

Rejoice in the Lord

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

Missionary Discipleship in a Time of Pandemic



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As Pope Francis has taught us, by virtue of our baptism we are all called to be *both* disciples *and* missionaries. Our Church is a community of missionary disciples of Jesus Christ who have been sent out “to the whole world” to proclaim the Good News, to share what we believe, and to serve all our sisters and brothers, especially the poor and vulnerable.

All of us—whatever our particular vocations—are companions on a journey, called to play an active role in our Church’s ministry because we all share in the one priesthood of Christ and because we have each received various gifts and talents (charisms) from the Holy Spirit to contribute to the common good of all.

This missionary vocation remains in force even when the world is effectively shut down because of a pandemic like COVID-19. Even when travel is severely restricted and we are required to keep a safe distance from others, we are still required to “go out to the whole world” in our prayers and in whatever ways are available to us. We remain missionary disciples even under quasi-quarantine.

As we witnessed dramatically when the coronavirus pandemic forced us to suspend public gatherings, including the Mass and other sacraments, and to practice “social distancing,” we *can* find new ways to carry out our Church’s mission. Using all the communications instruments at our disposal, we *can*, and *must*, continue to be the face of Jesus to all our brothers and sisters here in northern New Jersey and throughout the whole world.

Our archdiocese is incredibly diverse. In our four counties, we have some of the wealthiest and poorest people in the country. Members of our archdiocesan family converse in more than two dozen different languages. We are rich in our cultural diversity at the same time that we share a common love for our faith, our families, and our freedom and dignity as women and men created in God’s image.

As a Catholic community, we welcome newcomers, including people who choose to join our Church through participation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and those who come to us from different countries and cultures with diverse customs, devotions, and points of view on

Church life. Here in New Jersey, we clearly are an immigrant Church – both because of our history and because of our current reality – and we stand solidly with those who are new to our community because we recognize their dignity and their basic human rights as members of God’s family.

Before the pandemic hit, we had already announced an action plan called **Forward in Faith Together: Our Road Ahead**, which features a multi-level approach to what Pope Francis calls “pastoral conversion.” Much more than simply “restructuring,” pastoral conversion calls us to make the joy of the Gospel a reality that permeates all our church structures and activities, bringing them into close alignment with the evangelizing mission of our Church.

I believe that pastoral conversion can lead us forward in faith together by helping us to:

- Listen as a community to what the Holy Spirit is saying to our Church through the Word of God which resonates in our current situation and interpret the signs of the times with the eyes of faith.
- Create a pastoral culture that respects the diversity of gifts while always looking for the unifying principle that sustains us as one Body of Christ.
- Be critical of the wider social environment and avoid an unconscious appropriation of values that are antithetical to the Gospel, not to condemn the world but to transform it.
- Continually discern what is essential to the Church’s mission while regarding questions about resources (personnel, facilities and money) as important but secondary.

The pastoral planning process that is currently underway in our Archdiocese invites all members of our family of faith to help identify priorities for ministry at the parish and archdiocesan levels. I am eager to see the results of this effort because I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit is working with us—opening doors for us and helping us discern God’s will for our local church. Much work still remains to be done, but I want to affirm that my vision for the future demands more than lofty ideas or comforting words. Action and change are underway!

Gathered and Sent by Jesus

As Christians, we are called to be women and men who gather around our Lord (cf. Mk 3:14), listening to his Word, encountering him in prayer and the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and serving him in “the least of these” our brothers and sisters. We are also ambassadors of Christ who have been sent out “to the ends of the earth” to proclaim the Good News, teach the faith and minister to all who are in need.

Gathering and *Being Sent* are the hallmarks of Christian discipleship. Both require that we let go of self-seeking and become willing to find ourselves in God and in our neighbor. Both require that we accept our role as pilgrims who travel together on a journey that often forces us to abandon our comfort zones and embrace new and uncertain realities along the way.



