

**First Reading:** Zephaniah 3:14-18

**Response:** “**Sing and shout for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel**” (Is. 12:6)

**Responsorial Psalm:** Isaiah 12:2-6

**Second Reading:** Philippians 4:4-7

**Gospel:** Luke 3:10-18.

Last week the Word of God spoke of the frightening end of times. Today, the Word-made-flesh, now Risen Lord, gives a sense of joy, expecting him in all his glory but already with us as a friend.

**“O Jesus, the source of all wisdom,  
The one who will show the way of peace.  
Be the light that burns so bright,  
Lighting up our lives.**

**Prepare, prepare,  
prepare for the One who is coming.  
Prepare, prepare.  
Let us welcome him into our hearts.”**

(Bernard Sexton)

*Bernard Sexton is an Irish composer who has been working in the area of sacred music for the past twenty five years. He wrote music for the Order of Funerals and in 2012, commissioned to write theme song (Though We Are Many) for the International Eucharistic Congress.*

In first reading, *Zephaniah's* prophecy begins with a tone of doom but ends with a note of joy and celebration. God does not want destruction but restoration. He “**has repealed your sentence**” (Zeph.3:15) and “**renew you with his love**” (Zeph.3:17).

The prophet *Zephaniah* joyfully proclaims God as Lord of the dance. Why the dance? “**He dances with shouts of joy for you**” (Zeph.3:18). How amazingly wonderful and expressive is our God!

In this spirit the prophet Isaiah gives us the response of the People of God: “**Sing and shout for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel**” (Is. 12:6).

This song of praise, a Hallelujah, dramatically proclaims God as our savior, *Jeshuah* (Jesus), ויהי לי ישועה (*vayehi li liJeshu'ah*) which freely translates as “**the Lord became my salvation**” (Is. 12:2).

St. Paul says “**the Lord is very near**” (Philipp.4:2), right in our hearts and in our homes, and sees the Church as the joyful People of God. “**Be happy in the Lord**” (Philipp.4:4).

This joy comes from a supernatural peace and confidence, knowing God is in control. It is that “**peace of God which is much greater than we can understand and will guard our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus**” (Philipp.4:7).

To be a Christian, the Baptist answers the question, “**What must we do?**” (Lk.3:10). He admonishes us to be truthful and fair, to change our ways. This applies to all people in all walks of life.

We should be excited and full of expectation “**announcing the Good News**” (Lk.3:18) that “**someone is coming**” (Lk.3:16), someone very special in our lives.

Read the Good News (**Gospel**) for today and why we should rejoice.

**Liturgy** for today is called *Gaudete* (Rejoice) Sunday. Today is meant to be a joyful celebration.

Paul's **Teaching** emphasizes the joy of being Church, body of Christ and Christ dwells in us.

How are we living the truth of our faith, expressing joy of the presence of God in us? (**Witness**)

**“O Jesus, God is with us.  
Emmanuel, the king of all kings;  
Born in a manger, humble of birth,  
Bringer of hope to the world.**

**Prepare, prepare,  
prepare for the One who is coming.  
Prepare, prepare.  
Let us welcome him into our hearts.”**

### **FOR THE CHILDREN**

John tells us to prepare for Christ. What is expected of children? Help them understand Gospel.

See the Eucharistic celebration as a joyous occasion, for God and for his people. (*Liturgy*)

Teach the meaning of the word ‘Gospel’ also called ‘Good News’ or ‘Glad Tidings.’ (*Doctrine*)

Discuss and decide how we should be living our faith as a happy People of God. (*Witness*)

### **FOR TEENAGERS** (*Shared Christian Praxis*)

**Name the Present Action:** *What does Christian joy mean to you?*

**Your Story and Vision:** *Is it in you? Have you seen it in others, the Church?*

**Church’s Story and Vision:** *How joyful and how sad is the story of the Church?*

**Yours and Church’s Vision:** *How do you live the truth and joy of your faith, acknowledge the presence of the Lord and the building of His Kingdom?*

### **RCIA**

Our Christian joy and peace lies in the fact that Christ is dwelling within us. We have the living experience of **Immanuel**, God-with-us. Advent reminds us of this truth of life and faith.

