



Feb 2023

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Gen 29:20



Monthly Reflection:

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The Bible verse we have chosen for this month's reflection comes from a love story in the Old Testament. The Bible lays bare the intricacies of human nature, which reveal on the one side the beauty that God fashioned in man and on the other side the corruption that sin caused—love, prejudice, deception, hospitality, manipulation, affliction, worship, sibling rivalry, etc. Jacob, who in collusion with his mother deceived Esau out of his birthright, is forced to flee to his uncle Laban's house to escape from his brother's anger. There he falls in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. On being asked for the wages he desires, a love-stricken Jacob replies that he will serve Laban for seven years to marry Rachel. Our reflection is on what the Bible says about those seven years of toil. "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her"

Laban was not an ideal person to work for. The Scripture portrays him as a mixed bag: hospitable, who at times listens to God but also worships idols, who loves his family blindly, and who do not mind cheating or deceiving to achieve his ends. Yet how did Jacob serve him? Not grudgingly! We see him explaining to Rachel and Leah, "You know that I have served your father with all my strength" (31:6). He worked for Laban for a total of twenty years! (31:41) How could he have done that? Jacob was not a super virtuous hero. He was a man with a lot of frailties, and he had landed in this mess only to escape from the fruits of his manipulation. But he had a focus, a goal. This made him work cheerfully, as he counted the long years as nothing compared to the love that awaited him—the love of Rachel.

Jacob's issues with his brother began in the womb (25:22-26). It reached a boiling point when Esau decided to kill his brother for stealing the blessing, and Jacob had to flee from his wrath. Isn't it ironic that a man who couldn't even love his own brother has the capacity to love so selflessly? Seven years to achieve his goal seemed like a few days to him, as he was serving the only person who could lead him to what his heart longed for. His love was not an emotional, immature love that withered away with time. He toils for love's sake, hour after hour, day after day. Even though Laban's manipulation contributed to his extended stay and labour for another thirteen years, Jacob does not whine or become bitter.

How about us!? Our lover is comelier than all the Rachels in the world combined. For the ultimate goal of being in union with Him, how many years are we willing to toil? Seven, seventy, or a whole lifetime? There will be Labans in our lives who will try to take advantage of us, and Rebekahs who will whisper to us the wrong ways of the world. There will be Isaacs who will love us less and Esaus who will want to destroy us. We might even be haunted by our inadequacies. Yet there is a God who towers over everything and who is always with us (31:5, 42). His transforming grace slowly but steadily changes us from being Jacob (one who usurps) to Israel (triumphant with God). He has infused in each one of us the grace of charity with which we can love God and man for God's sake. He is inviting us to embrace the challenges of our lives as Jacob did in order to be blessed by Him as well.

St. Augustine said, "He loves thee too little who loves anything together with thee which he loves not for thy sake". All our toils—in our families, ministries, workplace, parish, and personal growth—become meaningful and joyful when done for the love of God. The presence of Rachel in the vicinity would have stirred Jacob's heart and brought a fresh fervour to his work. May the awareness of our Beloved's presence in our souls gladden our hearts as we joyfully serve the Lord in our workplace, families, ministries, etc. Then our lives will become so meaningful that years will seem like a few days because, like Jacob, we will have learned to keep our hearts centred on the Love that captured our hearts.



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