In fact, “pilgrimage” is an image used in most of the great religious traditions throughout human history and even in some secular cultures. Christians embrace the concept of being sent on a journey as pilgrims, but we also believe that it’s essential that we first gather around our Lord to receive his instruction, his nourishment and his blessing before we set out as missionaries who will be the face of Jesus to all we meet.

As he sends us out, Jesus tells us to “travel light.” We are not to be weighed down by material things—or by earthly cares and anxieties. We take with us the Holy Spirit who gives us everything we need to carry on Christ’s work. And when we return to him after a long and arduous journey, Jesus welcomes us with open arms. He replenishes our weary spirits and renews us by the power of his love.

Pope Francis continually reminds us that the Church’s ministry must always be grounded in prayer. “It is important for us to regain our confidence that by the power of God and our cooperation with Him, we can face and meet any challenges.” The Holy Father also tells us all—beginning with those of us who are bishops—that “prayer is not a devotion but a necessity; it is not one task among many, but an indispensable ministry of intercession” (Pope Francis, Audience with participants in a seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, September 8, 2018). Each day all of us should place ourselves—our joys, hopes, dreams, problems, fears and troubles of every kind—before God in prayer. God is close to us. He hears us, and He always responds to our prayers whether we realize it or not.

In addition to being people of prayer, we are called to share the joy of the Gospel with everyone we meet—here at home and in distant lands. Pope Francis challenges us to be “a Church that goes forth” rather than one that is turned inward where everything is familiar and comfortable. By turning outward, away from our own needs, we can proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in our actions as well as our words. We can be the face of Jesus to everyone we meet.

This is especially important in the circumstances we find ourselves in today. The temptation is to circle the wagons and protect ourselves from all outside influences. But as Pope Francis reminds us, the sins of selfishness and indifference can be more destructive than any pandemic. If we cut ourselves off from our sisters and brothers (especially those who are most in needs of our help), we become isolated and alone, unable to carry out our missionary vocation.

Even in the worst of times, Jesus never send us out alone. We are always accompanied by the Holy Spirit and by all our sisters and brothers who make up the one Body of Christ. Echoing St. Augustine, Pope Francis says, “The Church needs union, not soloists apart from the choir or exponents of personal battles” (Pope Francis, Address to Bishops from Missionary Territories, September 8, 2018). Our situation can never be accurately described as “just me and God.” We are always in the presence of Christ and the communion of saints—all the living and dead who make up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Pope Francis has asked us to be a Church that is “synodal.” This term originally referred to travelers on the same road, fellow pilgrims who journey together towards a common destination. The Holy Father uses this term to emphasize that we are a community of fellow travelers who listen to one another and who accompany each other on life’s journey. In spite of our differences and disagreements, which are many, we are all seeking the way to happiness and joy. We who have

encountered Jesus, and who have been gathered and sent by him, can help others to know Him as we do if we are synodal people who recognize the face of Jesus in others and who accompany them on the road to life.

Missionary Disciples

During my years of service to my religious community, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists), I had the privilege of visiting with missionaries in more than 70 different countries throughout the world. What I learned in the process was that every missionary is called to 1) love the people he or she serves, 2) respect their traditions, customs and life experiences, 3) help build up local communities and reject all efforts to exploit their natural resources, and 4) be the face of Jesus incarnate in their midst. Where missionaries are able to accomplish these objectives, their ministry flourishes, seeds are planted, and communities survive and grow even in the face of enormous obstacles.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon), Pope Francis calls our attention to the various ways in which our Church must be “incarnational.” The pope insists that “Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world, so that the Bride of Christ can take on a variety of faces that better manifest the inexhaustible riches of God’s grace” (QA #6).

The consistent image used by our Holy Father in this exhortation and throughout his writing and preaching is of “faces.” He has told us that Jesus is the face of mercy, the image of God’s inexhaustible love and forgiveness. He has also reminded us that we are the body of Christ and, therefore,



must show his face to everyone we encounter. Finally, Pope Francis tells us that the Church must let people everywhere see that we recognize in them the face of our Lord. We must be the face of Christ incarnate and, at the same, we must recognize His face in our sisters and brothers everywhere.

