

# Maronite Monks of Adoration

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## A Holy Deception

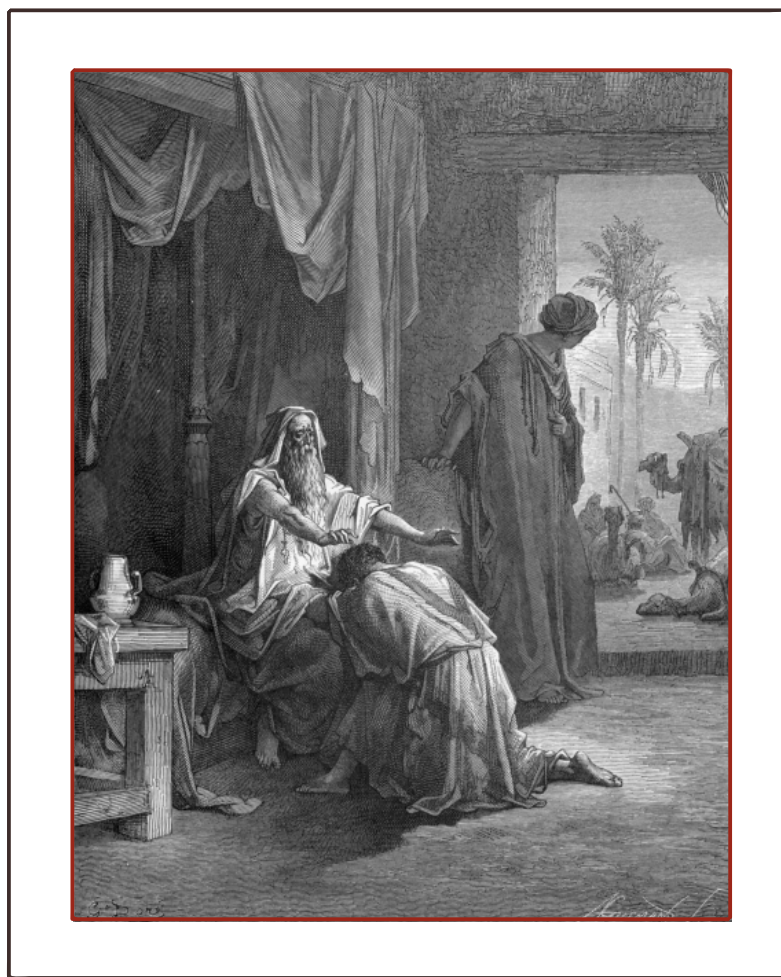
In the Acts of the Apostles, after Saul of Tarsus is blinded on the road to Damascus, we are told that “he saw a man named Ananias coming in and imposing hands upon him to receive his sight” (Acts 9:12). Ananias also had a vision: he saw our Lord telling him to go and lay hands upon Saul (Acts 9:10-12). Note this interesting fact: both men had visions ... but one of them was blind. It seems that we can suppose that there are more ways of seeing than with bodily eyes alone. Now, if that’s true, i.e., that we can see with ‘eyes’ other than bodily ones, then our perception of beauty expands as well. For, philosophers tell us that beauty is ‘what pleases when seen’. But since there are different ways of seeing, there must also be different kinds of beauty.

I once read a passage about the Eucharist which brought this other kind of beauty before the eyes of my mind. The book was written many centuries ago and was for a long time thought to be a work of St. Thomas Aquinas. However that may be, the depth of understanding and the beauty of expression are remarkable. During this year of the Eucharist, (in which Mystery our bodily eyes are deceived) we can ‘look’ together at a brief selection from this work entitled ‘On the venerable Sacrament of the Altar’ and grow in our wonder, admiration and love for the holy Eucharist.

