



REJOICE in the LORD

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Archbishop of Newark

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The Lord draws near to us, closer than we think

Keep close to one another, draw ever closer to God, and with your bishops and priests spend these years in building a holier, more missionary and humble Church, a Church which loves and worships God by seeking to serve the poor, the lonely, the infirm, and the marginalized (Pope Francis).

One of the constant themes of Pope Francis is “closeness.” In practically every communication, whether written in advance or spontaneous, our Holy Father urges us to stay close to God and to one another.

Our contemporary culture tends to view God as absent, remote and disconnected from our world and from us. This is not the Christian view. We are Advent people, women and men who await the Blessed Hope every day. We believe that our God draws near to us, that he is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

We consider permanent separation from God (and from one another) as hell, the worst possible situation for anyone. And we believe that God’s grace, his unconditional love freely given, is what keeps us connected to him and to each other.

God’s closeness to us is seen most perfectly in Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus Christ. The Blessed Virgin bore the Son of God in her womb. His humanity was formed from her flesh, from the priestly line that included Elizabeth and Zechariah, and from the heart of Mary’s faith-filled acceptance of God’s will.

Through Mary, God became one of us. He made it possible for us to come close to him, to identify with him and to recognize him as our brother. This is not an absent, remote or disconnected God. This God is one-with-us and draws us close to him through the intercession of a simple Hebrew woman chosen by God the Father to be his Son’s mother.

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent call our attention to Mary. Along with John the Baptist, who even as an unborn child rejoiced in the presence of his Lord, Mary proclaims the closeness of God. She acknowledges his closeness as only a pregnant mother can experience the closeness of her child. She accepts the blessing bestowed on her by Elizabeth without fully comprehending what God has in store for her or for her divine son.

Every morning, the Church invites us to pray the Canticle of Zechariah (commonly called the “Benedictus” because of its opening words, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free.”) I confess this is one of my favorite prayers. I look forward to praying

it each day because it praises God for his closeness; it reminds us that God has come to set us free; and because it proclaims that our God is merciful—tender and compassionate in his dealings with us who are wayward and sinful people.

Mary is the Advent messenger who calls us to prepare for her Son's coming again each Christmas. Her example is simple but profound. St. Luke tells us that when the angel confronted her with the mysterious will of God, Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). God draws close, and Mary's response is to open her heart and let him enter.

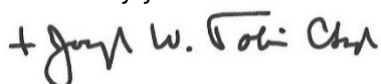
Toward the end of each day, the Church proposes another prayer, the Canticle of Mary or "Magnificat" which begins, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior." Here Mary sings of the powerful effects of God's closeness to all people. Because God is one-with-us, the poor and the lonely are raised up, the hungry are filled with good things and those who are consumed by their riches and pride are sent away empty-handed.

Every day, the Church prays this message proclaimed by Mary. God is close to us. If we let him into our hearts, he will liberate us, fill our emptiness, forgive our sins and lift us up when we fall into doubt or despair.

Advent celebrates the closeness of God. He is here among us now, especially when we gather in his name and receive him in the holy Eucharist. But he is also coming again—really and truly—in our celebration of Christmas and at the end of time.

As we continue our synodal journey, let's follow Mary's example and draw close to Jesus and to one another. Let's pray that when our Lord comes again our hearts will be open, and we will have the courage to say, "Yes, Lord. Here I am. I'm ready to do your will."

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Joseph W. Tobin" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin
Archbishop of Newark

Archdiocese of Newark Launches Synod 2021-2023

October 21, 2021

The Archdiocese of Newark joined dioceses throughout the world in celebrating a special Opening Mass on October 17 to launch “Synod 2021-2023: For a Synodal Church,” a two-year re-examination of the way the Catholic Church is listening to and walking with its parishioners.



The Mass was filled with parishioners from the four counties it serves (Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Union) as well as many clergy, religious women and men, parish pastoral council leaders, and archdiocesan staff members.

During his homily, Cardinal Tobin explained that a “synod” is a global process of discussion and reflection on a topic of particular importance to the Church. The current synod is meant to explore how the Church can improve its ability to collaborate with 21st century Catholics — which is why every parishioner’s voice will matter in upcoming listening sessions and discussions.

“It’s an effort to open ourselves to a permanent conversion of heart... a change of our Church at all levels,” Cardinal Tobin said, adding that the synod’s purpose is to “discover the divine will — God’s saving plan for us today, in our circumstances, in our time, in our places. And the process of the synod will make the people of God actors in the process of discernment rather than passive onlookers.”

Like other dioceses worldwide, the opening Mass was the Archdiocese’s first significant step in participating in the worldwide “synod on synodality” initiated by Pope Francis on October 10. Next, the Archdiocese will coordinate listening sessions for its 212 parishes, at which Catholics will be encouraged to share their opinions on what is expected of today’s Church. Sessions will be guided by universal questions for dioceses worldwide examining the perceptions of today’s Catholics.

In April, the Archdiocese will gather, analyze, and synthesize information from all parish listening sessions into one report that will be submitted to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Similarly, dioceses across the U.S. and globally will submit their local findings, which will ultimately be consolidated into reports for discussion among the world’s bishops and the Vatican to help guide Pope Francis on decisions about how the Church should proceed in the future.

To learn more about “Synod 2021-2023: For a Synodal Church,” visit <https://www.rcan.org/synod2023> and <https://www.synod.va/en.html>.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Remember God's Style of Closeness, Compassion, and Tender Love



In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society....

If we put the Gospel at the center and bear witness to it with fraternal love, we will be able to look to the future with hope, whatever the tempests, great or small, we may experience today. What is the Church called to bring to the lives of all men and women, if not the serene certainty that God is mercy, that he loves us at every moment of our lives and is ever ready to forgive us and lift us up?

Remember God's style, which is a style of closeness, compassion and tender love. This is God's style. Let us travel the same path, with the same style. Temptation to discouragement never comes from God, never. It comes from the enemy, and can be fueled by any number of situations: behind the façade of prosperity, or under the guise of religious traditions, many dark areas can lurk.

There are social problems: the troubles experienced by families, poverty, the problems faced by young people, all in a context where democracy remains to be solidly established. The Church must not fail to be an advocate of closeness, a source of care and consolation, lest people end up being robbed of the light of hope. (A selection from Papal Reflections September 30, 2021)

My Prayer for You

As we journey together in synod, let's remember that "each of us is unique. We were put into this world to be loved for who we are, and to love others in our own unique and special way" (Pope Francis). Lord, may we always experience your closeness, compassion and tender love.

- Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