This powerful teaching has important implications for our ministry to the people we serve here in northern New Jersey. We are truly a diverse community of faith—56.8% white, 27.6% Hispanic and/or Latino, 19.5% Black or African American, and 10.9% Asian. Do we recognize the face of Christ in each other? Are we sufficiently incarnational in our institutions, structures and pastoral practices? As diverse communities of faith—united in the one Body of Christ, are we ready to accept the challenges and opportunities of genuine pastoral conversion?

Pope Francis dreams of a Church that reflects the face of Jesus whose compassionate love for us takes as many different forms as there are individual men, women and children made in God’s image and likeness. The pope’s vision corresponds to the experience of missionaries in every area

of the globe. It also resonates with the opportunities and challenges we face right here in Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Union counties.

As missionary disciples here in the Archdiocese of Newark, whether we are clergy, consecrated religious or lay faithful, we must 1) love the people we serve, 2) respect their traditions, customs and life experiences, 3) help build up local communities and reject all efforts to exploit our people or their resources, and 4) be the face of Jesus incarnate in their midst. This is the call to be the face of Jesus and, at the same time, to recognize him in the faces of the people we serve.

There is no room for clericalism, elitism or a patronizing attitude in our ministry among the diverse people and cultures and histories of this local church. We are all members of the one Body of Christ and, as I've said before, our differences should enrich us, not divide us.

Forward in Faith Together: Our Road Ahead is the pastoral initiative we are implementing to ensure that we flourish as a community of missionary disciples, companions of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who are committed to recognizing the face of Christ in everyone. The questions we must ask ourselves are: How effectively are we using this new initiative to proclaim the Gospel and care for all God's people here in northern New Jersey? Do we recognize the face of Christ in everyone we serve—whether here at home or far away? Are we sufficiently incarnational in our institutions, structures and pastoral practices?

Mary, Sure Guide and Support for the Journey

When it first became clear that the coronavirus pandemic was having a devastating effect on the health and well-being of people in all regions of the world including our four counties of northern New Jersey, Catholics everywhere turned to our Blessed Mother Mary for inspiration and hope. One of Pope Francis's first prayers was to Our Lady, Health of the Sick, in which he used the words of an ancient prayer, *Sub tuum praesidium*, actually the oldest hymn to Mary, the Mother of God, to implore her protection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith.

You know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

"We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen"

As missionary disciples, we rightly turn to Mary our mother to encourage and guide us on our journey of faith, hope and love. Mary is the one who said "yes" to God's will for her even when she couldn't comprehend its meaning or fully anticipate what it would require of her. Mary was the first missionary disciple. From her first journey to "the hill country" to visit her cousin Elizabeth, to the

trip with Joseph to Bethlehem, to the flight into Egypt to avoid Herod's mad cruelty, Mary went wherever she was sent by God.

Mary also gathered with others—standing at the foot of the Cross, gathering with the disciples after her Son's resurrection and waiting with them for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mary is both a fellow traveler and a sure guide and support during our pilgrimage to our heavenly homeland. With confidence in her closeness to us, her children, let's turn to her now and always to seek refuge under her protection and care.

Worldwide crisis has reminded us that we are not self-sufficient. We are totally depended on the grace and mercy of a loving and all-powerful God. And we are all in this together.

As missionary disciples, even in "lockdown," we are called to proclaim our salvation and our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ to all our brothers and sisters here in northern New Jersey and throughout the world. The time for "fraternity, hospitality and solidarity" is now.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



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

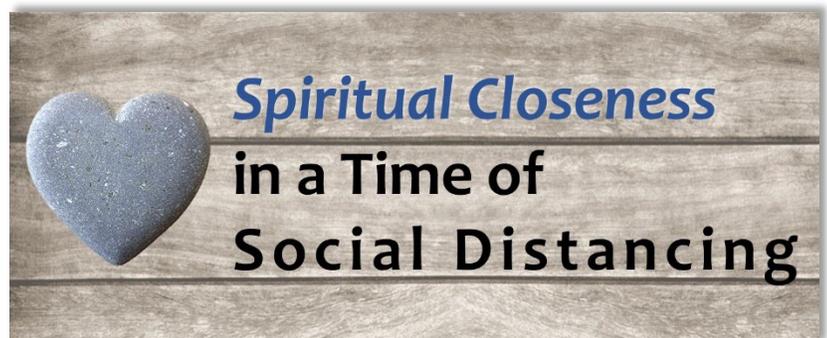
Spiritual Closeness in a Time of Social Distancing: Seven Suggestions

