

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS  
Final Test and the Truth Revealed  
Gn 44,1-45,15

### Prayer

“And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation,<sup>19</sup> namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”  
/2Cor 5,18-20/

### Introduction

Many people don't like waiting because it seems like lost time – time which could be spent differently. Waiting in the Bible is significant and meaningful. The time of waiting is preparation and adaptation for what is to come. People undergo an internal transformation. Waiting is like a time for maturing.

Joseph waited for his father in Canaan and his brothers in Egypt for a long time. All of them underwent a process of change: brothers repented, father decided to descend to Egypt and Joseph showed generosity. The following episode of reconciliation is the stress related to Joseph's entire story.

### Text

Then Joseph gave his head steward these instructions: "Fill the men's bags with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his bag.<sup>2</sup> In the mouth of the youngest one's bag put also my silver goblet, together with the money for his rations." The steward carried out Joseph's instructions.<sup>3</sup> At daybreak the men and their donkeys were sent off.<sup>4</sup> They had not gone far out of the city when Joseph said to his head steward: "Go at once after the men! When you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil? Why did you steal the silver goblet from me?'<sup>5</sup> It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. What you have done is wrong."<sup>6</sup> When the steward overtook them and repeated these words to them,<sup>7</sup> they remonstrated with him: "How can my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!"<sup>8</sup> We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. Why, then, would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?<sup>9</sup> If any of your servants is found to have the goblet, he shall die, and as for the rest of us, we shall become my lord's slaves."<sup>10</sup> But he replied, "Even though it ought to be as you propose, only the one who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you shall be exonerated."<sup>11</sup> Then each of them eagerly lowered his bag to the ground and opened it;<sup>12</sup> and when a search was made, starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest, the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag.<sup>13</sup> At this, they tore their clothes. Then, when each man had reloaded his donkey, they returned to the city.<sup>14</sup> As Judah and his brothers reentered Joseph's house, he was still there; so they flung themselves on the ground before him.<sup>15</sup> "How could you do such a thing?" Joseph asked them. "You should have known that such a man as I could discover by divination what happened."<sup>16</sup> Judah replied: "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead or how try to prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. Here we are, then, the slaves of my lord-- the rest of us no less than the one in whose possession the goblet was found."<sup>17</sup> "Far be it from me to act thus!" said Joseph. "Only the one in whose possession the goblet was found shall become my slave; the rest of you may go back safe and sound to your father."

<sup>18</sup> Judah then stepped up to him and said: "I beg you, my lord, let your servant speak earnestly to my lord, and do not become angry with your servant, for you are the equal of Pharaoh."<sup>19</sup> My lord asked your servants, 'Have you a father, or another brother?'<sup>20</sup> So we said to my lord, 'We have an aged father, and a young brother, the child of his old age. This one's full brother is dead, and since he is the only one by that mother who is left, his father dotes on him.'<sup>21</sup> Then you told your servants, 'Bring him down to me that my eyes may look on him.'<sup>22</sup> We replied to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; his father would die if he were to leave him.'<sup>23</sup> But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes back with

you, you shall not come into my presence again.' <sup>24</sup> When we returned to your servant our father, we reported to him the words of my lord. <sup>25</sup> "Later, our father told us to come back and buy some food for the family. <sup>26</sup> So we reminded him, 'We cannot go down there; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go, for we may not see the man if our youngest brother is not with us.' <sup>27</sup> Then your servant our father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons. <sup>28</sup> One of them, however, disappeared, and I had to conclude that he must have been torn to pieces by wild beasts; I have not seen him since. <sup>29</sup> If you now take this one away from me too, and some disaster befalls him, you will send my white head down to the nether world in grief.' <sup>30</sup> "If then the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, whose very life is bound up with his, he will die as soon as he sees that the boy is missing; <sup>31</sup> and your servants will thus send the white head of our father down to the nether world in grief. <sup>32</sup> Besides, I, your servant, got the boy from his father by going surety for him, saying, 'If I fail to bring him back to you, father, you can hold it against me forever.' <sup>33</sup> Let me, your servant, therefore, remain in place of the boy as the slave of my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. <sup>34</sup> How could I go back to my father if the boy were not with me? I could not bear to see the anguish that would overcome my father."

