

MAY 26, 2026 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

An elderly gentleman was on his deathbed, so he called his friend and said, “Bill, I want you to promise me that when I die, you will have my remains cremated.” And his friend asked, “And what do you want me to do with your ashes?” The man replied, “Just put them all in an envelope and mail them to the tax department.” And write on the envelope, “Now you have everything.”

Now, sisters and brothers, in today’s Gospel from Mark, Peter says to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” In Matthew’s version, Peter asks Jesus, “We have left everything to follow you. What then will we get?” To know this context, today’s Gospel passage comes right after the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man who comes to Jesus and asks him, “What must I do to inherit the kingdom?”

The disciples must have been astounded as they watched the rich young man walk away when Jesus challenged him to let go of his possessions and then to come and follow him. The disciples thought, like many others in Jesus’ time, that wealth was a sign of God’s favor. Yet Jesus said that it was impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven without God.

Now the disciples had come on board believing that they would be rewarded for all their sacrifices to follow Jesus. But now, after this incident, they were asking among themselves, “What is in it for us?” Peter’s question comes from a moment of honesty or vulnerability, or perhaps expectation. Peter speaks here for every disciple who has tried to take their following of Jesus seriously.

Now, following Jesus is not an abstract idea. It is not simply a fancy thing to do. It really involves sacrifice. Jesus himself said in Matthew 16:24, “If any want to follow me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Following Jesus involves real leaving—

leaving comfort, leaving control, leaving certainty, leaving one's ego, leaving some habits, or even leaving certain relationships.

Now I can think of my own life. About ten years ago, I lost my only older brother in a tragic accident at the age of 46. There was a lot of pressure put on me by my relatives and others to leave the priesthood and come back home to take care of my parents and my family. My father, who was a teacher and a wise man, told me very clearly, "People will say what they want to say. You have committed yourself to serving the Lord, so don't allow what people tell you to disturb or distract you. We will manage things at home."

Now, like Peter, we may not have physically dropped our fishing nets to follow Jesus, but we all know what it means to let go of something that was close to our hearts in order to follow him. It could be relationships, habits, or attachments that we once held dearly.

We also notice something important in today's Gospel. Jesus does not rebuke Peter for his question. Instead, he acknowledges the sacrifice and promises something greater, not only in the future life, but even here and now: a deeper life, a transformed life, a new kind of belonging.

Now, sisters and brothers, today's Gospel invites you and me to examine our own discipleship. The questions before us are these: What is my expectation from Jesus? Do I follow Jesus because he is the author of life, or because I expect him to do things for me?

Let us be honest. It is normal for us to have expectations in our faith. We want the Lord to protect us and our loved ones. We want him to guide our lives. But we are called to go beyond this, because the Lord deserves our love and reverence simply because he is God.

Today we also celebrate the memorial of Saint Philip Neri, the founder of the Congregation of the Oratory. Saint Philip Neri was someone who

gave up everything in order to follow Jesus, including his family ties. He left his family in Florence at the age of 18 and never returned to visit them.

Today, we ask for the intercession of Saint Philip Neri, that we may follow Jesus wholeheartedly and give praise and thanks to him always.