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The objective value of a blessing

Gen 27:1-5,15-29

When Isaac had grown old, and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he summoned his elder son Esau. 'Son!' he said, and Esau replied, 'Here I am.' He then said, 'Look, I am old and do not know when I may die. Now take your weapons, your quiver and bow; go out into the country and hunt me some game. Make me the kind of appetising dish I like and bring it to me to eat and I shall give you my special blessing before I die.' Rebekah was listening while Isaac was talking to his son Esau. So when Esau went into the country to hunt game for his father, Rebekah took her elder son Esau's best clothes, which she had at home, and dressed her younger son Jacob in them, covering his arms and the smooth part of his neck with the skins of the kids. She then handed the special dish and the bread she had made to her son Jacob. He went to his father and said, 'Father!' 'Yes?' he replied. 'Which of my sons are you?' Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your first-born; I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of the game I have brought and then give me your soul's blessing.' Isaac said to his son, 'Son, how did you succeed so quickly?' He replied, 'Because Yahweh your God made things go well for me.' Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come closer, son, so that I can feel you and be sure whether you really are my son Esau or not.' Jacob went closer to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice but the arms are the arms of Esau!' He did not recognise him since his arms were hairy like his brother Esau's, and so he blessed him. He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' And he replied, 'I am.' Isaac said, 'Serve it to me, so that I can eat my son's game and give you my special blessing.' He served it to him and he ate; he offered him wine, and he drank. His father Isaac said to him, 'Come closer, and kiss me, son.' He went closer and kissed his father, who sniffed the smell of his clothes. Then he blessed him, saying: Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field which Yahweh has blessed. May God give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine! Let peoples serve you and nations bow low before you! Be master of your brothers; let your mother's other sons bow low before you! Accursed be whoever curses you and blessed be whoever blesses you!

This Old Testament story may seem a little strange to us. A mother wants her youngest son to obtain from his dying father the blessing that was meant for the firstborn.

Rebekah deceives Isaac, whose eyes could no longer see well, and so Jacob receives the paternal blessing in Esau's place. The cunning is obvious! However, the blessing stands and cannot be retracted, and for Esau there remains only a second-rank blessing, so to speak.

By our moral standards, we might be shocked by Rebekah's actions and question whether this deception does not invalidate the blessing that Isaac gave to Jacob. But if we read the story further, we will see that this is not the case. Rather, when Isaac realizes the deception, he does not nullify his blessing; rather, he says to Esau, *"I blessed him (Jacob), and now blessed he will remain"* (Gen 27:33).

The blessing was a reality that could not be retracted. It was an objective act, even if it had been achieved captiously. In the continuation of the story, we also do not see that God rebukes Jacob behaving as a crime.

Sometimes one may wonder whether, for example, the ministry of a priest who leads an immoral life is still valid; whether the Eucharists he celebrates are still valid... But, in fact, if he pronounces the consecratory words as prescribed by the Church and takes the bread and wine for the sacred action, then the sacrifice will be valid, even if the priest lives immorally. The sacrament of priestly ordination is an objective reality, even if there have been priests who have infiltrated the Church in order to destroy it from within, as was the case in the times of communism.

To better understand Rebekah's actions - which, by the way, are not censured by God - there are two statements from Holy Scripture that must be taken into account. Firstly, it says that Jacob was a blameless man (cf. Gen 25:27) and that Rebekah loved him (v. 28). But, even more important is the narrative that precedes today's story:

"Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau returned from the countryside exhausted. Esau said to Jacob, 'Give me a mouthful of that red stuff there; I am exhausted' -- hence the name given to him, Edom. Jacob said, 'First, give me your birthright in exchange.' Esau said, 'Here I am, at death's door; what use is a birthright to me?' Then Jacob said, 'First give me your oath'; he gave him his oath and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave him some bread and lentil stew; he ate, drank, got up and went away. That was all Esau cared about his birthright" (Gen 25:29-34).

It is a great compliment that Holy Scripture defines Jacob as a "blameless man". Rebekah was aware of this, and that is why she must have regarded him as the most suitable man to succeed Isaac. Crucially, Esau had indeed spurned the birthright and sold it to Jacob. Rebekah may have known this, and so she now sought a way to pass on to the younger son the blessing that originally belonged to the elder.

We must assume that Esau's renunciation of the birthright must also have counted before God, for, in disdaining this privilege that He had granted him, he was also rejecting God Himself.

Seen in this context, one can understand Rebekah's actions from another perspective, and one can also understand why the Scriptures do not censure it.

What can we draw from today's reading?

On the one hand, we can learn to appreciate the value of a blessing, which is imparted in God-given authority.

For example, the blessing of a priest, of a spiritual father; as well as the blessing of parents.

On the other hand, we should never give up a greater value for a lesser one, as Esau did. Everything has to be examined in God's eyes: What is important in His eyes, and what is the most important?

With regard to Rebekah's actions, we can learn that, even if at first we find what a person does strange or deceptive, there may be other underlying motives that we may not understand at first. That is why we should not rush to judgement; rather we should carefully examine what are the motivations of a person who acts in a way that seems strange to us...