The seventh chapter of this book on the Eucharist treats the question of why our Savior gave us His flesh and blood in a veiled form. In other words, why did He decide to give Himself in such a way that we can’t see Him? Among the several reasons given, the author says that it provides us a way to exercise faith— but not just any exercise of faith! Our Lord gives Himself to us

in such a way that the exercise of faith will remedy the infidelity of our first parents. The explanation this author gives will delight your mind.

First, he says, the remedy of infidelity requires that the body of Christ be veiled so as to correspond by way of an appropriate satisfaction. That is to say, just as the unbelief of our first parents toward God began by their listening to the devil persuading them to eat the food which had death concealed in it, and in this their senses were vainly



Gustave Dore  
Isaac Blessing Jacob

delighted, so it is fitting that the faith of those to be saved should begin from listening to the Savior persuading them to eat the food having true life hidden in it, and in which our senses are lovingly deceived ... except for the sense of hearing, so that faith would be from hearing only and not from seeing or the other senses, but that what is heard is the word of Christ.

So far so good. You remember in the garden of paradise, God gave Adam and Eve a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if they did eat from it, they would die. The devil persuaded Eve (who persuaded Adam) to eat ... and the Book of Genesis gives this detail: that while Eve was listening to the serpent she “saw that the tree was good to eat and fair to the eyes and delightful to behold” (Gen. 3:6). And we know how she was deceived! What appeared to be good for food and “fair to the eyes” concealed death.

Of course, we can readily admit: they should have believed God instead of the serpent; they should have trusted their ears instead of their eyes only. As a result, our remedy is to listen only to Christ. Yet He said to the unbelieving: “You have seen me and you believe not” (Jn. 6:36). Christ’s disciples, however, should be persuaded to believe Him when He says: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn. 6:51).

Now comes the beautiful explanation of the remedy, i.e., why our Lord gives us the Eucharist in a veiled form as a remedy for our first parents’ infidelity. (This explanation supposes familiarity with the blessing of Jacob found in Genesis chapter 27. Otherwise many of the details will be missed). Here, the author says that this is “beautifully prefigured” in Genesis 27, in the blessing of Jacob, where the senses of Isaac were deceived, thinking he felt Esau, while he actually felt the likeness of Esau in Jacob who was veiled. But we must understand from this passage of Genesis, as a figure of the Lord’s body in the Sacrament of the altar, there are four persons involved: first, Isaac and Rebecca, the masculine and the feminine, signifying the two natures in us, i.e., the body and the soul. The masculine, which is accustomed to be more manifest and intent on exterior things, signifies the exterior man, that is the body with its senses. The feminine, which resides in the home and rules the family, signifies the interior man, i.e., the soul which bears the care and concern for its salvation and that of others.

The next two persons are Jacob and Esau. Jacob was a good man and fair, dwelling in tents (literally ‘tabernacles’), whom Rebecca (the faithful soul) loves- and he signifies the true body of Christ. Esau, whom Isaac loves (the body & senses) because he ate of his

food, signifies the substance of bread with its accidents, i.e., its color, taste, etc.

Now, Isaac, the exterior man, is prepared to bestow a blessing as a priest. And at this point, Esau, the substance of bread, leaves. At this point, the likeness of Esau enters, i.e., the clothing with its odor, the hairy skins, the tasty food-all the accidents of bread or the likeness of bread, namely, the color, taste, odor and feel-all these enter in with Jacob, and our senses are deceived.

In Genesis, the nearly blind Isaac, like the body weakened after the fall of Adam and Eve, is deceived. He thinks he has Esau before his eyes, as we think we have mere bread before our eyes. But Isaac only had the vesture of Esau, as we have only the likeness of bread. And under those garments Jacob was hidden, as under the likeness of bread Christ is hidden. Isaac’s taste erred, since he thought he was eating the meal prepared by Esau, as we taste bread when in fact it is only like bread. Again, the sense of smell is deceived since Isaac supposed he sensed the odor of the field in Esau, who was not there. Rather, he sensed the odor of the garments with which Jacob was clothed, as we sense the odor of bread with which Christ clothes Himself.

