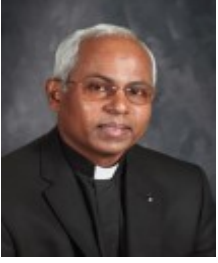


# A Message From Fr. Francis



My Dear Friends In Christ!

Jesus gave his full attention to people who turned up out of the blue, wanting to talk to him. In today's gospel, we are told that Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put the question to him, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' At this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus is on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem; this was the most important journey of his life. When the gospel says that Jesus was setting out on a journey, the evangelist was stating that Jesus intended to journey on further in the direction of Jerusalem.

At first sight the young man comes across as an exceptionally good person, deferential to Jesus and somehow searching for the way of eternal life. He had kept God's commands since his youth, and Jesus looked on him with love. An ideal person, you would think, to receive the gospel. And yet Jesus wanted to show him something about himself of which he was totally unaware. He was owned by his own wealth, and it had a stronger grip on him than he had on it. Jesus invited him to become free of it, but the cost seemed too just too high. "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."

There is nothing wrong with money as such, or even with being wealthy. Some of the world's greatest people who did most for the welfare of humanity, have been wealthy people. But at a deeper level the fact is that we own nothing, *absolutely*. My hold on things is provisional, temporary. A sudden stroke, a brain hemorrhage or a heart attack, and I am separated forever from all my worldly belongings. Apparently there was a narrow entrance at the side of the temple called the "needle." It is wide enough for a camel to pass through, but only if the load was removed from the camel's back. With the panniers of goods the camel normally carried on either side, it would be impossible to pass through the *Needle* gate. How hard it is for people who are weighed down with money and ambitions to enter the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom belongs to children. It belongs to the *poor in spirit*; not so much *economically* poor, but detached from riches in their inmost spirit. For a worthy cause, they can part with their wealth.

Then there are some who give up everything to follow Jesus. He doesn't call everybody to do this. He didn't ask Lazarus or his sisters to leave home and follow him. But being a follower of Jesus does mean having to leave *something*. It involves a change of priorities, a new way of valuing things, an interest in the riches that are stored in heaven, "where moth cannot consume, nor rust corrode." Those who leave everything to follow Jesus are among the most blessed of people, dedicated souls like Padre Pio, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, aid workers in places torn by war and disease, and many other unsung heroes. Such people are blessed with the riches of God's grace, and bring much blessing to the lives of others.

If we approach the Lord, as the man in the gospel did, if we seek out the Lord and enter into a personal relationship with him, he will call out to us too. However, his call to us will have something in common with that man's call. It will always be a call to give ourselves more fully to the Lord's way, and to let go of whatever it is that is holding us back from living according to the values of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed and lived.

See you at Mass!  
Fr. Francis