<sup>NAB</sup> **Genesis 45:1** Joseph could no longer control himself in the presence of all his attendants, so he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" Thus no one else was about when he made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> But his sobs were so loud that the Egyptians heard him, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace. <sup>3</sup> "I am Joseph," he said to his brothers. "Is my father still in good health?" But his brothers could give him no answer, so dumbfounded were they at him. <sup>4</sup> "Come closer to me," he told his brothers. When they had done so, he said: "I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> But now do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now the famine has been in the land, and for five more years tillage will yield no harvest. <sup>7</sup> God, therefore, sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. <sup>8</sup> So it was not really you but God who had me come here; and he has made of me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> "Hurry back, then, to my father and tell him: 'Thus says your son Joseph: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come to me without delay. <sup>10</sup> You will settle in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me-- you and your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything that you own. <sup>11</sup> Since five years of famine still lie ahead, I will provide for you there, so that you and your family and all that are yours may not suffer want.' <sup>12</sup> Surely, you can see for yourselves, and Benjamin can see for himself, that it is I, Joseph, who am speaking to you. <sup>13</sup> Tell my father all about my high position in Egypt and what you have seen. But hurry and bring my father down here." <sup>14</sup> Thereupon he flung himself on the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept in his arms. <sup>15</sup> Joseph then kissed all his brothers, crying over each of them; and only then were his brothers able to talk with him.

### Structure and Setting

Gn 43-45 describes the second of three journeys of Joseph's brothers to Egypt. It is the high point of the story and includes the disclosure of Joseph to his brothers. It can be divided into 7 scenes that are arranged concentrically:

Scene 1: Jacob sends sons to Egypt (43:1–14)	A
Scene 2: Arrival in Egypt: Steward and brothers(43:15–25)	B
Scene 3: Lunch with Joseph (43:26–34)	C
Scene 4: Brothers arrested (44:1–13)	D
Scene 5: Joseph discloses himself to brothers (44:14–45:15)	C <sup>1</sup>
Scene 6: Departure from Egypt: Pharaoh and brothers (45:16–24)	B <sup>1</sup>
Scene 7: Sons report to Jacob on mission (45:25–28)	A <sup>1</sup>

Today we will focus on scenes 4 and 5 which are a dramatic highlight of the story. There are also many cross-references to Joseph's entire cycle.

## Lectio

**44,1-13** Then Joseph gave his head steward these instructions: "Fill the men's bags with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his bag.<sup>2</sup> In the mouth of the youngest one's bag put also my silver goblet, together with the money for his rations." The steward carried out Joseph's instructions.<sup>3</sup> At daybreak the men and their donkeys were sent off.<sup>4</sup> They had not gone far out of the city when Joseph said to his head steward: "Go at once after the men! When you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil? Why did you steal the silver goblet from me?'<sup>5</sup> It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. What you have done is wrong."<sup>6</sup> When the steward overtook them and repeated these words to them,<sup>7</sup> they remonstrated with him: "How can my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!"<sup>8</sup> We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. Why, then, would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?<sup>9</sup> If any of your servants is found to have the goblet, he shall die, and as for the rest of us, we shall become my lord's slaves."<sup>10</sup> But he replied, "Even though it ought to be as you propose, only the one who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you shall be exonerated."<sup>11</sup> Then each of them eagerly lowered his bag to the ground and opened it;<sup>12</sup> and when a search was made, starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest, the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag.<sup>13</sup> At this, they tore their clothes. Then, when each man had reloaded his donkey, they returned to the city.

This scene is put together with much skill stressing the dramatic gradation. First Joseph appears generous, giving more than required by justice (v. 1). Hiding his silver cup in the bag of the youngest brother (v. 2) must have a meaning which remains hidden from us for now. The choice of the youngest brother is not explained and will become clearer during the course of the narrative, especially related to the entire story of Joseph.

The brothers must have felt satisfaction with their mission: they brought grain and had Simon and Benjamin with them (Simon had to stay in Egypt after the first visit and Benjamin had to be brought in order to prove their credibility).

**4-5** Here we can observe the mastery of the narrator: the general accusation "Why did you repay good with evil?" is specifically (or implied): "Why did you steal the silver cup from me?" assuming they know what he is talking about while, of course, they do not.