Even though Isaac was wise, he erred in his judgment, thinking Esau was present when he only sensed his likeness; just so, our exterior man errs in judging the Bread of the altar ... except for the sense of hearing. For this reason, Isaac says: “the voice truly is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau”. And he knew him not, because his hairy hands had made him like his elder” (Gen. 27:22-23). Isaac says: “the hands I touch are the hands of Esau” and nothing is more false; “but the voice I hear saying ‘I am’ is the voice of Jacob” and nothing is more true. Likewise, we can say, “the Sacrament which I touch is the substance of bread.” and nothing is more false; “but the voice which I hear saying ‘this is My body’ is the voice of Christ” and nothing is more true.

Thus the reason why Christ gives us His body in a veiled form: that since the senses of the first man were vainly delighted with the food of perdition, our senses might be deceived with the food of blessing after the example of Isaac, in such a way, however, that Rebecca (the soul) is not deceived in her faith. For she believed Jacob (in the likeness of Esau) truly to be in the holy blessing, just as the body of Christ is truly present, veiled in the likeness of bread.

## Genesis 27: 1-29

Now Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, and he could not see: and he called Esau, his elder son, and said to him: My son? And he answered: Here I am.

And his father said to him, thou seest that I am old, and know not the day of my death. Take thy arms, thy quiver, and bow, and go abroad; and when thou hast taken something by hunting, Make me a savoury meat thereof, as thou knowest I like, and bring it that I may eat: and my soul may bless thee, before I die.

And when Rebecca had heard this, and he was gone into the field to fulfil his father's commandment, she said to her son Jacob: I heard thy father talking with Esau, thy brother, and saying to him: Bring me of thy hunting, and make me meats that I may eat, and bless thee in the sight of the Lord, before I die. Now therefore, my son, follow my counsel: and go thy way to the flock, bring me two kids of the best, that I may make of them meat for thy father, such as he gladly eateth. Which when thou hast brought in, and he hath eaten, he may bless thee before he die.

And he answered her: Thou knowest that Esau, my brother, is a hairy man, and I am smooth: if my father should feel me, and perceive it, I fear lest he will think I would have mocked him, and I shall bring upon me a curse instead of a blessing. And his mother said to him: Upon me be this curse, my son: only hear thou my voice, and go, fetch me the things which I have said.

He went, and brought, and gave them to his mother. She dressed meats, such as she knew his father liked. And she put on him very good garments of Esau, which she had at home with her: and the little skins of the kids she put about his hands, and covered the bare of his neck. And she gave him the savoury meat, and delivered him bread that she had baked.

Which when he had carried in, he said: My father? But he answered: I hear. Who art thou, my son? And Jacob said: I am Esau, thy firstborn: I have done as thou didst command me: arise, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.

And Isaac said to his son: How couldst thou find it so quickly, my son? He answered: It was the will of God, that what I sought came quickly in my way:

And Isaac said: Come hither, that I may feel thee, my son, and may prove whether thou be my son Esau, or no.

He came near to his father, and when he had felt him, Isaac said: The voice indeed is the voice of Jacob; but the hands, are the hands of Esau. And he knew him not, because his hairy hands made him like to the elder. Then blessing him, he said: art thou my son Esau? He answered: I am. Then he said: Bring me the meats of thy hunting, my son, that my soul may bless thee. And when they were brought, and he had eaten, he offered him wine also, which after he had drunk, he said to him: Come near me, and give me a kiss, my son.

He came near, and kissed him. And immediately as he smelled the fragrant smell of his garments, blessing him, he said: Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field, which the Lord hath blessed. God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, abundance of corn and wine. And let peoples serve thee, and tribes worship thee: be thou lord of thy brethren, and let thy mother's children bow down before thee. Cursed be he that curseth thee: and let him that blesseth thee be filled with blessings.

