

## Rejoice in the Lord

By Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Newark

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### A Virus Worse Than COVID-19



In his homily for Divine Mercy Sunday, Pope Francis said, “Now, while we are looking forward to a slow and arduous recovery from the pandemic, there is a danger that we will forget those who are left behind.” He went further and said that after coronavirus, “the risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus.”

What virus could be worse than COVID-19? The whole world has been brought to a standstill as thousands of people have been infected by this deadly illness, and many more of us have lost their jobs and been forced to live with isolation and fear. What

could be worse than this?

Pope Francis’s response is: “The virus of selfish indifference.” As our Holy Father explains, “A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me.” This is the reality of sin, which Pope Francis says “begins with selfishness and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress.”

Selfishness and indifference are worse than COVID-19 because they infect our minds, our hearts and our souls. When we focus exclusively on our own health and safety, on our own comfort and security, we lose sight of what should matter most in our lives—our relationships with God and with each other.

Recall the words of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century English poet John Donne:

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as  
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine  
own were; any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

This is what Pope Francis wants us to remember: No matter how bad things get as a result of wars, famines, plagues or humanity's inhumanity, we are not alone. As our Holy Father insists, "*there are no differences or borders between those who suffer – we are all frail, all equal, all precious.*"

I am reminded of a quote from Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl, a survivor of Nazi death camps, wondered how some who went through unspeakable horrors were not defeated but rather ennobled by the ordeal. He wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Sin is worse than any pandemic because it isolates us in ways that we cannot cure by our own efforts. Through selfish indifference to the needs of others, we act as if we were islands that are wholly self-sufficient. We deny our interdependence as women and men who are connected to each other because we are all children of God. We forget that the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus have united us all in the one Body of Christ our Redeemer.

The attitude of selfish indifference is not restricted to individuals. Families, communities and even nations are also tempted to close in on themselves and neglect the needs of others—strangers, migrants and those who are different from us. This is not the love of neighbor we are called to exemplify as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. It is not the lesson taught by the parable of the Good Samaritan who went out of his own way and risked everything to help a stranger.

During this deadly pandemic, let's ask our Blessed Mother Mary, to whom we reconsecrate our nation this day (May 1, 2020), to help us choose an attitude of genuine, loving concern for all our sisters and brother, especially the poor and vulnerable.

You are in my prayers in a special way during this Easter season. Please pray for me as well.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph W. Tobin" with a cross symbol to the left.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Newark

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**Easter Sunday Homily**  
**Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.**  
**Archbishop of Newark**  
**Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart**  
**April 12, 2020**

*(The following is Cardinal Tobin's homily for Easter Sunday. To watch this online go to [www.youtube.com/NwkArchdiocese](http://www.youtube.com/NwkArchdiocese))*



If this is Easter, why does it still feel like Lent?

None of the gospels relates the actual resurrection, that is, the rising of Jesus from the dead. There are two reasons for this. First, no one was present to witness it. There were witnesses of the empty tomb and his appearances, but these are the aftermath of the resurrection, not the event itself. Secondly, resurrection is transformation into an entirely new mode of existence – not just some sort of resuscitation to the old life. Perhaps this is the reason why no one immediately recognizes the Risen One.

The first witnesses all agree that the tomb that received Jesus was empty. Among the four Gospels there are other points of agreement. The first witnesses to arrive at the burial ground were women, who carried the news of the empty tomb to other disciples. There are also notable divergences.

In the other three gospels, the women approach the tomb in daylight. Mark says, “the sun had risen.” Matthew describes the sun as “dawning,” and Luke refers to early dawn “when the sun had risen.” Daylight: a time when hope and faith are in the air. Not so, in the account we heard today. John’s Gospel remembers that Mary Magdalene went alone to the grave while it was still dark. In John’s Gospel, darkness is a sign of the absence of faith. Mary will indeed come into the light, but she has a journey to travel.

The journey toward faith first takes her away from the empty tomb. She runs to Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved and reports that someone has entered the tomb and taken away the body of Jesus. Significantly, she reports: “We don’t know where they put him – including the two other disciples in the darkness of unbelief.

Nonetheless, the two reverse the journey of Mary Magdalene, taking us back to the empty tomb. Peter enters the tomb first, and the gospel is careful to note a strange detail: the clothes of death are empty. Not only empty, but someone has folded them and placed them in different locations; the cloth that had been around Jesus’ head has been “rolled up in a place by itself.”