This silver cup "he uses for divination". The praxis of divination was widespread in ancient times (especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia) and was repeatedly forbidden in the Law: "Let there not be found among you anyone who immolates his son or daughter in the fire, nor a fortune-teller, soothsayer, charmer, diviner" (Dt 18,10). Water and oil were poured into a cup and their mixture was supposed to be used to predict the future. Another means of divination was from the shape of an animal liver. It is questionable whether Joseph effectively practiced divination (even though, his being a high Egyptian official and his father-in-law being an Egyptian priest would make it plausible). In the context of the narration, however, this detail rather serves to show the gravity of their offence and the source of Joseph's knowledge.

**7-9** The brothers claim their innocence in the most outspoken terms pointing to their past behavior: they returned the money they owed after the first visit. Now, offering the deal of being enslaved and put to death, they hint on the fate they prepared for Joseph years ago. They offer to suffer as they made him suffer. "**He shall die**" (v. 9) Israel law-code didn't punish a transgression against property with the death penalty (unlike the Chamurabi Code and Assyrian legislation). According to the Egyptian customs, both sides were allowed to bargain about the sanction.

**10** Now Joseph's whole intention in pointing out Benjamin is disclosed. He wants to see whether his brothers will sacrifice him as they did with Joseph.

**11-12** This moment contains several points of gradation: the brothers were completely convinced of their innocence, since they submit to a search and freely open their bags. The search goes from the oldest to the youngest one who is found "guilty". The old family story comes to

mind, where Laban searched the tents of his son-in-law Jacob looking for the idols (house-gods). There, Jacob pronounced a death sentence over the guilty person, exposing danger to his beloved wife. Now the brothers have done the same. The text is left open, expecting a continuation.

Patristic commentary: the brothers couldn't blame Benjamin, since all of them had money in their bags. They were confused and didn't know what to do. Christ finds in us silver that he gave to us. We possess silver in our nature and grace as well. Nature is the work of the Creator, grace is the work of the Redeemer. Even if we are unable to see the gifts of Christ, He gives them and acts in mysterious ways. But very few people can preserve them and not lose them. He doesn't give everything. He gives grain to everybody and the cup only to one. /Ambrose/

**13** What will be the reaction of Joseph? We have to wait to learn it for a while, since the reaction of the brothers comes first. When Joseph disappeared, it was his father Jacob who tore his clothes (37,34). Now all the brothers do the same expressing their fraternal solidarity. Not only do they regret having sold Joseph to Egypt but they also return to Egypt with Benjamin as a sign of solidarity.

**14** Beginning with this verse, the story will climb to its climax. When the brothers prostrate/fall in front of Joseph, they fulfill the dreams of Joseph for the second time (37,7.9).

**15** Now Joseph lays on the psychological pressure claiming to be diviner. This remark demonstrates the brother's helplessness: they can only appeal for mercy and not justice.

**16** Judah replied: **"What can we say to my lord? How can we plead or how try to prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. Here we are, then, the slaves of my lord-- the rest of us no less than the one in whose possession the goblet was found."**

The reply of Judah: "God has uncovered your servants' guilt" is not only a statement but can be understood as a confession of their responsibility for the cup at the first instance. What is intended on the deeper level, however, is confessing their crime against Joseph, as they did prior during their first visit: ("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; that is why this anguish has now come upon us." <sup>22</sup> "Didn't I tell you," broke in Reuben, "not to do wrong to the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now comes the reckoning for his blood.") (42,21–22).

The mastery of this verse is built on the use of the verb "find": first the cup was found (discovered/unveiled) in Benjamin's bag, now the fault of the brothers is found/unveiled.

**17** Joseph wants to test them once again and puts them in a situation that mirrors an earlier moment as closely as possible. He invites them to go home, while their youngest brother will be slave in Egypt. 22 years earlier they returned home to their father, while one of their brothers became a slave in Egypt.