A Message from Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R. | April 1, 2020

As Christians, we encounter Jesus in his people—our families and friends, our neighbors and fellow parishioners, our co-workers and school mates, even people we don't know personally (strangers) who we come in contact with as we go about our daily lives. Jesus tells us that we find him in the "least of these" brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25: 31-46), so being close to them means being close to him.

During this unprecedented time of pandemic, we need to be especially concerned about those who are experiencing intense anxiety, feel lonely and abandoned, and who really count on public worship for their own support. We also should be concerned about how the spiritual lives of our people will be impacted by the drastic changes we are all experiencing for the first time in our lives. The Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass are so central to our Church that their absence is really felt deeply by us.

"Social distancing" is necessary for the common good, but we need to counter this with a dramatic increase in what Pope Francis calls "spiritual closeness." How can we stay close to Jesus, and all our sisters and brothers, at a time when concern for them demands that we keep



our distance? How can we remain spiritually close at the same time that we practice social distancing?

Here are some simple suggestions for staying close spiritually while maintaining a safe and respectful social distance:

1. Begin each day with prayer. Ask Jesus to stay close to you and to all your family and friends. Pray for the health and well-being of everyone you associate with, and of all God's people throughout the world.
2. Express your love and concern for the people you live with—your spouse, children, other relatives or friends. Comfort and encourage them when they are frightened and feeling closed-in or helpless.
3. Reach out to other family members, friends and colleagues by telephone, texting, email and other forms of social media. Let them know that you are close to them and that you share their experiences and anxiety.
4. Attend Mass and other prayers and devotions virtually. Many opportunities are available each day on television, radio and online. Participation in the life of the Church can help us feel more closely connected with God and with each other. Make a spiritual communion.
5. As you go about your daily business—working remotely, studying at home, doing spring cleaning, caring for children or family members, preparing dinner, doing the laundry, and more—look for opportunities to offer up your activities to God in gratitude for his closeness to you.
6. To the extent that you can, share your financial resources with those in need. Online giving is available for most religious, educational and charitable organizations, but if that's not an option for you, you can write a check and mail it, or set aside some cash to give to someone in need once the current stay at home order has been lifted.
7. Be patient with yourself and those you love. This is a strange and difficult time for all of us. Frustration and anger are understandable reactions. We need to help each other remain calm and trust in the healing power of Jesus who is close to us—now and always.

As Archbishop of Newark, I pray for the unity and solidarity of our people (clergy, religious, and laity) and I long for a Church that is one with the poor, especially immigrants; that is bold and enthusiastic in its proclamation of the Gospel; and that eagerly and consistently passes on the faith to future generations, especially those children and youth who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

I foresee a future where lay people are fully engaged in the life of our Archdiocese at all levels – and where young adults play a direct and decisive role in our worship, our faith formation, and our service to those in need. I see priests united with one another and with the people they serve. I see deacons, consecrated women and men, and lay people who feel empowered and

included in their respective roles and responsibilities for building up the Body of Christ here in northern New Jersey.

My vision for our Archdiocese is one of genuine unity and solidarity in Christ. Our differences should enrich our Church, not divide it. The challenges we face – which are many – should bring us closer together and allow the Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom, courage, perseverance, hope, and generosity that we need to be successful as missionary disciples.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope Solidarity, Fraternity and Hospitality



In his extraordinary message “to the city and the world” during the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis said:

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity.

By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope. (Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Message, March 28, 2020).

My Prayer for You

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.
(*Sub tuum praesidium*)

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

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