

*John Docherty, January 24, 2017*  
*(given at the Soeurs de Jérusalem in French)*

### **Brotherhood recreated**

The theme for this evening, in connection with the reading of the passage of Genesis and in connection with the fact that we are in the middle of the week of prayer for Christian unity, is "Brotherhood recreated".

These two words - brotherhood, recreated - are revealing, in my opinion.

First, we talk about fraternity / brotherhood, or, to be a little more inclusive in our language, we can perhaps speak of family.

These words - fraternity or family - speak of a blood relationship, an identity link, a bond of loyalty. It is these elements that make us intimately linked to each other.

I know that I am the brother of my sister because we are born of the same mother and the same father.

I know that I am the brother of my sister because we share the same blood, the same DNA.

I know that I am the brother of my sister because we lived in the same house, with the same memories of family activities, with the same moments of joy and the same fights.

But when one speaks of fights, one speaks sometimes of wounds, of wrongs, of rupture.

Every family goes through this. Our relationships as members of the same family are complicated. The sense of belonging that makes us proud of our brothers and sisters, and proud to be a member of the same family, also makes the fights within the family sometimes produce much deeper injuries than those produced by a falling out with a friend or neighbor.

In the verses we read from the book of Genesis, for example, we see the last phases of a very serious family break. We see in these verses the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers - following years of separation – we're witnesses of the "re-creation" of the bonds of brotherhood.

What we do not see in these verses are the roots of this rupture; The conflicts that produced the situation that finally ended with this scene of reconciliation.

If you know Joseph's story a little, you know that he was sold as a slave by his brothers, and that the merchants who bought him transported him to Egypt, the place of this eventual reconciliation.

You know, perhaps, that once arrived in Egypt, he becomes a great noble; the right hand of the pharaoh; responsible for the management of the country.

If you know Joseph's story *very* well, you also know that the roots of this jealousy and hatred go back to chapter 37 of Genesis.

At the beginning of this chapter we read that Joseph used to report to his father the bad things about his brothers ... not hard to believe that his brothers did not like it.

But worse still, he had dreams, and in his dreams he had visions of a future in which all his family would prostrate themselves before him ... not hard to believe that his brothers did not like *that* either.

"Who do you think you are, Joseph?"

It's a family like yours and mine. We have our jealousies, our feelings of rejection, our fears about the future.

But we also have our abilities to love and reconcile when the time is right.

In this story of Joseph we see the generosity of a man who has every reason to hate his brothers. And he not only has every reason to want to exercise vengeance on his brothers, he has all the necessary power as governor of the country.

But instead of focusing on his differences, and on his legitimate complaints against his brothers, he chose to recognize his family ties: his ties of blood, DNA, and loyalty. His common ties of identity. He chose to recreate the bonds of fraternity broken by the actions of his brothers.

And the great Christian family is like yours, and like mine, and like Joseph's. We have our jealousies, our feelings of rejection, our fears about the future.

Since the beginning of the Christian era, we have been trying to arrive at a common understanding of faithfulness and of God's will for the earth. But we have not always been able to agree on that.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles we read that the faithful in Jerusalem disputed over the reception of non-Jews; That the apostle Paul quarreled with Barnabas and that they parted; That Paul and Peter were quarreling over the reception of non-Jews.

Throughout the history of the church our differences of understanding of fidelity have produced separations:

Between the Church of the West and the Church of the East;

Between the Catholic Church and the Churches of the 16th century Reformation;

Between the Protestant churches of the states and the "free" Protestant Churches;

Between the various churches in Europe of the 16th century and the Mennonite Church of which I am a member.

Even within the Menonite family we have differences of opinion on how to best follow Jesus. So we have the Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, the Amish, churches of a traditional bent and those that are more liberal. Etc. Etc. Etc.

Today we have within the Christian Church a multitude of Christian faith communities that are distinguished by their differences ... but also distinguished by their ability to love and to reconcile at the appropriate time.

I think that if Joseph's story has a message for the Church today it is that if we are to seek Christian unity we must begin by adopting the ability to recognize not the wounds we have inflicted on each other, but rather to recognize the fact that we are born of the same Father;

That we all share the same blood of Christ, and that we derive our life from this blood, in spite of the fact that some are of type A (positive or negative), or B, or AB, or O;

That we are constructed of the same Christian DNA, in spite of the fact that I may have blue eyes, and that you may have brown eyes;

In short, that we have a family identity despite the fact that we are not clones.

I spoke at the beginning of this meditation of "my sister". In fact, in my family we are three - I have two sisters.

My parents both had dark hair, brown eyes. My mother was right-handed, my father left-handed.

I was born - red hair, blue eyes, right - handed.

My first sister was born - dark hair, brown eyes, right-handed.

My second sister was born - red hair, one brown eye, one blue eye, left-handed.

Christian DNA, it seems to me, is every bit as diverse as the DNA of my family.