

The LORD Is There

Session 5. Whitewash and Idols of the Heart

The idols did not die when the statues fell; they changed address.

What We Found

We watched Ezekiel pack refugee baggage and dig through his own wall while the neighbours shrugged, and we learned why: a rebellious house filters sermons, so God sends signs. The oracle about the prince who would come to Babylon and never see it was fulfilled with terrible precision in King Zedekiah.

In chapter 13 we met the prophets who spoke from their own spirit and sold peace when there was no peace, whitewashing a flimsy wall so no one would ask the questions that lead to repair. We heard the same diagnosis from Ezekiel's contemporary in Jerusalem, and we heard Jesus pick up the whitewash image centuries later for religion that is beautiful outside and dead within. The lesson we drew: comfort was never the crime, counterfeit was, and true hope only works on the far side of the truth.

Chapter 14 gave us the session's discovery: elders came to consult God looking perfectly devout, and God said they had taken their idols into their hearts. In chapter 8 the idols were in the temple; by chapter 14 the temple of the idol is the man. Paul and Jesus read this as permanent: greed is idolatry, and what defiles comes from the heart. Even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job could not cover another person at this stage; each heart must hear 14:6 for itself: repent, and turn.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258

Writing after the Decian persecution, St. Cyprian confronted clergy who rushed lapsed Christians back to communion without repentance. His teaching, in substance: this easy peace was no mercy at all. It soothed the wound at the surface while the infection spread beneath, and it was crueler than the persecution itself, because the persecution attacked bodies while a counterfeit peace destroys souls. A wound must be opened and treated deeply before it can honestly close.

On the Lapsed (*De Lapsis*). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone who has been handed cheap comfort in the middle of real damage, and for anyone tempted to hand it out.

St. Teresa of Avila, d. 1582

St. Teresa pictures the soul as a castle of many rooms with the King dwelling at the very centre. Her teaching, in substance: many souls never enter their own castle at all. They live in the outer courtyard among the reptiles and vermin that creep in from outside, unaware of the treasure at their own centre, and a soul in serious sin is like that castle plunged into darkness even though the King has not moved. The beginning of prayer is self-knowledge: actually walking inward and seeing what has been living in the rooms.

The Interior Castle, First Mansions. Summary of her teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Prayer as walking inward and finding out who has been given the inner rooms.

St. John of the Cross, d. 1591

St. John teaches, in a famous image, that it makes little difference whether a bird is held by a heavy chain or by a single slender thread: either way it cannot fly until the cord is broken. His teaching, in substance: a small attachment

willfully held binds the heart as effectively as a great one, because the question is never the size of the thing we cling to but the fact that the heart is not free. The idol does not need to be impressive; it only needs to be kept.

The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 1. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the person whose idol is small enough to seem harmless.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Run a one-question examen each night: 'What did I turn to first today for comfort, escape, or security?' Write one word per night. No self-punishment, just naming; by Friday you will have a map of the inner rooms.
2. Refuse one coat of whitewash. Catch yourself once this week about to smooth something over with a religious phrase, and say something true and present instead: 'I don't know why this is happening, but I'm not going anywhere.'
3. Pray Psalm 139 slowly once this week, and let its last two verses be your own words: ask God to search you, know your heart, and lead you.
4. Ezekiel 14:6 has a concrete address in the Catholic life: the sacrament of Reconciliation. If your nightly one-word list surprises you, take it there. That is what the sacrament is for.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 14:6 (excerpt)

"... Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations."

Ezekiel 14:6 (excerpt)

Ready Response

When someone who is suffering gets handed a quick religious comfort ('everything happens for a reason'), what could you offer instead?

'I don't know why this is happening. I'm not going anywhere.'

'This is hard. Can I pray with you rather than explain it?'

'God can handle your honesty. The psalms prove it.'

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 2113.** idolatry a constant temptation; divinizing power, pleasure, money
- **CCC 2114.** idolatry perverts our innate religious sense
- **CCC 2563.** the heart, our hidden centre, place of covenant
- **CCC 1431.** interior repentance, a radical reorientation of life

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 16 in one sitting before we meet. Fair warning: it is the rawest chapter in the book. Stay with it all the way to the end.