

27 JULY 14 - 17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

During this past week I watched the movie, "Heaven Is for Real." Based on the best-selling book, it's about a 4 year old boy who tells his parents about his visit to heaven while he was undergoing surgery. The message of the movie is summed up in the last scene. The boy's father is a minister, and he gives a sermon in which he says something like: Perhaps my son's experience of heaven frightens some of us. After all, if heaven is for real, wouldn't we all live different lives?

My brothers and sisters, this is the pearl of great price: Heaven is for real! God exists and He loves each and every one of us. He sent His Son Jesus, who lived and died and rose from the dead, and opened for us the way to heaven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to live lives based on Gospel values.

This is what Jesus means when he talks about the Kingdom of God ... following him and living as his disciple. Jesus invites us to live every moment of every day with Him as our companion and guide on our journey through life. And because Jesus calls all of us to this journey, we walk with each other as members of his Body, the Church. As the pastor in the movie puts it: God is love, and God's love requires us to let others know that they are not alone.

In today's second reading St. Paul uses theological and philosophical words to say pretty much the same thing: God has called, foreknew, predestined, justified, and glorified those who love Him. Another word for all of this is "providence." As Paul explains: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose." Do we believe that God has a purpose for us?

In the first reading, King Solomon prays, not for a long life, nor for riches, nor for victory over his enemies. Instead, he prays for wisdom, for an understanding heart. We, too, should pray for wisdom to know God's purpose for us. We should pray for the wisdom to recognize the value of the pearl of great price, the fact that heaven is for real, God has called us, and Jesus has shown us the way.

We also need wisdom in order to recognize the things that have to change in our own life in order to follow the way Jesus has revealed. Remember the image of the dragnet in today's gospel? (Perhaps today we would tell the parable of the rummage sale!) There are all sorts of things that need to be evaluated. Choices have to be made. What is good is saved; what is not-so-good is thrown away.

We have to practice that kind of discernment in our own lives. What helps us to follow Jesus? What do we need to give up? The person who finds the pearl of great price sells all that he has in order to buy it. Life in the Kingdom requires that we give our all in following Jesus who first gave his all for us.

My brothers and sisters, Heaven is for real! God the Father loves us. Jesus has saved us. The Spirit is with us as our guide and as our strength. Let us pray daily for the wisdom to recognize this pearl of great price. Let us confidently ask for the courage to give all that we have, and all that we are, in order to be Kingdom-centered disciples of Jesus the Lord.