**18-34** Joseph's generosity (he offers to lower the set conditions) is replayed with the longest and most passionate speech in Genesis. Judah not only repeats known facts but offers new aspects and details which become significant. The speech can be divided into 3 parts:

18-29 review of the past

30-32 probable result if Benjamin doesn't return

33-34 Judah's offer of himself

**18-29** <sup>18</sup> Judah then stepped up to him and said: "I beg you, my lord, let your servant speak earnestly to my lord, and do not become angry with your servant, for you are the equal of Pharaoh. <sup>19</sup> My lord asked your servants, 'Have you a father, or another brother?' <sup>20</sup> So we said to my lord, 'We have an aged father, and a young brother, the child of his old age. This one's full brother is dead, and since he is the only one by that mother who is left, his father dotes on him.' <sup>21</sup> Then you told your servants, 'Bring him down to me that my eyes may look on him.' <sup>22</sup> We replied to my lord,

'The boy cannot leave his father; his father would die if he were to leave him.'<sup>23</sup> But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes back with you, you shall not come into my presence again.'<sup>24</sup> When we returned to your servant our father, we reported to him the words of my lord.<sup>25</sup> "Later, our father told us to come back and buy some food for the family."<sup>26</sup> So we reminded him, 'We cannot go down there; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go, for we may not see the man if our youngest brother is not with us.'<sup>27</sup> Then your servant our father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons.<sup>28</sup> One of them, however, disappeared, and I had to conclude that he must have been torn to pieces by wild beasts; I have not seen him since.'<sup>29</sup> If you now take this one away from me too, and some disaster befalls him, you will send my white head down to the nether world in grief.'

Rabbinic commentary: Judah is like a man who ties strings and ropes until he is able to draw water from a well. Judah, word for word was answering Joseph until he reached the depth of his heart.

Judah places Joseph equal to Pharaoh (v. 18) expressing thus that he has the power to pardon. After that he offers a summary account from their first visit to Egypt (v. 19-23) and tactically omits any reference to the charge of spying, the incident of their imprisonment or the detention of Simon.

Also the favoritism of Jacob towards Benjamin is expressed with much more details: "We have an aged father, and a young brother, the child of his old age. This one's full brother is dead, and since he is the only one by that mother who is left, his father dotes on him."<sup>21</sup> Then you told your servants, 'Bring him down to me that my eyes may look on him'" (v. 20-22). Favoritism for Joseph was the reason for their hate and now another case of favoritism (Benjamin) is a reason for asking mercy. Love of their father must overcome all other grudges.

**24-29** The second review of the past is the second paragraph which repeats the discussion at home about whether Benjamin should be allowed to descend with them to Egypt. Again, Judah adds a few more explanatory details going beyond what actually happened. For example, nowhere is it reported that Jacob says "As you know, my wife bore me two sons" (v. 27). (Putting these words to Jacob's mouth, Judah delegitimizes himself). Don't forget that Joseph now, for the first time, learns what happened at home when he was brought to Egypt: the grief of his father and his conclusion that Joseph had to be torn in peaces: "One of them, however, disappeared, and I had to conclude that he must have been torn to pieces by wild beasts; I have not seen him since" (v. 28).

**30-32**<sup>30</sup> "If then the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, whose very life is bound up with his, he will die as soon as he sees that the boy is missing;<sup>31</sup> and your servants will thus send the white head of our father down to the nether world in grief."<sup>32</sup> Besides, I, your servant, got the boy from his father by going surety for him, saying, 'If I fail to bring him back to you, father, you can hold it against me forever.'

Judah predicts their father's death in case Benjamin doesn't return. At the same time, adding his personal comments (32) he stresses more strongly the bond of affection between the father and Benjamin.

**33-34**<sup>33</sup> Let me, your servant, therefore, remain in place of the boy as the slave of my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.<sup>34</sup> How could I go back to my father if the boy were not with me? I could not bear to see the anguish that would overcome my father."

The climax in the confession is reached at the moment Judah offers himself for his brother to be a slave instead of him. This might be a true internal conversion, or a rhetorical statement responding to a situation with no solution. He shows affection towards the second child of Rachel! Finally, father's favoritism becomes the ground for self-sacrifice!

**1-7** Joseph could no longer control himself in the presence of all his attendants, so he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" Thus no one else was about when he made himself known to his brothers.<sup>2</sup> But his sobs were so loud that the Egyptians heard him, and so the news

reached Pharaoh's palace. <sup>3</sup> "I am Joseph," he said to his brothers. "Is my father still in good health?" But his brothers could give him no answer, so dumbfounded were they at him. <sup>4</sup> "Come closer to me," he told his brothers. When they had done so, he said: "I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> But now do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now the famine has been in the land, and for five more years tillage will yield no harvest. <sup>7</sup> God, therefore, sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance.

