

Here Am I, Send Me

Isaiah 6

WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah's call happened *inside the liturgy*: throne, temple, incense smoke, altar, and a hymn. And we discovered the dark irony in the date. King Uzziah, whose death year anchors the vision, died a leper, struck at the altar of incense when he proudly grasped at an office God had not given him (2 Chronicles 26). A king presumed at the altar and was disfigured; a prophet confessed before it and was healed. The altar is not a place for the confident; it is a place for the confessed.

The seraphim's triple "*Holy*" is Hebrew's maximum superlative, and it has never stopped being sung: Revelation says the hymn *never ceases*, and at every Mass the Sanctus is where we step into it mid-verse (CCC 1352). We also solved last week's puzzle: Isaiah's favorite name for God, *the Holy One of Israel*, echoes the angels' song he heard at his call. And the second half of the title is the wonder: the thrice-holy One has attached his name to a people. He wants to be *ours*.

Then the anatomy of every vocation. Isaiah sees, and collapses: "*Woe is me!*", the same honest cry as Peter's "*depart from me*" (CCC 208). Purification comes to him from outside: a coal from the altar, carried by a minister, with a word of absolution. Only then the question, asked openly so it can be answered freely: "*Whom shall I send?*" Cleansing precedes commission; nobody sends themselves. And Isaiah volunteers before hearing the job: available before informed.

The job was hard: preach to a people who will not listen (6:9-10). We weighed the sovereignty question 6:9-10 raises, at its strongest, and found the fuller canon: Pharaoh hardened his own heart first, God "*desires all men to be saved*" (1 Timothy 2:4), and Jesus himself softens the grammar to "*because seeing they do not see*" (Matthew 13:13). The hardening, on the Church's long reading, is a judgment that confirms a refusal already made; the warning for us is simple: do not practice refusing. And John dares the greatest claim of all: "*Isaiah said this because he saw his glory*" (John 12:41). The King on the throne, high and lifted up, was Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Isaiah 6 (In illud, Vidi Dominum)*

St. John Chrysostom dwells on the seraphim covering their faces: sinless spirits of fire cannot bear to gaze directly on the divine glory. If they veil themselves, what reverence is owed by us, who approach the same holy God in the liturgy? Awe is not the opposite of intimacy with God; it is its doorway.

St. John Damascene • *On the Orthodox Faith, Book 4*

Let us receive the Body and Blood, says St. John Damascene, as a burning coal: for the coal Isaiah saw was not plain wood but wood united to fire, as the Bread of the Eucharist is not plain bread but bread united to divinity. What the seraph brought to one prophet's lips with tongs, the Church, in the Damascene's image, receives at the altar.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Commentary on Isaiah (Expositio super Isaiam, an early work)*

In this early commentary, written while he was still a young teacher, St. Thomas draws out the order of Isaiah 6: purification before mission. No one worthily announces the word of God whose own lips have not first been cleansed, and the cleansing is God's work, brought to the prophet by a minister sent from the altar. Grace equips whom God sends.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this Sunday, when the Sanctus begins, remember where you are standing: mid-verse in the seraphim's unending hymn. Sing it like Isaiah 6 is true, because it is.
- Bring one honest *woe is me* to prayer, or better, to Confession, and let the cleansing come from Christ's absolution rather than from self-improvement.
- Once this week, pray Isaiah's answer as your morning offering: *Here am I, send me*. No conditions attached. See what God does with an available person.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"

Isaiah 6:8 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 7:1-17 and 9:1-7. Bring your Christmas associations; we are going to test them against the text.

Catechism References From This Session

CCC 208 • CCC 1352 • CCC 1137-1139 • CCC 600 • CCC 712