

**Readings Zephaniah 3: 14-18; Phillipians 4: 4-7; Luke 3: 10-18**



**Fr Michael says:**

### **The Lord is near**

Something of the Christmas joy is making itself felt in today's liturgy! Zephaniah encourages the people of Jerusalem to share in it as they try to restore Jerusalem and the Temple, despite great difficulties. God loves us despite ourselves – indeed it is because we are as we are that He loves us fully! Paul believes the Second Coming is imminent; it should be something to pray for! John gives guidance on how we are to do all this.

What is the secret of happiness? I would like to use the main technique that Jesus used in His Ministry in Palestine – the parable. It concerns a boy who was sent, by his shepherd father, to a wise man to discover this secret. The man responded by giving him a spoon, filled with oil and told the boy to explore the palace in which he was standing, but paying attention not to spill any oil. Off he went and spent the next couple of hours wandering around, being very careful of the oil – he then returned to the wise man. “What have you seen?” he asked. Embarrassed, the boy had to reply: “Nothing! I have been concerned with the oil” “Well then,” he replied, “go back and observe the marvels in my world. You cannot trust someone unless you know his house.” The boy went off and explored the house and saw all the beautiful things which were in the different rooms. He went into the garden and was in admiration at how wonderful it was, too. So when he went back to the wise man he was able to talk at great length about all the things he had seen. When he had finished, the man asked him where the drops in the spoon were and he boy saw that it was empty! “There is one piece of advice I can give you for happiness, it lies in the ability to see all the marvels of the world and never forget the drops of oil in the spoon.”

The boy understood the message – like his dad he was going to be a shepherd and he would travel far to find pasture, but must never forget the sheep which are entrusted to him. In other words, we must always be faithful to our commitments and responsibilities, whilst at the same time enjoying life! It is easy to be happy when we do what we want – but to find happiness in what we HAVE to do, is another matter – this is God's blessing to us. There cannot be happiness without love; joy is not to be confused with pleasure, as that concerns the body - our spirit needs joy – the former soon fades, the latter never!

Ultimately, it is God alone who can fulfil our dreams and happiness flows from His presence with us once we realise this. It is why we are told to “shout for joy, God is in your midst.” This is the message which Paul reiterates. Joy is a mixture of sorrow and joy, our heart's warmth for others and looking for happiness in small ways, as big ones are rare. We live the present fully and enjoy it, our joy can enter it, even when we have pain. Joy comes from Jesus' presence in our hearts and lives.