

The Vineyard and the Lawsuit

Isaiah 1-5

WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah does not open his book with a prediction. He opens it with a **trial**. God summons the same witnesses Moses summoned in Deuteronomy, heaven and earth, and sues his own people for breach of covenant. The ox and the donkey know their owner; Israel does not. That single verse (1:3) is a chief reason nativity scenes have an ox and a donkey kneeling at the crib.

We watched God reject a long list of things he himself commanded: sacrifices, feasts, incense, even prayer. And we tested the strongest version of the claim that God is against ritual worship itself, then let the text answer it. The verdict rests on 1:15, “*your hands are full of blood*,” and 1:13, “*I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly*.” The target is the combination: worship divorced from life. The remedy is not to cancel the liturgy but to wash, do good, defend the defenseless, and then come. The Catechism reads the passage the same way: outward sacrifice must express the sacrifice of the heart (CCC 2100).

Then the strangest verdict in literature: the plaintiff, with an airtight case, offers settlement. “*Come now, let us reason together... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (1:18). Scarlet was a fast dye, the stain that holds. God promises the impossible, and he speaks first: even our repentance is a response to grace that goes ahead of us (CCC 2001). We respond through contrition and confession; God accomplishes the cleansing no effort of ours can. That is the logic of every Confession you will ever make, and it is why this study is printed in scarlet and pearl white.

Finally, the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7): a love song that turns into an indictment, sharpened by a Hebrew pun, God looked for *mishpat* (justice) and found *mispach* (bloodshed), for *tsedaqah* (righteousness) and heard *tse'aqah* (a cry). And we found Jesus, in Matthew 21, rebuilding that vineyard detail by detail: the hedge, the wine press, the tower. In his telling “*the kingdom of God will be taken away... and given to a nation producing the fruits of it*” (21:43). The Church reads herself there, and CCC 755 sets Isaiah 5 and Matthew 21 side by side: not as a replacement for Israel but as wild branches grafted into Israel's own olive tree (Romans 11:17-18), for “*the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable*” (Romans 11:29). The love song is now sung over us, and so is the demand for fruit.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome • *Commentary on Isaiah, Prologue*

St. Jerome says Isaiah should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet, because he sets out the mysteries of Christ and the Church with such clarity that he seems to be composing a history of what has already happened rather than foretelling what is to come. This is why the tradition calls Isaiah *the Fifth Gospel*.

St. Augustine • *Confessions, Book 9*

Preparing for baptism, St. Augustine asked St. Ambrose which book of Scripture he should read. Ambrose told him: Isaiah, because Isaiah is the clearest foreteller of the Gospel and of the calling of

the Gentiles. The greatest convert in the Church's history was pointed first to the book we have just opened.

St. John Chrysostom • *Commentary on Isaiah (In Isaiam)*

St. John Chrysostom marvels at Isaiah 1:18: the Judge of the whole earth, whose case is airtight, stops the proceedings and invites the guilty to reason with him, offering to make scarlet white. For Chrysostom this is the measure of God's love of mankind: he argues not to condemn but to win the sinner back.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Make an examination of conscience using Isaiah 1:16-17 as the mirror: cease evil, learn good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Then go to Confession, this week if you can, and hear 1:18 happen to you.
- Pray Isaiah 1:18 aloud each morning, once, slowly.
- Do one act of justice or mercy for someone who cannot repay you, and tell no one.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Isaiah 1:18 (RSV2CE)

MY GUESS • SEAL IT UNTIL SESSION 11

Late in this book, Isaiah will ask a question: *"Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"* Isaiah keeps returning to a mysterious figure through whom God saves. **Your guess: who, or what, is "the arm of the LORD"?**

Write it, fold this sheet, and do not change your answer. We will open these together in Session 11.

Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 6. It is thirteen verses. Read it twice, once for what happens, once for where it happens.

Catechism References From This Session

CCC 755 • CCC 1430-1431 • CCC 2100 • CCC 2001 • CCC 839-840