

right in exchange for what is sure to perish, and to make them perish with it. Esau was tempted by the mess of pottage which he saw in Jacob's hands. Satan arrested the eyes of his lust, and he gazed on the pottage, as Eve gazed on the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve sold their birthright for the fruit of a tree—that was their bargain. Esau sold his for a mess of lentils—that was his. And men now-a-days often sell theirs, not indeed for anything so simple as fruit or herbs, but for some evil gain or other, which at the time they think worth purchasing at any price; perhaps for the enjoyment of some particular sin, or more commonly for the indulgence of general carelessness and spiritual sloth, because they do not like a strict life, and have no heart for God's service. And thus they are profane persons, for they despise the great gift of God.

And then, when all is done and over, and their souls sold to Satan, they never seem to understand that they have parted with their birthright. They think that they stand just where they did, before they followed the world, the flesh, and the devil; they take for granted that when they choose to become more decent, or more religious, they have all their privileges just as before. Like Samson, they propose to go out as at other times before, and shake themselves. And like Esau, instead of repenting for the loss of the birthright, they come, as a matter of course, for the blessing. Esau went out to hunt for venison gaily, and promptly brought it to his father. His spirits were high, his voice was cheerful. It did not strike him that God was angry with him for what had passed years ago. He thought he was as sure of the blessing as if he had not sold the birthright.

And then, alas! the truth flashed upon him; he uttered a great and bitter cry, when it was too late. It would have

been well, had he uttered it before he came for the blessing, not after it. He repented when it was too late—it had been well if he had repented in time. So I say of persons who have in any way sinned. It is good for them not to forget that they have sinned. It is good that they should lament and deplore their past sins. Depend upon it, they will wail over them in the next world, if they wail not here. Which is better, to utter a bitter cry now, or then?—then, when the blessing of eternal life is refused them by the just Judge at the last day, or now, in order that they may gain it? Let us be wise enough to have our agony in this world, not in the next. If we humble ourselves now, God will pardon us then. We cannot escape punishment, here or hereafter; we must take our choice, whether to suffer and mourn a little now, or much then.

Would you see how a penitent should come to God? turn to the parable of the Prodigal Son. He, too, had squandered away his birthright, as Esau did. He, too, came for the blessing, like Esau. Yes; but how differently he came! he came with deep confession and self-abasement. He said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants:" but Esau said, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me." The one came for a son's privileges, the other for a servant's drudgery. The one killed and dressed his venison with his own hand, and enjoyed it not; for the other, the fatted calf was prepared, and the ring for his hand, and shoes for his feet, and the best robe, and there was music and dancing.

With this being said, we must now consider with some depth the means or the ways to gain purity if it has been lost, then how to keep it. Before it is too late.

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, III

"God does not command what is impossible," says the Council of Trent, in words borrowed from St. Augustine, "but when He lays His command upon you He warns you to do all in your power, and to appeal to Him for what is beyond your power; and He will help you to do what of yourself you had not the power to do."

Continuing then with the motivation for purity – which is essential to desire it as a goal and "to do all in your power" – consider the following:

"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father." (Gen. 27: 34.) Cardinal Newman wrote a sermon about this passage, and in that sermon we find great wisdom and motivation to pursue purity:

It is the cry of one who has rejected God, and God in turn has rejected him. It is the cry of one who has trifled with God's mercies, and then sought to regain them when it was all too late. It is the cry of one who has not heeded the warning, "See that ye receive not the grace of God in vain," and who has "come short of the grace of God." (2 Cor. 6:1) It is the cry predicted by the wise man, "Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me." (Prov. 1:28) That subtlety and keenness of his brother Jacob, by which he got before him, and took the kingdom of heaven by violence, was God's act; it was God's providence punishing Esau for former sin. Esau had sinned; he had forfeited his birthright, and he could not get it back. That cry of his, what was it like? it was like the entreaty of the five foolish Virgins when the door was shut, "Lord, Lord, open to us; but He an-

swered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." (Matt. 25: 11- 12) It was like "the weeping and gnashing of teeth" of lost souls. Yes, surely, a great and bitter cry it well might be. Well may they weep and cry, as they will most largely, who have received God's grace and done despite to it.

The mournful history then which I have been reviewing, is a description of one who was first profane and then presumptuous. Esau was profane in selling his birthright, he was presumptuous in claiming the blessing. Afterwards, indeed, he did repent, but when it was too late. And I fear such as Esau was of old time, such are too many Christians now. They despise God's blessings when they are young, and strong, and healthy; then, when they get old, or weak, or sick, they do not think of repenting, but they think they may take and enjoy the privileges of the Gospel as a matter of course, as if the sins of former years went for nothing. And then, perhaps, death comes upon them; and then after death, when it is too late, they would fain repent. Then they utter a great, bitter, and piercing cry to God; and when they see happy souls ascending towards heaven in the fullness of Gospel blessings, they say to their offended God, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father."

Is it not, I say, quite a common case for men and for women to neglect religion in their best days? They have been baptized, they have been taught their duty, they have been taught to pray, they know their Creed, their conscience has been enlightened, they have opportunity to come to Church. This is their birthright, the privileges of their birth of water and of the Spirit; but they sell it, as Esau did. They are tempted by Satan with some bribe of this world, and they give up their birth-