

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT
16th DECEMBER 2012

“I want you to be happy” – the words of St. Paul to the Church at Philippi almost 2,000 years ago, but also the Word of the Lord spoken to us in our second reading.

“I want you to be happy.” The Lord wants us to be happy, the Church is telling us to be happy, not obedient or humble or righteous but happy.

We might think that happiness is too changeable and uncertain to be wanted for us by God.

Perhaps the only meaning we can give to happiness is that it is the opposite of being miserable, so if we can identify what makes us miserable and pray to get rid of the causes of misery in our lives we can expect to be happy. I am speaking to those of us who are not perfectly happy.

St. Paul was happy in the Lord, not with the Lord, but in the Lord.

He knew from his own experience what this meant. He said to the Galatians: “I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

He was so united with Jesus that he thought as Jesus thought and desired only what Jesus desired. There was no conflict between his will and God’s.

Conflicting desires are a cause of unhappiness. Like the tax collectors and the soldiers in the Gospel we may ask: “What must we do then?”

Perhaps the first step is to really mean, “Thy will be done,” when we pray it.

Another cause of unhappiness is worry. St. Paul says: “There is no need to worry.” That sounds simple but it is not. Having watched families being evicted from their homes on BBC1 on Thursday evening, I will never again tell anyone that there is no need to worry.

It’s humanly impossible not to worry when waiting for an eviction order with no home to go to or when facing redundancy from work with no job to go to, or when getting worn out looking after a dependent relative, and that’s only in this country where no one faces starvation.

Worries like these are often imposed on people who have tried their best. People like that deserve help.

St. Paul implies that he is writing about unnecessary worries. There are many causes of unnecessary worry.

Some people make themselves miserable by having unrealistic expectations – ambition to achieve something that is beyond them and not God’s will for them.

Sometimes people think that God is depending on them to do some great work when he is not.

Some people think they are indispensable when God is offering them help that they don’t want to take.

Unrealistic desires cause frustration and anger. Anger spreads the misery from the angry person to other people.

“What can we do?” St. Paul says, “if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving.”

Prayer with thanksgiving, thanks even before the prayer is answered, thanks for the faith that God will give us what we need, though not always what we want – such prayer will relieve worry. Angry prayer achieves nothing.

St. Paul says that prayer with thanksgiving will restore peace to our souls the “peace of God which is so much greater than we can understand.”

Peace and happiness go hand-in-hand.

Peace comes when the people who treat us with unkindness and injustice change their minds and treat us with kindness and justice as St. John the Baptist told the tax-collectors and soldiers in the Gospel.

Peace comes when we accept our own limitations and learn to want what God wants for us and no more.

The Advent readings from Isaiah remind us again and again that what God wants for us is to find peace and happiness in his love.

Perhaps the way to be happy in the Lord is to be absolutely still and quiet with God in prayer, to have Golden Time with God just as parents have Golden Time with their children, just them together, undisturbed, giving each other full attention, concentrated love.

It’s the image on our Christmas cards – Mary having Golden Time with Jesus – perfect love, perfect happiness.

We can join them, too, in prayer.

Rev Geoff Carey