



6. March 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT
Day 17: “The Depths of the Heart”

Today's readings confront us very concretely with the depths of the human heart and with the evil deeds that spring from it. First, we hear part of the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:6–22). Joseph's brothers realized that their father, Jacob, loved Joseph the most. Joseph was the one who told their father about the evil things they did while grazing the sheep and goats. Therefore, *“they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him”* (v. 4).

Their hearts grew darker and darker, and when Joseph innocently shared with them two prophetic dreams indicating that one day they would bow down before him, this increased their jealousy even more. When a favorable opportunity presented itself, they decided to kill him. Only one of the brothers, Reuben, wanted to save him from their hands and bring him back to their father. He persuaded them to throw him into a cistern in the wilderness and not to shed his blood (cf. v. 22).

Yesterday we reflected on the words of the prophet Jeremiah that our hearts are deceitful, and we also drew attention to a corresponding word of the Lord that evil comes from our hearts (Mt. 15:19). Today, we are presented with the example of Jacob's family. Joseph's brothers did not hesitate to plan to kill him. Fratricide dates back to Cain and Abel and continues throughout human history. People not only hate their enemies; their hearts can be so corrupt that they commit evil acts against their own brothers—and by that, we mean all people who are particularly close to us.

These reflections are also relevant when we see how many people have to die who are involved in acts of war without ever having wanted or supported them. Wars, with their immeasurable suffering, have not been overcome, even in so-called civilized societies, and due to technological developments, they can “set the whole earth on fire.”

Therefore, evil must be overcome at its root. This means the human heart must be transformed; otherwise, it will never stop. We see this with Joseph's brothers. They were already inclined toward evil and could not bear that their father loved the youngest more. Jealousy escalated into hatred and darkened their hearts. They did not realize this, however, and simply followed their evil inclinations, even planning to murder their brother. How often this happens! Jealousy, envy, greed, lust for power, and all the other evil inclinations that the Lord points out to us—the untamed and unconquered vices—

are often the driving forces behind evil deeds.

Even though we see how the story of Joseph and his brothers takes such a wonderful turn through God's grace and providence, leading to the salvation of the family from impending famine and to reconciliation, we are still dismayed that we humans are capable of evil—and unfortunately often commit it.

If we look at today's Gospel, we once again see the work of wickedness, revealed through the unbridled evil inclinations of the heart (cf. Mt. 21:33–46).

We understand what our Lord is talking about in this text. God entrusts His vineyard to us so that it may bear good fruit, which we can take with us into eternal life. However, those to whom the vineyard was entrusted began to regard themselves as owners rather than tenants, and they mistreated and killed the messengers sent by the owner to receive the fruit. They did the same to other messengers and finally to the owner's heir, the Son.

The text concludes: *“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. But when they tried to arrest him, they feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet.”* (Mt. 21:45–46)

We know how the story continued, and we lament how the Son of God was treated.

This topic is so central that I would like to take a brief detour in our Lenten reflections to discuss the conversion of the heart.

While we cannot convert another person's heart, with God's help, we can contribute to the conversion of our own hearts. This allows God to fill us more deeply and bring His love to others. Thus, the conversion of our hearts can be a true service of peace in a world plagued by war and injustice.

Thus, today's “flower” is the request to God for a new heart.

Meditation on the Gospel of the Day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2021/03/05/>