Now the Beloved Disciple enters the tomb and sees what Peter saw: the signs of death, empty, folded and put away. They are no longer needed. Mary Magdalene was right: someone other than Jesus has been active in the tomb before them. With great simplicity, John describes what happened to the second disciple, the one whom Jesus loved: “He saw, and he believed.”

What did he see? We heard the details of an empty tomb and the now useless burial clothes. But he did not see the risen Jesus. An absolutely important detail and next Sunday's gospel reading will tell us why. Jesus will call "blessed" "those who have not seen but believe." My friends, that includes us.

Like all the disciples who have gone before us, on Easter we stand together before an empty tomb. The faith that enlightens that tomb is not something instantaneous, a sort of spiritual Nescafé or instant tapioca. Like Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and John, and our mothers and fathers before us we need to travel – always journeying from a darkness of unbelief to the blessed light of faith, seeing more than meets the eye, connecting dots of the events that life throws at us.

This Passover and Easter, communities of faith across the world find themselves surrounded by buildings that at first glance look like empty tombs. Our synagogues, mosques and churches, formerly lit and loud with prayer and praise, have been strangely silent. The silence is loudest on Easter, making this great day feel like an unwelcome extension of Lent. But, let us look again.

The One who was active in the tomb of Jesus before the arrival of the disciples is still at work, protecting all who walk in the shadow of death, summoning people out of darkness into light. The love that called Jesus from the tomb is at work in this empty cathedral and, beyond its walls, among all who are united by the faith that this magnificent building represents and celebrates. That love asks us to stay home, when every social and religious instinct calls us to be together and embrace in the peace that only Christ can give. Because of the empty tomb, all the sacrifices that love bids us make on Easter 2020 are united to the One who displayed the greatest love of all: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Despite all our present limitations, something has been enkindled this Easter, a light more faithful than the morning star, which never sets. Jesus has come back from the dead and shed his peaceful light on humanity. This is the Light we had been hoping for.

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. With joy, let us keep the feast!

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## **A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope**



### **LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE FAITHFUL FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2020**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The month of May is approaching, a time when the People of God express with particular intensity their love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is traditional in this month to pray the

Rosary at home within the family. The restrictions of the pandemic have made us come to appreciate all the more this "family" aspect, also from a spiritual point of view.

For this reason, I want to encourage everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May. This can be done either as a group or individually; you can decide according to your own situations, making the most of both opportunities. The key to doing this is always simplicity, and it is easy also on the internet to find good models of prayers to follow.

I am also providing two prayers to Our Lady that you can recite at the end of the Rosary, and that I myself will pray in the month of May, in spiritual union with all of you. I include them with this letter so that they are available to everyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, contemplating the face of Christ with the heart of Mary our Mother will make us even more united as a spiritual family and will help us overcome this time of trial. I keep all of you in my prayers, especially those suffering most greatly, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. I thank you, and with great affection, I send you my blessing.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 25 April 2020 | Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist

Pope Francis

**✠ First Prayer ✠**

O Mary,  
You shine continuously on our journey  
as a sign of salvation and hope.  
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,  
who, at the foot of the cross,  
were united with Jesus' suffering,  
and persevered in your faith.

to conform ourselves to the will of the Father  
and to do what Jesus tells us.  
For he took upon himself our suffering,  
and burdened himself with our sorrows  
to bring us, through the cross,  
to the joy of the Resurrection.  
Amen.

“Protectress of the Roman people”,  
you know our needs,  
and we know that you will provide,  
so that, as at Cana in Galilee,  
joy and celebration may return  
after this time of trial.

We fly to your protection,  
O Holy Mother of God;  
Do not despise our petitions  
in our necessities,  
but deliver us always  
from every danger,  
O Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,

**✠ Second Prayer ✠**

“We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God”.

In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of

*the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.*

*Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.*

*Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.*

*Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.*

*Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus.*

*Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.*

*Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.*

*Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.*

*Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.*

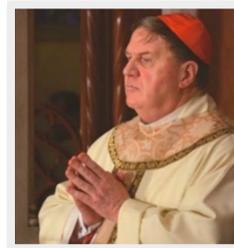
*To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.*

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## **My Prayer for You: A Spiritual Communion**

Mary, Mother of the Church, we reconsecrate our nation to you. Make us a people who care deeply for one another and for all those who come to our borders—as our ancestors did—seeking better lives for themselves and their families. Help us to cast off selfish indifference and to open our hearts to the needs of all our neighbors here at home and throughout the world. †



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