Cross-Veneration Tuesday

Father George Appleyard

"On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines.... The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces.... 'Behold our God, to Whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for Whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!' "

Isaiah 25:6,8,9

In the exquisite reading we have from Isaiah the prophet at the Sixth Hour—noontime prayer—on Cross-Veneration Tuesday, we hear in prophetic poetry the promised rewards of our greatfast endeavors.

If we keep in mind that the Cross of Christ stood on a little rise near Mount Zion upon which Jerusalem was built, the reading speaks with even richer imagery. *On this mountain* we will find the banquet of rich food and choice wine... *on this mountain* the black garb of grief will be taken away... *on this mountain* death will be destroyed.

But we ask ourselves: did those who stood by the Cross of Jesus see these wonderful promises fulfilled at the time of the Lord's execution? To be honest, we don't know. Certainly the rabble did not see this grisly affair as the triumph of life over death and joy over grief. But that is precisely the scandle of the cross: it is emblematic of all those events in life that do not seem to be what they are! For all through the Scriptures we have examples of those who acted in accordance with God's designs often seeming to fail or lose, but then—like a boomerang returning—they found victory. Think of Joseph sold into Egypt! Think of Moses set adrift on the Nile as an infant!

As the Holy Great Fast progresses, it is natural that we will become weary, that we will be tempted to cut back on our efforts. That is why we need this lesson from the Holy Prophet Isaiah today: a song of thanksgiving to remind us that the strain and the effort of these days will provide exultation and satisfaction. As our vices are whittled down, the ground will be cleared for the growth of virtue. The good that is in us will be nourished so that we will find deliverance from all that snags our souls and clutters our hearts. With the prophet we, too, shall cry: "Lord, You are my God. I extol You! I praise Your name! For You have carried out Your excellent design—long planned, trustworthy and true." Yes, the Precious Cross is the emblem of a plan, not some random happening, not some chance born of a twist of circumstances. And if we are to enter deeply into the mystery of the Cross, we must stick to our plan. We must rally all our energies to push on with the labor of building the Kingdom of God which "is within." Finally we, too, shall proclaim: "See, this is our God."

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Isaiah 25:1-9
Genesis 9:8-17
Proverbs 12:8-22