

Did you ever notice that when lottery jackpots pass \$200 million, people start fantasizing about how happy they'd be if they'd win all that money? If they were rich, they could tell their boss what he or she could do with that job. They'd buy a new car. They'd travel. They'd never have to worry again. They'd finally have what they need to be happy.

This week, I received an advance copy of Matthew Kelly's new book *Resisting Happiness*. As I read it, I was struck by the similarity of its message and our gospel message regarding our perceived connection between wealth and happiness.

Matthew Kelly says that when we're children, we think: "If only I could have a certain toy, I'd be happy." But then we get that toy and after a while we realize it isn't going to satisfy our desire for happiness. So we turn our attention to something else, like a bike...and again we tell ourselves: "If I ever get a bike, I'll be happy." But when we get that bike, our yearning for happiness still isn't satisfied.

As we get a little older, we tend to attach our hope for happiness to friendship... and we think to ourselves: "If he or she became my best friend, I'd be happy forever."

But our desire for happiness can't be fulfilled in this way either. No one person can satisfy our immense desire for happiness...and it really isn't fair to attach that hope to any one person. So many relationships, including marriages, die under the weight of this misplaced expectation.

As teenagers, we turn our attention to pleasure. We tell ourselves: "If I only have this pleasure or that pleasure, then I'll be happy." But pleasure is a poor substitute for the happiness we desire. It's fleeting, and we yearn for something lasting.

In early adulthood our attention turns to accomplishment. We think, "If I can accomplish something great, I'll stop feeling empty and dissatisfied. I'll be happy forever." Maybe we do accomplish something great or maybe we don't, but either way, the yearning for a higher and deeper happiness continues.

At this point, most people just cycle back through the same things, thinking that more of something or more of everything is the answer to that desire for real happiness...just like that rich man in the gospel today.

But instead of building more barns to house more grain and other goods, we chase more things, more money, more pleasure, more of the “right” friends, and more accomplishments.

So what ON EARTH *will* satisfy this desire for happiness? Jesus tells us today that ***nothing on earth*** can satisfy our desire for complete happiness...and the reason is simple: Each of us has a God-sized hole that can't be filled with money, status, power, sex, drugs, alcohol, other people, experiences, or accomplishments. Only God can fill that hole.

We often make the mistake of hoping that certain people or things can fill it. But if we're honest with ourselves, we come to realize that only God can fill a hole that represents our deepest longings...a hole that's bigger than anything this life has to offer.

Allowing God to fill it will make everything this life has to offer not only better, but prepare you for that day when, as Jesus tells us in our gospel, ***your*** life will be demanded of ***you***...and the things you have prepared...to whom will they belong?

Notice that Jesus didn't question that rich man's desire for happiness, only the way he chose to satisfy it. We yearn for happiness because we're created for it. Paragraph 27 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us:

“The desire for God is written in the human heart because we're created **by** God and **for** God; and God never ceases to draw us to himself. Only in God will we find the truth and happiness we never stop searching for.”

That's the point of this Gospel. The whole meaning and purpose of our existence is wrapped up in expanding our relationship with God, not expanding our net worth. When we're separated from Jesus and His Father life has no meaning. It's only by placing God at the center of everything that life...and death...make sense. Placing something or someone else at the center of our lives only sets us up for disappointment after disappointment.

That's the difference between winning the lottery and being truly happy. You don't even have to buy a ticket just to have a chance to be happy. True happiness is free...and your prize isn't a thousand dollars for life...it's life for eternity. You just have to choose it. SO CHOOSE IT. Then Mass will become your happy hour.