Jacob. He was the apple of his father's eye and the envy of his jealous brothers. Their envy led them into great shame and vice when they determined first to murder their brother and then to deflect their guilt at this heinous plan. As you know, they “merely” sold their brother into slavery, rather than murdering him outright. In a certain way, this was worse than murder; for the slavery to which they condemned him was a kind of living death. Their fear of divine retribution for murder deflected their criminal courage. Instead of killing their brother Joseph, they sold him to the Ishmaelites, while making a little money in the transaction. They could also rationalize their craven act by saying, “At least we are not murderers!” Moral calculations that begin with the words, “At least” do not bode well for the calculators.

Great trouble came upon unsuspecting Joseph through his brothers, and Jacob grieved inconsolably for his beloved son. Both men suffered a living death; one bereaved of father, family, and freedom, and the other's joy stolen from him by conniving children in his declining years. Why did God permit this great wickedness to befall these patriarchs? Couldn't He have subverted the plans of those wicked brothers? Yes, of course. But He chose not to, for his own mysterious reasons. Certainly, by studying our Bible we can be delighted that Joseph is raised to great power and riches after his slavery and imprisonment, and that Jacob's joy is made complete by a reunion with his beloved son in Egypt. But none of that is known or experienced by either Joseph or Jacob when Joseph is sold into slavery. They wandered in the valley of the shadow of death, suffering a heavy burden and even a chastisement from God (Heb. 11:36; 12:6).

The Lord sent the cross that was exactly right for these great saints, taking what men meant for evil and turning it to good (Gen. 50:20). While that is quite clear to us in hindsight, it was not to those who suffered through this experience. Bearing the cross is always a challenge to our faith at the time we bear it. **We do not often see the purpose to our suffering, but we must believe that suffering has been sent to us for God's own hidden purposes (Rom. 8:28).** Only later might that become clear to us, as it did for Jacob and Joseph. While we may be deeply tempted to gripe and complain about our suffering and lot in life, we must confess that we are becoming better acquainted with the suffering Servant in our cross bearing. The pattern of living by suffering and death is inscribed into His hands with nails, that we might likewise have those prints cut into us through cross bearing. **Like Joseph, we too become beloved sons of God and bear the image of Christ as His baptized, beloved children.**

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