At this point the highlight of the text has been reached: Joseph cannot control his emotions and the brothers have sufficiently proven that they are changed – now they intend to treat Benjamin differently from how they treated his older brother Joseph.

**1-2** Joseph has wept twice before, when meeting his brothers (42,24; 43,30) but he cannot control his emotions any more. He tries to keep his privacy but the news still reaches the pharaoh's palace.

**3** After the long speech of Judah, it seemed clear that Jacob was still alive, but considering his heavy grief over the years, Joseph is primarily concerned about the father.

Rabbinic commentary: Hearing that, the entire of God's plan became clear to them. They understood everything that had happened during the last 22 years from a new point of view. Something similar will happen when God will appear and say: "I am the Lord". He will remove the veil from our eyes and we will understand everything that has happened.

**4** No wonder Joseph had to take the initiative and invite his brothers to come closer: they were terrified after his disclosure.

Patristic commentary: Joseph is like Christ talking to people: "come to me". He came and took our nature. Christ forgave the sin of the brothers, recognizing God's plan that had been fulfilled. Joseph's forgiveness is like Christ's forgiveness on the cross. /Ambrose/

**5-8** These verses sum up the main theme in Joseph's story: four times he makes recourse to God's saving purpose and involvement in the entire story: "It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you" (5); "God, therefore, sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance" (7); "was not really you but God who had me come here" (8a) "he has made of me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt" (8b). This is an important statement: after the long description of men's actions, God is mentioned now as the real subject of everything.

Rabbinic commentary: Joseph explains to the brothers that they became instruments in God's hands. All were supposed to descend to Egypt (prophecy to Abraham 15,13). Normally they would descend in chains, but now as a result of God's care, they preserve their dignity.

**7** Joseph has been sent to Egypt "to save lives". Saving lives is a key phrase of the flood story: "Of all other living creatures you shall bring two into the ark, one male and one female, that you may keep them alive with you."<sup>20</sup> Of all kinds of birds, of all kinds of beasts, and of all kinds of creeping things, two of each shall come into the ark with you, to stay alive" (6,19-20). Joseph, like Noah is an agent in the divine plan of salvation.

**8** **So it was not really you but God who had me come here; and he has made of me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.**

Joseph credits himself with 3 titles expressing his position in Egypt: "father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt". In other passages in the Bible, priests and prophets are spoken of as "father to": "When Elisha was suffering from the sickness of which he was to die, King Joash of Israel went down to visit him. "My father, my father!" (2Ki 13,14); like real fathers they instruct their "sons".

**9-13** Joseph is anxious to see his father. That's why this section begins and ends with the urge to hurry: "Hurry back, then, to my father" (9); "hurry and bring my father down here" (13).

**10-11** We don't know the exact location of the locality "Goshen", but most likely it could have laid in the Nile-delta. Joseph promises complete care for the family making thus sure his father will not be afraid to descend to Egypt.

The Nile-delta has 2 main branches today, but it used to have 7 in the antiquity and one of the was branches reached up to the peninsula of Sinai. The eastern side of the delta became a natural gathering space for Semites coming from the East. Documents and excavations show that the Semites used to come for various reasons and they had various successes. Some had no land-property and used to be hired as shepherds, farmers, or builders. Another group were merchants who could even attain high positions on the Pharaoh's court. Some Semites stayed permanently while others were traders, bringing their local products.

Rabbinic commentary: Joseph chose this area purposely in order to allow his family to be removed from idolatry and the immoral life of the Egyptians and also to allow them to be shepherds, which was an atrocity for the Egyptians.

**12-13** Surely, you can see for yourselves, and Benjamin can see for himself, that it is I, Joseph, who am speaking to you. <sup>13</sup> Tell my father all about my high position in Egypt and what you have seen. But hurry and bring my father down here."

The brothers are personal witnesses now, since they see for themselves.

**14-15** <sup>14</sup> Thereupon he flung himself on the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept in his arms. <sup>15</sup> Joseph then kissed all his brothers, crying over each of them; and only then were his brothers able to talk with him.

The final embrace hints on reconciliation between brothers. The only ones to weep are Joseph and Benjamin. The other brothers at least talk with Joseph, thus ending the 22 years without communication.

