

Cero Miedo

In the Church of my youth, sin was all we talked about. Sin was constantly on the lips of the preacher, so much so that you'd be forgiven if you thought the Gospel was basically, "You are all diseased!" Sin was the theme of the day, the theme of *every* day, because the only way salvation worked was by convincing people they were absolutely terrible and in need of God's corrective measurements if they wanted a snowball's chance in hell at getting into heaven.

Sin. Let the force of that word hit you, sinking into your soul, making you feel a bit like you're on *spiritual edge*. It's a word we use to describe all the ways we *fail*. We sin by failing to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We sin by failing to love our neighbor as ourselves. We sin by failing to love ourselves with the dignity God has already given us. *Sin*.

Unlike the faith of my childhood, we don't talk about sin too much, and certainly not in the same way. But that doesn't mean it's not here. It's here to trip us up, to make us feel less-than, to make us feel a bit more primal, a bit more raw, so that we don't live up to our God-given potentials. Sin is the word we use to describe all the ways that we resist growing in grace, growing in virtue, growing in goodness, growing in mercy and holiness. And though I might not be a preacher constantly and forcefully reminding you of all the ways you fail, we nevertheless are confronted by the fact that our imperfect humanity pales in comparison to the luminous beauty of the God of our Salvation. So, even when we approach with fear and trepidation, when we approach the throne of God with respect and admiration, we are confronted by our failures and shortcomings. We are confronted by the apparent gulf between creature and Creator, between our raw humanity and God's perfect divinity, and thus, we once again internalize feelings of guilt, or shame, or worthlessness. More than that, we live in a culture *saturated* by failure. We

live in a culture that takes our imperfections and failures and magnifies them under a microscope of shame. So, whether you get it in here, or out there, you are constantly bombarded by the idea that you aren't perfect, and you don't have that much to offer God or the world.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Place yourself there, where Isaiah was, spiritually, in the immediate presence of God. Imagine your own raw humanity taken up, placed right next to the very throne of God, hearing the beating wings of the seraphs and feeling the immense heat from God's light cascading over your face. "*Woe is me!*" would not just be Isaiah's cry, but it would certainly be my own, and I bet yours too! It would be the cry of a great many of us who are convinced our sinfulness, our unworthiness, our brokenness has made us irredeemable and unusable in the eyes of God. *Woe is me* is the cry of a people who have come to believe themselves worthless in the presence of an all-holy God who stands above the earth and judgment.

But the story does not end with Isaiah's cry of unworthiness, of dereliction, leaving him without purpose and meaning. His sinfulness is rendered meaningless as his mouth is made clean and he is taken up into the holy service of the living God: *Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed, and*

your sin is blotted out. Attune yourselves closely to this Oracle of goodness. Your guilt has departed, and your sin is blotted out. Your sin is gone, it is covered over and is no longer visible. Your sin is rendered worthless and powerless. Your sin is cast aside. Your sin does not define you. What defines you is what I have called you: clean, beautiful, holy, righteous, a beloved child of the living God, beautiful to behold!

And if Isaiah can receive such assurance and sanctification from a coal from the hands of an Angel, how much more are we made clean and holy when our lips touch the very flesh and blood of Jesus Christ himself? How much more are we given when what we touch this morning is not merely an ember from the presence of God, but the very essence of God himself?

You may have come here this morning feeling down, dejected, or unworthy because, in your eyes, your brokenness renders you useless. You may have come here this morning feeling none of those things, but you feel lost or adrift, as if you have no purpose or meaning. You may have come here this morning excited for church and looking for an encounter with the living God. Set aside all those things. Right now, the living God calls out to you and invites you into holy service, not counting your sinfulness against you, but seeing you as a beautiful and holy child of God because of the salvation given to us through Jesus Christ.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
What will be your answer?