

This Sunday, we are listening to the Lord speaking in parables. The first one is the “treasure in the field” and the second is the “pearl of great price” and the third one is “net thrown into the sea”. These three parables touch each of us because many people dream of striking it rich. That is why many people launch themselves in the lotteries business hoping that they would win much money and then resolve all their problems. We may see what happens in casinos.

If we satisfy all of a person’s material desires, emptiness remains because we are more than a body. We have a soul. Consider a human life without friendship, love, purpose or faith and we can understand why our greatest need is spiritual. The spiritual is the organizing principle of our life.

The Gospel calls this organizing principle of the human heart, the “kingdom of God.” As the Lord says elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” The kingdom of God has little to do with territory, castles. It does have to do with the reign of God in our hearts, our lives and our homes.

How do people come to this kingdom, this acceptance or embrace of God’s reign? How do people come face to face with God? For some, it happens like a bolt out of the blue, like stumbling across a treasure in the first parable. The man is plowing and suddenly hits what he thinks is a rock. But it’s not a rock but a treasure. This was the experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. He was thrown to the ground and had a sudden, dramatic, powerful life-changing encounter with Christ.

Tragedies can throw us to the ground as suddenly we realize the need and place for God in our life. The sudden shortness of breath, the discoloration, financial losses, a disabling accident suddenly put everything in our life into a different perspective. We realize our creaturehood and need for God. Some people come to God suddenly.

Others go on a search. Within them is a dissatisfaction with their life. They have seen too many idols with clay feet. They are like the merchant in search of fine pearls in the second parable. This was the experience of St. Augustine, going from one thing to another, one escape to another, one belief to another until he came to see that all his trouble was really a disguised search for God. Later when he reflected on his coming to God, he wrote, “Late, late have I loved Thee.” We would paraphrase St. Augustine as saying to God today, “Where have you been all my life?” God says, in effect, “I was with you all the time. I guided your search.” Some people come to God through the search.

Finally, others grow into an embrace of God through their life in the Church. Like the fish in the net in the third parable, they are gathered into the Church’s life at Baptism and slowly, as they mature, hopefully, they come to appreciate God as their life’s center of gravity. However we come to Him, once we have a strong relationship with God, everything in our life falls into place: the honors, the money, the successes, the tragedies and the ups and downs.

As St. Paul writes in today’s second reading, “For those who love God, everything works for their spiritual good.” Once we have the true God at the center of our life, we never have to fear being trapped by false gods, becoming devotees of image and celebrity, slaves of ambition or lust, servants of power or greed, prisoners of our job or career, because we have found our greatest good in God.

We may have suddenly discovered God; we may have searched for God, or we may have grown to appreciate God’s presence in our life. However we come to Him, the service of God will put everything in our life in order like that cascade function on the computer. This is the wisdom for which Solomon prayed in today’s first reading. Before power or wealth, he sought the wisdom to use those gifts wisely in God’s way. The point here is that the kingdom of God is not a piece of real estate. It is a condition of soul.

However we come to the kingdom of God, by discovery (the treasure), by search (the pearl), or by growing within it (the net), we have to invest ourselves in His reign to discover the riches, the wealth, the perspective, the abundance of life in Christ.

Those who embrace the reign of God, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in their lives are the ones who really strike it rich.