

### **Schizophrenic Believing!**

*Zephaniah 3<sup>14-end</sup>; Cantic, Isaiah 12<sup>2-end</sup>; Philippians 4<sup>4-7</sup>; Luke 3<sup>7-18</sup>*

*The peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your heart  
and your minds in Christ Jesus [Philippians 4<sup>7</sup>]*

No wonder Paul tells us that the **peace of God... passes all understanding**: from the readings today I am not sure whether I should be so irrationally joyful, singing all the time (you will have noticed how many times we are told to **sing** or **rejoice**) whilst on the other hand you have the Gospel describing the ministry of John the Baptist with its focus on **repentance** and **fleeing the wrath to come**.

To try to hold both together is rather schizophrenic: miserable people rejoicing, singing their repentance, running away from a wrathful God who, at the same time answers your prayers. Simple!

Put as simply as I can, when faith makes sense it becomes logic and logic isn't faith. Faith is what remains when all the thinking is done.

I think that is what the readings for today say:

- ✠ The Prophet Zephaniah writes as the reforming reign of King Josiah begins in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. If you read the whole prophecy it tells us of a God capable of both love and anger for the same people, but now we reach the point where the renewal of the faith of the nation has taken away **fear, disaster, reproach**. This rediscovered faith reveals a God who **will change their shame into praise** with the promise to the people, **I [will] restore your fortunes before your eyes**.
- ✠ The verse before the Cantic from Isaiah says, **I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away and you comforted me**. That is why, whilst Isaiah acknowledges the **strength, might** and **might** of the **Holy One of Israel**, he is able to **trust** and **not be afraid**.
- ✠ While Paul is telling us to rejoice he suggests that we should be so in control of ourselves that we give up **worry** by trusting in **prayer** and continues the schizophrenic approach by encouraging us to have an attitude of **thanksgiving** as **we let [our] requests be made known to God**.

How many people manage that: if you are desperate enough to pray is usually isn't because you have things to be thankful about!

- ✠ John the Baptist takes the approach that he has a message, but that he isn't the one you should listen to. His **baptism with water** is only a stop gap before the one who will **baptise with the Holy Spirit**. He tells people that the things they thought were important - their Abrahamic heritage - aren't, and the things that seem insignificant - sharing, honesty and avoiding abusing your position - are vital. The people had expectations, but that wasn't what they were going to get. Judgement is an expression of grace and love!

As we move through Advent we wait for Jesus, and it is he who makes sense of all of this: it is our faith in him that makes sense of repentance and confidence, of misery and praise, of fear and prayer because in him we meet God, the God in whom we put our faith. Because it is faith, it doesn't have to make sense, it just has to make a difference.