## **Meditatio**

**1.** One of the less visible characters in this episode is Jacob (or Israel). And still he gives essence to the whole narrative. He is the patriarchal head of the family, making decisions. At the beginning he sends his sons to Egypt to buy food, he allows his son Benjamin to leave with the brothers the second time and at the end he finally agrees to go down himself: "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die" (45,28). His character doesn't change much over the years: he dwells in the same country and is hesitant to leave; he still regards Rachel as his beloved wife, still mourns the death of Joseph and is still mistrustful of his sons. Yet eventually he concedes the permission for Benjamin to accompany them to Egypt.

Jacob is an example of stability and fidelity to rules and patterns. Following them is not a sign of weakness, nor a loss of freedom, even if for young people it might seem different. It is much more an expression of wisdom and insight. Things that work shouldn't be abandoned but rather used for our own benefit. Experiences gained over generations are for us a precious source of wisdom. Using this source helps us to move forward with more security.

**2.** This story shows one interesting element: how the past makes itself present and comes to life again. Joseph's brothers or at least their spokesman Judah don't make too many explicit references to their past. Still, it weighs heavily on their conscience and they interpret every setback in Egypt as divine punishment for their treatment of Joseph. The most representative statement comes on their first journey: "we are being punished because of our brother... that is why this anguish has now come upon us" (42,21).

Every attempt to overlook the past and to silence his own guilt turns against him and catches the author himself. Totally denying one's own past would mean denying a part of one's own life and that is not possible. We own our past, even the not-very-glorious moments belong to our lives. It is a part of personal history and cannot be canceled. Instead of closing one's eyes, one should open them and look more carefully in order to better understand the present times and in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

3. The person of Judah is the most beautiful example of repentance in Scripture. He makes the following confession: "God has uncovered your servants' guilt" (44,16). The guilt about stealing the cup is not intended but, rather, their guilt about Joseph. God has uncovered their guilt not publically, but rather to them: through what happened, they recognized they were guilty. They also show concrete signs of repentance: they care for Benjamin who is now the darling of Jacob. While Judah was happy to sell Joseph into slavery, make money (37,27) and disregard his father's distress, he is now willing to be a slave instead of Benjamin, thus sparing his father's grief.

Repentance might be a long process that takes even several years. God granted that much time to Judah (standing for all the other brothers), therefore, we have to be patient with each other and also patient with ourselves. Also, God has uncovered their guilt not by pointing it out publically but through a sequence of events, so that they recognized and admitted their own guilt. Pointing out another persons' guilt must be done with extreme delicacy: the intention is not to dishonor somebody but rather to allow him to recognize his own guilt. It is difficult in privacy and how much more difficult it must be publically!

4. Certain questions are hard to answer. One of these is the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God is above everything and leads the events and people according to His plans. Everything is foretold and known by God in advance. He is the ultimate author of events as it is claimed by the biblical authors and prophets: "If evil befalls a city, has not the LORD caused it?" (Am 3,6). At the same time, human responsibility is strongly affirmed. That God used the brothers' hate to send Joseph to Egypt and save the family doesn't excuse the hate, guilt and sin. The cost of these is immense: Jacob's grief, Joseph's imprisonment and the brothers' guilty conscience. Twenty-two years were needed to work their way through that. Though the Bible states that God uses the sins and hate of Joseph's brothers for good, it never approves, nor excuses their sins or pretends they can be forgotten. Rather they needed to be acknowledged and repented.

We live in a complex world: we have a full responsibility for our decisions and choices. Justifying every kind of our bad choices making recourse to God and his leadership of the world doesn't give justice to the idea of His knowledge, supreme power and predestination. What we profess is that He is in charge of the world and leads it according to his design. We struggle making everyday decisions according to our best knowledge and understanding. He, in His supreme power is able to fit everything into His plan. But the cost to be paid by other people or by ourselves for our bad decisions goes on our account. The solution to this problem is not justifying ourselves and hiding behind God's plan. Only a sincere repentance and involvement can advance His design with our world and life.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, you give all people the time they need to reflect about their lives, to recognize what was wrong and to get reconciled to each other and to you. Grant us understanding of this grace in each moment of our life, courage to go this way and perseverance in this process of growth.