

## THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - C

This Sunday is known as *Gaudete Sunday* after the opening words of the Latin introit 'Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete,' 'Always be joyful in the Lord; again I say, be joyful.' The gospel reading continues with Luke's account of John's ministry. He has advice for all sections of society and rather like us at this time his listeners too had a feeling of expectancy. The first reading from the prophet Zephaniah is a psalm of joy for the people of Judah with clear applications for us today. The second reading from Philippians takes up the words of the opening introit and gives a message of hope and peace which flow from the Incarnation.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Zephaniah, one of the twelve minor prophets who preached in Judah during the minority of King Josiah, ie 640-630, immediately before the ministry of Jeremiah. The book falls into four short sections: 1. The Day of Yahweh. 2. Prophecies against the nations. 3. Prophecies against Jerusalem. 4. The promises made to Israel. Zephaniah's message is a prophecy of the day of Yahweh, a catastrophe which will affect not only Judah but all the nations. Judah will be punished for religious and moral corruption springing from pride and rebelliousness. Zephaniah understands sin as an offence against the living God. The punishing of the nations should be a warning to bring God's people to obedience and humility, salvation is promised to only a humble and submissive remnant.

The reading, 3.14-18, comes from the promises made to Israel and is part of a concluding psalm and refers to the prophet's words telling them they have nothing more to fear. It is not certain that these are Zephaniah's words because they seem to refer to the end of the exile, fifty or more years after Zephaniah. The 'sentence' refers to the punishment of exile but God will crush their enemies and make it possible for a humble remnant to return to Jerusalem hence the reason for joy expressed in the reading. What God achieved for his chosen people all those years ago he made possible for us in a spiritual sense through the Incarnation of his Son who is truly in our midst and the reason for our joy.

The **Responsorial Psalm** is from the prophet Isaiah 12.2-6. It is a psalm inserted into Isaiah to bring the book of Immanuel to a close. Following the thoughts expressed in the first reading where the exiles are given their freedom to return home the psalm expresses faith and trust in God for he is my strength, my song, my salvation and the reason for joy. We too may have the same expressions of joy for all that is celebrated in the psalm can be applied to Jesus and all he has achieved for us.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippi, one of the principal cities of Macedonia, had been evangelised by Paul in 50 A.D. on his second missionary journey. Paul is now on his third missionary journey and is imprisoned in Ephesus, the capital of Roman Asia. He hopes to revisit the Church at Philippi and does so in the autumn of 57 and at Passover 58. The letter is almost heart rending showing Paul's love for the Church and in his desire to see them, he writes a friendly letter, giving some news to his converts there. He warns them to 'Beware of evil workmen!' who will destroy the unity of love and joy which he so much desires for them based on humility, the humility of Christ and to that end he writes the Philippians a poem on the humility of Christ Jesus, 2.6-11.

The reading, 4.4-7, takes up the words of the opening introit and emphasizes the theme of joy in this letter. This joy should bring in its wake tolerance for everyone with no need to worry about anything. If we have a need we should pray for that need with thanksgiving and the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and thoughts. For Paul the Lord is very near and he is near to us too and can see all our needs and concerns so we should have no need to worry. We must inspire with confidence in Christ Jesus.