### **LIVING OUR FAITH TODAY AS A FAMILY** and **PHILOSOPHY** (*Ancient Greeks*)

**Parmenides** of Elea (515-450 B.C.).

He was anti-Heraclitus, saying there is no flux. Everything is *Being*, constant, immutable. *Change* is an *illusion*. He sees empirical knowledge as unreliable and believes in power of logic and reason in discovering permanent truth about the world. We see change yet reason says it is impossible. We cannot rely on senses. Something exists (*it is*) and cannot also not exist (*it is not*). State of nothing existing is impossible. Something cannot come from nothing, it must have always existed in some form. This permanent form cannot change, cannot change to something else. Therefore change is impossible. Everything real is eternal, unchanging, indivisible unity. Real is ‘*what is*’ or ‘*Being*’ (*eon*), the All, One, ungenerable, imperishable, indivisible, unchanging. All is one, unmoved mover. What can be thought and what exists are the same. All exists in the present moment. Past and future is talk, have no real existence. *Movement* is from place to place, implying empty space. But space is nothing, cannot be something at the same time. So movement is not real. Things cannot come and go out of existence, therefore no change.

*Plurality* means more than one thing. Each is not the other. Can’t say something is nothing, therefore no plurality or multiplicity of things, only *One*, timeless, changeless whole. Everything else, e.g. observable cosmos, and opinion are appearances of differences, an *illusion*.

What is true, undying and unchangeable about a *Family*? The permanent factor is God and love. It transcends what is seen and physical. It is *metaphysical*, more than what meets the eye. *Parmenides*, first *metaphysician*, *ontologist* who sought to understand the depth of being.

### **VIGNETTES OF MY LIFE**

Allan's favorite place for worship was in a parish called 'St. Paul of the Shipwreck.' It was in the 'Tenderloin' district of *San Francisco*. It was truly Catholic in the sense that it was an international and inter-racial community, Black and White, Western and Eastern, such as Latinos, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders. The parish priests were progressive and encouraged full participation of all the people. It was not so much rubrics that was most striking but the level of participation of the faithful. At holy communion, when the priest said: "The body of Christ," the people replied: "Yes I am." Here was a sense of life and true joy amongst the People of God. Allan was not the only stranger that felt at home.

Allan had a surprised visit from some old Indian friends from Durban, who came to see relatives living to America. They were not impressed with Allan's diet and wrote in detail how he should cook a good pot of curry and rice. Details were written down, such as how to brown the onions first and proceed to put in the rest of the ingredients. Upon completing the procedure, he returned a compliment of inviting some of his good hosts to his apartment; and they were completely taken in with what they considered as a most excellent exotic curry. He was promptly booked to visit them and cook the same in their residences as well. Allan who had never cooked before was being treated as a *cordon bleu* chef. Even to this day, Allan's family cannot believe that he was ever a cook. At *Berkeley*, Allan was not only an academic student but a culinary one as well.

One of Allan's strangest experiences in *Berkeley* was when an earthquake occurred in the *San Francisco Bay* area. It was after classes at the university and Allan strolled down holy hill to the shopping centre. When he arrived there, he was surprised to see a crowd of people standing outside and noticed damage to buildings. Was it a bomb? No, he was informed, it was an earthquake and people wondered why he had not felt it. He walked back up the hill and noticed that there was no damage to the houses along the way. Was he in part of the Bay area that was solid ground and not shaken? Back at the university campus there were huge gatherings of staff and students, assessing damage to the university, their apartments and sharing personal experiences. They were glad to see me approaching them, thinking that he might have come to harm as well. Even part of the Bay Bridge, connecting *San Francisco* to *Oakland* had collapsed, causing heavy traffic to crash and killing a number of people. At classes next morning, there had to be debriefing, every student having to share his/her experience of the earthquake. When it was Allan's turn, he honestly stated that he had not experienced it but only saw its after-effects. This was interpreted as Allan being in a state of denial and in need of therapy and so accordingly sent off to a psychologist. Allan wondered at the American confidence in *psychology* as a *panacea*, which seemingly in his case was a sort of *placebo* and compared it to his understanding of '*I Ching*' where one "put on the *shaman's* mask and retreat through which you see (*or have not seen*) and not let go of what you see"<sup>1</sup> (*italics* here are Allan's own words).

