

In the Guadalajara Art Museum sits the painting I love above all others. Large, colonial, religious theme --- it's not famous ... but I've seen it four separate times ... and each time it reaches out and grasps me and almost won't let me go. I've tried to get a poster of it, thinking if I had a copy in my room to look at every day, I'd be a better person.

If we were more spiritual alert, we'd probably be dazzled like that by the parables of Jesus, or at least some of the 40 or so we have --- like Dominican bible Sr. Barbara Reid.

About today's twin parables of finding the lost treasure and the pearl of great price, she says: Observe that both people, in the context of those days, are unsavory and not nice.

The one who finds the treasure in the field and then hides it again to buy the field from the unaware owner ... he's committing fraud. The society of Jesus had rules about discovered treasure. It wasn't "Finders keepers; losers weepers." It was --- if you find a treasure in someone else's field, it belongs to that person. The Talmud (the law) specifies that you have an obligation to go notify the owner. If you buy the field and find the treasure, it still belongs to the previous owner. Only after you've owned the land 7 years and have made a serious attempt to contact the owner, can you finally say it's yours.

And the merchant with the pearls. In a barter and trade system like primitive Galilee, merchants who sold luxury items to the very wealthy were looked upon as parasites, involved in trade that was unworthy of human beings, given the amount of people that were desperate just to have food.

In the parables, both these people, unworthy though they are allowed by God to discover something immeasurably valuable. They discover God. They discover the divine presence hidden where they never expected. They discover the kingdom of heaven.

And finding God is so amazing and so precious with no hesitation whatsoever they give up anything else, and everything else for it. They sold *everything*.

Can you think of something you would give everything for? Mitt Romney spent more than \$42 million of his money to be Republican nominee for president. He probably still has something left. But is there anything he ... or you ... would give everything for.

The kingdom of heaven is worth everything. Knowledge of God, that you're loved by God, that God is with you bringing good out of the present no matter how hard it is, knowing that God has life safe for you and your loved ones in the resurrection ... that's worth everything. No wonder people who really have discovered the treasure or the pearl lavish time, talent and money on God and God's purposes ... and think nothing of it.

Finally, maybe these parables are a way for Jesus to explain himself, his decisions and his life. "Why do I, with human talents to be rich, powerful and comfortable, spend myself morning, noon and night, even to nakedness, exhaustion and death of the cross? Because I am a person who found a treasure, I am a merchant who discovered a priceless pearl. And having discovered God and God's kingdom, nothing else is even a close second."