

When my sister told me this story, she said, "It was one of those experiences when you meet God." She was in a park with some friends when she noticed a young child playing with a puppy. "What's your dog's name?" she asked. "Garfield," the boy replied. "Does your mother let Garfield sleep in bed with you?" "No, so sometimes I sleep on the floor with him." Then she noticed that the child was carrying a baggie filled with water. "What's that for?" "Sometimes it gets hot, so I put water on my dog's head to cool him off." Then he picked up the dog and walked away. It was an ordinary experience, but it caused her to reflect that day on the care God gives to us.

We hear two parables today, one about a poor farmer, the other about a well-to-do merchant. Both characters find a treasure and sell everything they own to buy it. What's different about their stories is this: One stumbles on the treasure quite unexpectedly, the other finds it after a long search.

Every so often in our lives, we find a treasure--a person, an event, a place that leads us to a new insight about God. How we find the treasure will be different for people. Sometimes we discover God quite unexpectedly in an ordinary way, other times we see God after a long search.

Perhaps this is why Jesus gave us both these parables and not just one or the other. Together they show that it doesn't matter so much how we find the treasure. One person's experience of God is as valid as another's.

There's no need to be jealous over someone else's religious experience. Maybe you've said things to yourself like, "I wish I could say my prayers with the same devotion my mother has." Or, "Why can't I speak in tongues like my friend can?" Maybe you'd like to have a vision of the Blessed Mother, or you've prayed for a certain sign to prove that God is listening. It might be tempting to think that someone else sees God better than we do, and we feel insecure about how God is revealed to us.

But it doesn't matter so much how we find the treasure. You may have had a jolting conversion in your life, or maybe you were baptized as a child and grew up slowly and steadily in your Catholic faith without any major revelations. Some people can make you think that if you haven't had a conversion in your life, your experience is of no value. But it's the treasure which has value and there's no single way to find it.

It doesn't matter how we find the treasure; what matters is what we do after we find it, how we sacrifice to make the treasure ours. In the parable, the merchant and the farmer make a daring commitment: they sell everything to buy the treasure. When we have an experience in which we meet God, we must get rid of everything else so we can possess only God. If we want religious experience, we may have to pay for it with our time, with our desires, with our habits. It may cost us charity or prayer. But whatever the cost, we buy the treasure.

Whether we meet God in our regular morning prayers, or suddenly in the park with a boy and his dog, it's important that we allow space for the encounter, and that we embrace the event at any cost.