

Lectionary readings: Joel 2: 23-32 Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18; Luke 18: 9-14

For reflection and prayer

- **Joel 2:** *'Rejoice in the Lord your God!'* We have much cause for rejoicing, for the Lord is good to us. We have plenty of food to nourish our bodies; the silos and barns are full of grain. The locusts have not devastated our fields. There is no chance of our starving. God says to us: *'I am your God, yes, YOUR God.'* Do we really believe that God is for us, that He loves each one of us, that He has pledged Himself to us? Do we rejoice in Him daily and give thanks for all the good things He gives us - not only food to eat, but forgiveness, love, mercy, His constant presence with us? Lord, open our eyes to see Your miracles of grace each day, and give us thankful hearts and a longing to share our abundance with those less fortunate.
- **Psalm 65:** This is a Psalm of praise to God, a God who answers our prayers, who forgives us when we do wrong, who gives us hope when we are tempted to despair, who does marvellous things if we have eyes to see them and hearts to respond. *'Awaken us to your kindness; enter into your Holy Temple, our heart.'* (Psalms for Praying) May this be the prayer of each one of us this week.
- **2 Timothy 4:** Paul was confident that he had faithfully carried out what God had called him to be and to do; and so he could face death without fear. We are not called to be Paul; we are each called to be who we are, to use the gifts God has given each one of us to do what

God calls us to do each day. So let's be open to God's leading each day this week and open ourselves to Him who loves us and who delights in who we are, pleased with our little steps of faith as we open our hearts to Him. May we offer our life to God each day, giving ourselves unreservedly to Him and to others in love. And let us remember that He loves us dearly; we are precious to Him. He just wants us to be who we are and to rejoice in His love. He is not a God to be feared, but to be embraced.

- **Luke 18:** This is the familiar parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee, a highly respected religious person, conscientious in carrying out his religious duties as laid down by the Law. Here at prayer he is playing to the gallery, going through the motions of the ritual, with no sense of his need of God, full of self-righteousness and pride, full of his own self-importance. His pride and his self-righteousness act as a stumbling-block between him and God. The tax collector, on the other hand, despised by his fellow Jews, shows real humility, acknowledging his deep need of God's mercy and forgiveness. It was the tax collector who was praised by Jesus. This was a complete reversal of the values of the day. People look on outward behaviour; but God knows our hearts. God wants us to be honest when we come before Him - no pretence. Verse 14 in The Message really spoke to me: *'If you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.'* There's a bit of the Pharisee in each one of us, for we often pretend to be what we are not. Let's come before God each day this week humbly, like the tax collector, with no airs and graces, just being who we are, opening our hearts to God and allowing Him to enable us to transcend our egoistic tendencies.