The Third Tuesday of the Great Fast

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"Those who say in arrogance and pride of heart, 'Bricks have fallen, but we will build with cut stone; sycamores are felled, but we will replace them with cedars.'.... For all this, His wrath is not turned back, and His hand is still outstretched!"

Isaiah 9:9,11

In today’s reading for noontime prayer—the Sixth Hour—we hear the Lord speak through the great prophet Isaiah. Perhaps it would be better to say “we hear the Lord rail,” or even “we hear the Lord rage.” Some are shocked at this burst of temper by One they think should always be placid and composed. In some instances this misconception is due to our stereotypes about God. Yet God has chosen to present Himself to us in these hostile terms to make several points.

First, wickedness is not something God will tolerate. God will tolerate people in their faults and weaknesses, even their sin, for the time allotted to them to change their ways and find salvation. But God is never content to see sin and let it pass. While the Lord waits for the prodigal to return home, He fumes at the destruction which sin works.

Secondly, the stupid self-satisfaction of the spiritually blind moves the Lord to take steps to correct such myopia. In the tract from the Holy Prophet Isaiah, we hear the people say: “our bricks have fallen, so we will rebuild with dressed stone; the sycamores are cut down, so we’ll plant cedars.” Another way of illustrating the same point would be: “our social programs have failed, so we will devise better ones; our hopes have proved fruitless, so we will plan grander schemes.” The Lord is calling us to assess the most fundamental of all issues: those very ideas which lie at the heart of all our actions. Nor will the Almighty humor them like some doting parent.

Thirdly, the social fabric of a rotten society is itself rotten and therefore abhorrent to the Lord. The final section of the paremia lesson speaks of the social activities of the community: the treatment of the widow and orphaned in crooked ways, the exploitation of the poor and the underdog. For too many people the “church” and the “society” are separate entities. The church is used to mark rites of passage and to provide certain cultural amenities, while the “real world” is relegated to the state and the government. It is precisely this flaw in basic values that leads to a corrupt society and the ills it begets: exploitation, class struggle, and graft.

In short, today’s paremia from Isaiah tells us that God does not tolerate this type of thing, and that only healing of the heart can lead to the reintegration of society. Where do we stand in all of this? It’s something on which we can reflect during the Great Fast!

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Isaiah 9:9 - 10:4
Genesis 7:1-5
Proverbs 8:23 - 9:11