

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year “A”

Heaven: the greatest desire of our soul

There is a story of a shop owner placed a sign above his door that said: ‘Puppies For Sale.’

Signs like this always have a way of attracting young children, and to no surprise, a boy saw the sign and approached the owner; ‘How much are you going to sell the puppies for?’ he asked.

The store owner replied, ‘Anywhere from \$30 to \$50.’

The little boy pulled out some change from his pocket. ‘I have \$2.37,’ he said. ‘Can I please look at them?’

The shop owner smiled and whistled. Out of the kennel came Lady, who ran down the aisle of his shop followed by five teeny, tiny balls of fur.

One puppy was lagging considerably behind. Immediately the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy and said, ‘What’s wrong with that little dog?’

The shop owner explained that the veterinarian had examined the little puppy and had discovered it didn’t have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame.

The little boy became excited. ‘That is the puppy that I want to buy.’

The shop owner said, 'No, you don't want to buy that little dog. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you.'

The little boy got quite upset. He looked straight into the store owner's eyes, pointing his finger, and said;

'I don't want you to give him to me. That little dog is worth every bit as much as all the other dogs and I'll pay full price. In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now, and 50 cents a month until I have him paid for.'

The shop owner countered, 'You really don't want to buy this little dog. He is never going to be able to run and jump and play with you like the other puppies.'

To his surprise, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted, crippled left leg supported by a big metal brace. He looked up at the shop owner and softly replied, 'Well, I don't run so well myself, and the little puppy will need someone who understands!'"
(Unknown author)

Like the little dog, the kingdom of heaven is for people who understand its value. The little dog with all its injuries may not worth much in the eyes of many yet it is the injuries that make it unique and give it value. In the eyes of those who see its uniqueness, brokenness and beauty, the value of the little dog is to say the least unquantifiable. At the end of the day what matters is not the amount of money and time but the amount of love we put into what we do.

Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven should become the greatest desire of the human heart. It is a treasure beyond all treasures, worthy of love and sacrifice. No amount of sacrifice is too great or too small for those who understand and appreciate the value of heaven. "Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness and every other thing shall be added unto you" Mtt 6:33

What is heaven and what is it like? No one has seen heaven as to know what it is like. At best we use anthropomorphic terms whenever we talk about heaven. From my earliest childhood I have understood heaven as the dwelling place of God and a place of bliss. This definition may imply that heaven is located within space and time, but realizing that God is pure spirit and does not need a place to dwell, my definition of heaven as a "place" falls short of what heaven truly is.

In the Apostles' Creed we say that God is the creator of heaven and earth. The earth is created as the dwelling place of human beings while heaven is the dwelling place of God, the angels, and the saints. The earth was created good while the heaven was created perfect; hence the evils and deficiencies we see on earth are obstacles we must overcome in order to go to heaven. Heaven, therefore, is not the opposite of earth but the perfection of earthly existence.

The Nicene Creed goes further to talk about earth and heaven in terms of "all that is seen and unseen." It goes to mean that not everything created by God could be seen with human eyes. Beyond what is seen are the things that are unseen which we refer to as heavenly realities. These

exist beyond space and time, and are not limited by boundaries.

While we hold this belief as true that heaven is a place of perfection, we ought to be careful not to overemphasize the picture of heaven as the place where the lion and the lamb will be at peace or where all tears will be wiped away, death will be no more, all our hunger shall be satisfied and no one will go to bed with an empty stomach. While these imageries are true, yet, heaven is more than that.

Painting an exciting picture of heaven as a way of getting the people of our time to be excited about going to heaven can be dangerous as it could make heaven to become opium that promises everything good to a disillusioned soul. It is important that we remain faithful to the traditional biblical notion of heaven. Heaven is ultimately beyond what has ever “entered into the heart of man.” But there are certain things we can know about heaven even if now we “see in a mirror dimly” what will only be revealed fully in eternity (I Cor. 13:12).

Heaven marks the end of human desires and wants. Heaven is a state of peaceful co-existence. In heaven, God will be all in all. In heaven we shall experience the “beatific vision” which means that the blessed shall “see God, face to face.” Heaven is where human beings aided by the grace of God are able to see God face to face. This is thanks to the grace of God which is obtained through faith and good works here on earth.

Heaven is not opium but a force for doing good in the world. Belief in heaven empowers us to work for justice,

serve the poor and the needy, defend the oppressed and admonish the weak. Heaven thus becomes the state of perfection of the goodness already practiced here on earth. It goes to mean that heaven begins on earth but does not end on earth since perfection is not possible in this world. Heaven, therefore, is the state of perfection, the reward and the ultimate end of all human goodness. Those who desire to enter into heaven are called to do what is right, love what is good and walk humbly with God. Amen.