

Scripture Readings for the Third Sunday of Advent ~ Year C

1st Reading ~ Zephaniah 3:14-18a

- ❖ Unlike the characteristic gravitas of his prophetic message, this selection from the *Book of the Prophet Zephaniah* highlights the prophet's expectant and joyous hope that God will come and save the people. Rather than being far off and distant, God is strikingly depicted as near to the people: "the Lord, your God, is in your midst." This combination of closeness and the strong, saving hand of God give reason for much rejoicing. Rather than casting away, the prophet proclaims that God will be the strong leader by protecting and saving the people. There is no reason to be afraid. Rather, the people are invited to rejoice in God's mighty power. God will be rejoicing, too.

2nd Reading ~ Philippians 4:4-7

- ❖ Once again, we hear the Apostle Paul's emphatic statement that "the Lord is near." This forward and attentive focus on the second coming of the Lord shapes how the Christian community is to think and act. Notice the first posture is of expectant joy: "Rejoice!" The second posture is a communal imperative to be gentle to one another. And the third is to prayerfully trust in God, rather than be afraid. For it is God's very peace which governs the hearts and minds of the disciples. Their unity as a community gives testament to Christ, who will come again to gather his people.

Gospel ~ Luke 3:10-18

- ❖ Conversion has an ethical dimension. This account of the ministry of St. John the Baptist in *The Gospel According to Luke* gives us insight into the communal dimension of conversion. John's call for repentance and preparation challenged the people to ask: "What do we do now?" Notice that John replies to each group of people with a particular response that is related to their lives. They are not being called to do extra-ordinary things, but to respond in ways conducive to their lot in life: ways that respect and help others. In his typical form, St. Luke the Evangelist "stresses the importance of action, above all in the social realm, and, in a word, effective charity. He does not give us a set of precepts or detailed rules, but he suggests concrete principles of action that each person must employ in his or her particular situation."¹ Are we capable of doing this on our own? Perhaps. But, it is the gift of the Spirit that sets us afire in God's love, compels us to act in charity, and helps us to live as citizens of the new Creation, united in Christ, as we long for the Lord's coming.

¹ Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year. Volume 1: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 119.