

On March 7, 2009 NASA launched the Kepler space observatory. Named after the 17th century German mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler, the spacecraft's sole mission is to find Earth-like planets orbiting other stars. This past August, the Kepler spacecraft was sufficiently disabled so as to compromise its present mission.

In the four years that Kepler scanned space, it found 134 confirmed exoplanets in 76 star systems as well as 3,277 unconfirmed planet candidates.

In order for a planet to be considered Earth-like, it needs to be in what is called the "habitable zone" in relationship to its star ... sort of a Goldilocks situation ... not too hot ... not too cold ... but rather the habitable zone is where everything is ... "just right" ... the appropriate temperature to support life ... at least life as we know it.

In addition, the prospective planet can't be more than twice the size of our own planet ... or else gravity will be too strong ... sort of crushing life before they get going.

Of these well over 30-some-hundred discovered planets and planet candidates, 104 of them are in the habitable zone, and of those, 24 are less than twice the size of good old Mother Earth.

Our readings today, at least the Old Testament ... and the Gospel ... deal with theological opinions regarding resurrection of the body. The Pharisees believed in the physical resurrection of the body ... whereas the Sadducees did not.

In the Gospel, there is an attempt to draw Jesus into this long-standing 1st century Jewish theological debate. Jesus isn't interested in arguing about theological opinions, but rather states the facts.

First, that God *"is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to [God] all are alive."*

Next, that in the resurrection, things are not like they are here and now. There is no marriage, there is no death.

The Sadducees' argument is without merit, because it's looking at the wrong things ... and because of that, it is slated for failure from the very beginning.

Often times, when we talk about religion, at times the conversation can begin to sound like a debate ... and usually this can center on minutia - namely, things that don't really matter.

In fact, these sort of arguments, and this sort of religious nit-picking can actually end up damaging, not only our spiritual life, but also the spiritual life of others as well ... those we are arguing with, and those who might happen to be watching.

What is important ... and this is what we hear in the New Testament Reading ... from the Second Letter to the Thessalonians ... and this is a better way ... regarding how we should be approaching religion ... and religious discussion ... can be found in the words of St. Paul ...

*direct your hearts to the love of God, and to the endurance of [Jesus] Christ.*

In other words the bottom line remains: *Love ... and perseverance.*

St. Paul also exhorts us to *pray* that the Gospel may reach more people, and admonishes us to remain *faithful* to what we have learned, and keep doing what we "*are doing and will continue to do.*"

Faith, Hope, and Love ... these are the things that keep us in the spiritual "habitable zone." When we are practicing the three Theological Virtues ... then we are able to stay alive spiritually as well as bring the life of Christ to those around us.

Are we engaging in heated religious arguments? Too hot.

Are we keeping the Gospel to ourselves? Too cold.

Are we abiding in Faith, Hope, and Love? Just right.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for a deeper outpouring of our Baptismal graces and especially the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love.

And with God's grace, may we be saved from anything else ... whether it is our own attitudes and thoughts ... or whether it is directed toward us.

May our practice of our Faith, and our professing of our Faith remain for us spiritually life-giving ... as well as spiritually life-supporting.