

The Lamb's High Feast

Lesson 3

Review of Lesson 1: Worship on Earth is patterned after the Worship of Heaven
Review of Lesson 2: God Communicates with Mankind through Sacraments

In the Presence of the Holy The Opening Acts of the Liturgy

As the Divine Liturgy begins we fall to our knees, bow our heads in deep reverence, and on behalf of all who are present the priest says these words:

Almighty God unto who all hearts are open, all desired known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *The Book of Common Prayer, page 85.*

The act of kneeling together with the words of this prayer usher us into the heavenly worship. Specifically, we enter the presence of the only, all holy God. This lesson explores the deep meaning behind our opening liturgical actions – God's holiness and our proper response.



Isaiah was “ruined” by the holiness of God, until an Angel touches his lips with a coal from the Altar of heaven, and purifies him to go in God's name

Isaiah Sees the LORD

The sixth chapter of Isaiah records a magnificent encounter between the prophet and the holy God.

Isaiah 6:1-8

6 In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.

2 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. 3 And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

6 Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

7 And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.” 8 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.”

Here is what we learn from Isaiah

1. Isaiah's encounter is with the specific God whose name is YHWH. Note: many Bible translations denote the divine Name YHWH as LORD, using all capital letters.
2. Our God reigns in majesty. He is high, lifted up, seated upon a throne, and wearing a train which fills the temple throne-room.
3. The holiness of God is consuming and overwhelming. The angelic beings called seraphim who never leave the presence of God, never cease to sing, "Holy Holy, Holy!"
4. Holy, when attributed to God, means wholly, entirely other. To see a glimpse of God is to glimpse the indescribable, ineffable, unknowable because he is unlike anything else. He has no counterpart and no comparison. He is entirely other.
5. The best description of holy is to observe how people respond to the presence of the holy God.
 - Isaiah cries out, "Woe is me for I am ruined (undone, lost)." Isaiah 6:5.
 - Job cries, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5,6
 - St. Peter falls down and cries, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Luke 5:8
 - St. John says, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." Revelation 1:17
6. The holiness of God is universally experienced as a sense of exposure, as if the heart is torn open and every secret longing brought into view, every desire known to all. To see the Holy is to be fully seen, to be known in every secret detail, and to be judged accordingly. See Psalm 139.
7. When Isaiah is undone by the holiness of God, he must wait until God sends an Angel to purify him before he is able to recover.
 - Peter, James, and all who were with them waited for Jesus to strengthen them before they were able to continue. Luke 5:10
 - John must wait for Jesus to lay his hand upon him, before he is able to move or speak. Revelation 1:18ff



St. Peter falls before the holy Lord as his brother James and others cascade behind him.

The Collect for Purity

Kneeling, we pray

Almighty God unto who all hearts are open, all desired known, and from whom no secrets are hid;

This is the perfect description of what it is like to stand before the Holy God.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,
Just as the Apostles and prophets required divine assistance to withstand the holiness of God,
so we must have the assistance of the Holy Ghost if we are to continue in his presence.

that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name;

"Who will go for us?" says the Lord? We will love you and worship you. Send me!