Allan appreciates his experiences in *Berkeley* even though he worked extra hard at the end, squeezing in his thesis, with little opportunity to relax or take a holiday. Fortunately, earlier on, he had his opportunities, having visited certain places in California, like *Los Angeles*, *San Diego*, *Yosemite Park*, Silicon Valley, vineyards, and the giant redwood trees (*sequoias*) which are the biggest and oldest living organisms in the world. What was also striking was the *San Fernando Valley*, a geological fault near *San Francisco*, stretching the length of California and beyond. Standing in this valley, one could see the meeting place of two great continental plates, Pacific and American. One observes the different terrenes on each side, such as different rocks, like granite on one side and basalt on the other and even some differences in vegetation. These plates are gradually moving against each other in opposite directions and this friction can cause great earthquakes. Geologists predict that there is going to be a giant quake soon in *San Francisco*.

As Allan was preparing to return home to South Africa, he sensed a rumble amongst the Canadian religious orders in *Berkeley*. There were leaks that there was going to be cases of *pedaphile* charges in some of their schools and houses back home. Little did Allan know how big was the bubble, and that it would burst, not only in Canada but in countries all over the world, especially Catholic ones.

<sup>1</sup> I CHING. Translated by **Stephen Karcher**. Vega, London, UK. Printed by Dai Nippon, China. 2002. p.384.

## WHAT AM I THINKING?

I am thinking of Angelina playing with her father. It was precious time for both of them and brought back memories of my own childhood. My teenage years also came to mind. I remembered long ago, the young lasses I danced with and the call to religious life, so far have I fled and live in solitude (*elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine*).<sup>1</sup> People wondered about my vocation. So did I, whether it should be marriage or the priesthood? Either way is a blessing. God is in all his sacraments. The joy and wonder of it all is to be with the Lord and sharing his presence with others.

<sup>1</sup> RADICE Betty. *Translation of 'THE LETTERS OF ABELARD AND HELOISE.'* Penguin, London. 1974. p.88. See Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*. P.L. 159 and Ps.LV:8.

## IMPORTANT WORD: **Καίρετε**, **Rejoice**

"**Καίρετε**" (*Chairete*) says St. Paul, which in Greek means 'rejoice, be glad, be happy.' It is clear that the cause of our rejoicing is not in ourselves but in the Lord. With this in mind, Paul writes happily from prison because he knows that the Lord is near. It is a spiritual happiness, a sense of being close to the Lord, like one in love being with the beloved. One thinks of the beloved disciple on the breast of Christ, feeling the warmth and heart-beat of the Sacred Heart. What a great sense of nearness it brings. We experience the presence of Christ in many ways, namely, in the scriptures, liturgy, teachings and witness. Paul experienced Christ's love in the Christians of Philippi. "We are more touched by contact with holy people than by any number of sermons"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HUME Basil. **FOOTPRINTS OF THE NORTHERN SAINTS**. Darton, Longman & Todd. London. 1996. p.9.

In *Footprints of the Northern Saints*, Cardinal Basil Hume writes about the saints of *Northumbria*, his birthplace. He mentions *St. Paulinus*, who taught that "serious spiritual life involves going through darkness when faith is tried."<sup>2</sup> *St. Theodore* as bishop had "a sense of humour and was naturally kind to people."<sup>3</sup> *St. Wilfrid* was "a flamboyant bishop who enjoyed the trappings of power and authority" yet renown "for his holiness and religious life."<sup>4</sup> *St. Cuthbert* combines "his natural gifts with a great love of scripture and the Word of God"<sup>5</sup> *St. Aidan* was connected with the establishment of *Lindisfarne*, a "centre for the spiritual life of *Northumbria*."<sup>6</sup> The *Synod of Whitby* (664 A.D.) is mentioned, resolving issues of Roman and Celtic Church traditions. *St. Hilda* led a community of men and women. They lived separately but gathered together for prayer. *St. Benedict Biscop* introduced "a new art form to England by filling church windows with glass"<sup>7</sup> and set some reforms for worship. *Cardinal Hume* concludes in saying: "We live in a post-Christian society. We have to preach the gospel again, re-evangelize our nation."<sup>8</sup> We have to do in our day what they did in theirs, *i.e.* bring Christ to the world.

<sup>2</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.25.

<sup>4</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.71.

<sup>6</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.34.

<sup>8</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.87.

<sup>3</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.59.

<sup>5</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.76.

<sup>7</sup> HUME Basil. *Opus cit.* p.65.

**Watchword:** "**Rejoice in the Lord always**" (*Philipp.4:4*)

Greek: **Καίρετε εν κυριω παντοτε.** (*Chairete en Kurio pantote*).

Hebrew: **שמחו באדונינו בכל-עת** (*Simhu ba'Adonenu bekol-'eth*).

Latin: **Gaudete in Domino semper.**