

## Equinox

We're familiar with those scenes from Dracula where all the hero has to do is hold up a cross and Dracula wilts away. The rising sun has the same effect upon the Count, who can only operate when all is dark. Well, don't laugh but, as a Church, way back on 9/14 (the Feast of the Holy Cross) we already pulled out that cross again. And why? To help us deal with the encroaching darkness of fall and winter or rather all that it symbolizes. Spring is a distant memory. Summer with its ever-brighter days is almost over. The autumn equinox is upon us - that time of the year when night returns to claim an equal share of our time and will even begin to dominate our days, making them shorter, colder and even depressing.

Our tradition realizes that these longer nights and shorter days are the consequence of a natural process occasioned by the tilt of the earth and its rotation around the sun. But why let an opportunity for spiritual support go unused? And so our tradition asks us to imagine spring and summer as symbolic of those brighter aspects of our lives - of youth, faith, romance, energy, joy, success. But what about those other experiences that cast a shadow: the aging process, sickness, mortality, failure, depression? Sooner or later these too must be encountered like the shadows of autumn and winter: to assault our faith, diminish our hope and possibly even our capacity for love. So what better time than now with the onset of autumn for the Church to pull off its Count Dracula trick and raise up the cross to confront the approaching darkness?

The feast of the Triumph or Exaltation of the Holy Cross commemorated St. Helen's reputed discovery of the true cross in 320 A.D. and its later recovery from Persian invaders in 629 A.D. But on a symbolic level listen to the Gospel selection which used to be read at this autumn festival wherein we hear Jesus saying to us: "Now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself . . . The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

In other words, whenever you find yourself entering some season of darkness in your life (whether it coincide with the onset of autumn or winter or not) keep your eyes fixed upon the cross of Christ, which like a beacon must always signal the inevitability of a transfiguration, a resurrection, a rebirth of light, yes, a Christmas! - the victory of unquenchable hope and love over the Prince of Darkness, despondency and despair.

And as a little mantra to recite as autumn darkness now sets in (and I must ask were times ever darker than the news we read today) why not fall back upon that old favorite by John Henry Newman - which he composed during a dark period in his life: *Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, / Lead thou me on! / The night is dark, and I am far from home - / Lead thou me on! / Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see / The distant scene, - one step enough for me . . . // So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still / Will lead me on, / O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till / The night is gone; / And with the morn those angel faces smile / Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.*