

Three Times Holy

I. When I speak of the holiness of God one can easily conclude that I am holier than I really am. I'm simply working in this area as you are.

II. Often times we become so familiar with Sacred Scripture that we only see what we wish to see or what we have seen before. Actually, because scripture is "active and alive" we need to look deeper and see what the Lord truly wants to reveal to us. In other words we need not just to look at the verses, but look through them to see the Lord.

III. This is a teaching on Isaiah 6, the prayer experience Isaiah had when he entered the temple of the Lord.

In the year King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

IV. The "Trisagion," three times holy, is the song of the seraphim and it has become the church's most august anthem. This repetition is a form of emphasis. It represents the superlative degree. This is the only time in Sacred Scripture that an attribute of God is mentioned three times in succession.

V. In Exodus 33 and 34, Moses wanted to see God. Humans are not permitted to see the face of the Lord. Moses was allowed to see the Lord's back and when he returned from the mount his face was shining. Remember, this was the reflection of the glory from the back of God, not the resplendent glory of his face.

VI. Yet the final goal of every Christian is to be allowed to see what was denied to Moses. This was the hope of every Jew as seen in the famous benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." (Numbers 6: 24-26) For us this hope becomes a promise. See what John, the apostle, wrote in his first letter, chapter 3, verse 2: "We are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We will not see his reflected glory; we will see him in his pure, divine essence.

VII. Like Moses in Exodus at the burning bush when he was told to take off his shoes in the Presence, the angels here in Isaiah 6 cover their feet with two of their wings. They are acknowledging their creatureliness in the exalted Presence of God. In the Presence one shows humility and reverence.

VIII. Now there were consequences to the overpowering reality of the Presence of God: the doors and the thresholds shook; they had the good sense to be moved by the appearance of God; they began to quake where they stood. But, they weren't the only things that were shaken. The thing that quaked the most in that building was the body of Isaiah!

IX. When he beheld the ultimate, reigning, ruling Monarch of all that is, he cried out, "Woe is me!" Let's put it this way: Isaiah became "undone, ruined;" he was disintegrated! This means he was coming apart at the seams. In a moment he was exposed; he was naked beneath the gaze of the absolute standard of holiness. He becomes aware of his complete unworthiness: "I am a man of unclean lips!" He saw that within himself sin was pervasive. For the first time in his life Isaiah understood who God really was and who he really was. Isaiah pronounced God's judgment upon himself; he puts the curse upon himself.

X. Unlike Isaiah, who experienced God and had his sin exposed all at once, we generally have these things happen a little at a time. Who could stand it? We just have a gradual recognition of our corruption. No wonder Isaiah became undone. But then he goes from groveling on the floor to "Here am I. Send me!" Rabbi Hershel says, "Awe, unlike fear, does not make us shrink from the awe-inspiring object, but on the contrary, draws us near to it."

XII. Isaiah was no "Humpty-Dumpty." No one in his kingdom could put him back together again. But God in an instant put Isaiah together and he still had his identity intact. He had his personality overhauled but not annihilated. He was still Isaiah ben Amoz when he left the temple.

XI. In this great passage of Sacred Scripture let's not miss a divine pattern which emerges: God appears; people quake; he forgives; he sends forth. Isaiah goes from brokenness to mission. He steps forth as a volunteer: "Look no further. I will go. Send me."

XII. Isaiah does not say, "Here I am!" designating location, but rather, "*Here am I!*" designating himself as a volunteer. He is in essence saying, "Take me; I am yours!" What we have is the start of a ministry. He is ready to serve the Lord. Isaiah moves from mystical vision to divine mission.

XIII. Like Isaiah we move from conversion to service. We either need a missionary or we are missionaries. I challenge all of us to enter the fields and gather in God's harvest. If you are in Koinoina, you need to call the UCO forth. If you are in UCO, you need to call forth the H.S. youth. If you are a part of the H.S. youth you need to call forth the junior high, and the junior high need to call upon the summer campers to step up! All of us must invite and welcome all people into our body. Let's all embody the call and mission of the prophet Isaiah.