

Sunday 19th December 2021 (Advent 4) 'Rejoice in the Lord always'
from Fr. Mike.

- **Philippians 4.4-7** (*from last week but speaks to us once again*)
- Magnificat or Psalm 80.1-7; Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45[46-55]

'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

Context

Against the background of false teachers, St. Paul is writing from prison to the church in Philippi (which at the time was a Roman colony) to spell out important practical tips for the best way to live a Christian life. He emphasises how our thinking and attitude affects the way we live out our faith. In the preceding chapters he gives perspective to suffering and hardship, and here he is keen to remind us of the key tools of faith.

Although we are asked not to worry, Paul is not suggesting a total lack of thought, just a lack of fear or anxiety, as we **rejoice** in the knowledge that as Christians we are ultimately protected by the **peace of God**.

At this point why not read the purple passage (above) once again and then briefly pause...

Paul learnt how to be content in all situations, and he was passing on this wise philosophy to the people of Philippi, who were the first to help him

when he needed it, and who continued their kindness on numerous subsequent occasions.

'Winter comes to rule the varied year'

Today, on our Advent wreath we light the fourth (pink) candle, linking the themes of 'Joy' and 'Peace' in this final week leading to Christmas. As the Angel delivered that famous special message to Mary, her initial fears, anxiety and confusion was transformed into Joy and deepened into Peace as the promises of God became a reality for her. Mary paused, took stock, did as she was asked and looked more closely at her circumstances... and this is still a helpful indication and example for us in 2021.

At first glance, Winter may appear dreary but if we look more closely, we see nature simply taking a rest in a deep and peaceful sleep. Taking time to recover from months of long, busy days. Taking enough time to stop for essential nurture. *What if we did the same?* If we just chose to simply rest in ourselves and the present moment?

Often it is in the winter months when the sun is weak and the weather doesn't encourage a lot of outdoor activity, that we notice how tired we have become in body and spirit. These months are a time for resting and recuperating. There is a real need to slow things down...

Time flies. At first, there appears to be only rare glimpses of clarity, too often drowned out by the next distraction before we have even really noticed them.

Paul reminds us that it is largely up to us whether we allow ourselves to be consumed by the demands of the world or consciously decide to reframe our perspective, allowing ourselves the space to turn towards that peace of God which passes all understanding.

A quiet moment of reflection on the events of the year helps us to let go if needs be, and to arrive fully in the here and now.

Winter is the time when we love to stay warm indoors with a comfortable blanket around our shoulders (or a festive 'onesie' perhaps) and either a mug of hot chocolate or mulled wine to warm our palms. When we listen to the soft sound of raindrops tapping on our windows and watch them sliding down the glass. Winter is a time when, if we are lucky, snow covers our world in a glittering blanket of white and muffles the noise of our lives. Each one of these quiet days is an invitation to slow down.

If you have already somehow managed to do just that, or are maybe struggling with illness or other challenges, this suggested change of gear, chosen or enforced by circumstances, equally allows for opportunity to reflect.

As we enjoy the first month of our Christian year, but the rest of the world comes to the end of a secular calendar year, we might find ourselves naturally drawn to a more pensive mood. While we continue with the inevitable everyday (sometimes hectic) pre-Christmas preparations, we can still choose to punctuate our days with the

thanksgiving Paul encourages and the acceptance Mary clearly demonstrates.

Moments of serenity are ever-present. Paying attention to the little joys of life, such as simply sitting in front of a roaring fire, noticing the glitter of morning frost on the trees, or simply remembering happy times, might be serene experiences. Looking beyond the current dangers presented by our latest pandemic, to appreciate and enjoy that 'crystal pavement by the breath of heaven cemented firm' these and many more priceless examples, are available to all with the patience to see them, offering timeless antidotes to the various commercial and emotional demands of the season.

Let's enjoy the touch of peaceful melancholy on clear days when our breath rises in puffs of white.

Let's remember (or restore perhaps) how exciting the magical weeks leading up to Christmas felt when we were children.

This is the time for TIME. For ourselves, and for one another. The time to make **peace** and let go of past events. The time for making new memories and rekindling those that have been lost in the 'busyness' of one kind or another – real or imagined.

Therefore, let's be kind to ourselves and to one another. **Rejoice** and enjoy this kindness with **all** of our God-given senses, **always!**

Fr. Mike, Sunday 19th December (Advent 4) 2021