

A Man of the Cross

A Sermon on Genesis 39:6b-12, 16-23

Year C - Pentecost 5

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JJ¹

She wasn't just the girl next door. She was the wife of one of the most prominent men in the nation.

Joseph already had everything he needed, but he could have had even more. The opportunity was literally right there in front of him! He could have had everything that belonged to his master, even his wife! This is what Potiphar's wife offered to Joseph.

Joseph was a man who was abandoned by his family when his brothers sold him into slavery about 10 years earlier. Despite this, Joseph knew and believed that he wasn't abandoned by God. "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Her temptation persisted—day after day. Joseph denied her and himself—day after day. He even refused to be around her! Then she set a trap! She told all the other servants to leave the house, maybe to take the day off. Joseph comes to run the household like any other day, but perhaps notices that it was eerily quiet and no one else was around. And like a lioness silently stalking its prey, she pounces! She captures her victim by his

cloak and wraps him in her arms of lust, something she had done with her heart long before. She has provided the perfect opportunity to sin (from a human point of view). No one would know, not even the other servants under their control. She would have to protect their secret to protect her dignity and her husband's honor in their high-class community.

She'll finally conquer Joseph's heart, or so she thinks. But the Holy Spirit's hold on Joseph's heart was stronger than her lust. Her claws could only hold his cloak as Joseph broke free and fled. But the devil isn't done with Joseph yet. He couldn't corrupt Joseph's heart with pleasure, so now he would try and crush Joseph's faith with chains.

Holding on to Joseph's cloak, Potiphar's wife now uses her passion, not to pursue Joseph but to get revenge. "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." Potiphar "burned with anger...took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined."

Leaving his cloak behind meant leaving everything else behind as well. Joseph did it to honor the LORD and his Word.

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

He did it for the sake of the purity of his own heart. He did it to call her to repentance. Joseph chose the cross, because Joseph was **A MAN OF THE CROSS.**

How fitting that we get to talk about Joseph today on Father's Day as you, men, are encouraged to be men of the cross, like Joseph. Now ladies, this of course doesn't exclude you, so you get to pay attention too. All this applies to you as well and isn't just an opportunity to jab your husbands in the ribs. Ladies, you are called by God just as much to be **A WOMAN OF THE CROSS** as the man beside you is called to be **A MAN OF THE CROSS.**

In the Gospel today, Jesus tells us to pick up our crosses and follow him (Lk. 9:23-24). Now in this instance, he isn't talking about a wooden cross, like he carried to Golgotha. When Jesus and the Apostles talk about us carrying our crosses, they're talking about the spiritual burdens we carry specifically because we are Christians. The most recognizable cross is the cross of persecution, whether it ranges from someone giving you a dirty look all the way to murder because of your faith in Christ. But the cross can show up in all sorts of other ways too.

As with Joseph, the devil and this sinful world tempt us to follow them in all their sinful desires. They lure us with the bait

of pleasure, riches and ease. They're just as passionate and zealous as Potiphar's wife was. And if we resist, they immediately respond with anger, mockery and worse. But the simplest form of the cross comes in the denial of self. And that's really what every cross boils down to—the denial of my own sinful wants, lusts and desires.

Have you always shed the cloak of temptation and carried your crosses? Sadly, each one of us has shed the cross out of fear, for false comfort or even for pleasure—and not even for an opportunity as "safe" as the one that confronted Joseph! Think of how you have abandoned your crosses at work or school because you were afraid to let God's opinion on sin be known when fools brag about sexual conquests or the ignorant speak of so-called sexual freedoms. Think of how you have abandoned your crosses to make a seemingly easier life

for yourself by putting work, money and the collection of stuff higher than God and your worship of him in your life. Think of how you have abandoned your crosses to feed your sinful pleasures, giving in to the wives of Potiphar of the world, whether on the internet or even in the flesh.

To abandon the cross is to abandon Christ. To abandon Christ is to abandon



the gift of faith and all its blessings. To abandon the cross is to abandon life.

How can we do such wicked things and sin against our God?!!!

The sinful world asks, "What makes you happy?" And when it hears your answer, says, "Do it!" This is the wrong question to ask. The correct question is, "What makes God happy? What pleases God?" What pleases God is that we carry our crosses, like Joseph, **A MAN OF THE CROSS**. But this is only possible because of Christ who never abandoned his crosses his whole life through, and especially *the* cross of Calvary.

Friends, remember that Christ's glory is found in his cross. Peter didn't understand this, just as you and I have such a problem understanding that glory comes after the cross. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him for talking about suffering and death on a cross, but it was that very cross where he crucified every time you have shed the crosses he gives you! Christ's victory over sin is found in every temptation perfectly endured to the bitter end. Christ's victory over the devil and this sinful world is found in his seeming defeat on Calvary. But it was there that Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished!"

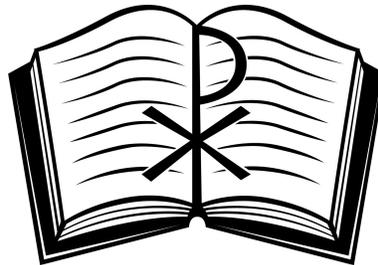
Christ's victory through the cross made him the perfect **MAN OF THE CROSS**. And his victory not only grants us the

forgiveness of all the times we have abandoned our crosses to live for ourselves, but it even works every cross for our good, and often times for the good of many others. Just look at Joseph. We know how the story comes out. We get to look back and see God's guiding and loving hand through those stormy years of life because we see God working his plan to save thousands upon thousands of people, and more importantly, to save the family of The Promise.

The same rings true for you and me today, especially when our lives turn down unexpected and unpleasant paths. To resist temptation and flee from it, to continue to trust God amidst tragedies and losses in our lives, we must keep our eyes fixed on Christ and his promise that he has a perfect plan for us and is committed to

carrying it out. It's a plan he made and set in motion already in eternity. A plan he began carrying out in time with the first of promise of the Savior to Adam and Eve. The promises he continued to fulfill as he himself came into this sinful world to be the perfect **MAN OF THE CROSS**. The promises he keeps to always provide a way out of temptation, just as he gave to Joseph, even if it means suffering for a time.

Sometimes, the cross isn't just for your good, but also the good of others. Just think of the opportunities God gives you to live your faith and tell others about



him in tragedies, especially medical tragedies or sudden deaths. You have people you don't really know at work or school or in the neighborhood coming to you to offer condolences. You often find yourself in hospital rooms surrounded by people who will be watching how you react and waiting to hear what you have to say, even if they're not actively watching or listening to you. A wise pastor once said, when talking about the crosses we carry, that

perhaps those crosses are the price God is willing to pay to save someone else.

If my cross, if my pain means that God is going to use that to bring even one more person into his eternal family, well then, it's worth it!

Joseph carried his cross and lived to experience God's protection and blessing. Friends, carry your crosses, knowing that the LORD is with you just as he was with Joseph. Rejoice in the opportunities he gives you to carry the cross in front of this sinful world and give witness of his love. Sometimes it will add fuel to the fire of someone's wrath. Sometimes it will lead someone to despair of themselves and turn to the LORD who promises to be with them. In the end, we will see all our crosses as the blessings they truly are. Amen.

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.