



Rejoice in the Lord

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

Archbishop of Newark

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Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy

The Second Vatican Council taught that Lent has a twofold character: 1) It recalls our baptism and the universal call to holiness, and 2) it stresses the fact that in order to experience the joy of eternal life with God (symbolized by the joy of Easter), we must suffer and, eventually, we must die. The penitential season of Lent is designed to prepare us for great joy. It is not a gloomy or depressing season, but it is a time of sober reflection intended to help us get ready for what Pope Francis calls “an experience of closeness to the Lord who in the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection indicates the royal road which gives meaning to pain and loneliness.”

Lent is the season of mercy. It's a time when the Church reminds us that no sin—no matter how grievous—can permanently separate us from the love of God if we truly repent and seek the forgiveness of the One who is ever-merciful.

In his 2015 “papal bull” titled *Misericordie Vultus* (The Face of Mercy), Pope Francis urges us to seek and find “a genuine experience of God's mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed.”

Pope Francis tells us that:

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God (*Misericordie Vultus*, #1).

We are not asked to pretend that our sins are “no big deal” just as we do not deny that we will one day die and return to dust. Sin is horrible, an offense against heaven and earth, and justice demands that we atone for our sins and accept the punishment we deserve. And yet, God is free to intervene

in our lives and to wipe away the consequences of our selfishness and sin simply because he loves us and desires that we be happy with him forever. Yes, our God is just, but our faith tells us that God's mercy transforms our notions of justice—allowing us, as Pope Francis teaches, “to be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of his forgiveness.”

What a powerful Lenten image! The more we seek God's forgiveness, the more we experience his closeness. And no matter how seriously we have sinned, nothing can prevent us from being touched in a tangible way by the amazing grace that alone frees us from the negative effects of our sin!

What can we do to prepare for this genuine experience of God's mercy? Allow our loving father to come close to us. Speak with him in prayer. Open our hearts to him in the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist. Observe the Lenten practices of fast and abstinence. Perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Lent is truly a time of grace and, as Pope Francis says, an opportunity to let the mercy of God “become visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us.” This Lent let's ask God to open our hearts and, so, allow him to come close to us!

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



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

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Ash Wednesday Homily
St. Patrick Pro-Cathedral – Newark NJ
February 17, 2021

We made it! I wasn't sure that we would get to this blessed moment, but here we are! Ash Wednesday... a new beginning... the first step in the journey of Lent. I don't know what you are thinking, but I believe we need Lent this year more than ever.

The Word of God agrees with the urgency and the relief that is offered as we begin this journey. Even now, says the LORD... return to me with your whole heart, proclaims the opening salvo of the First Reading. Paul agrees, explaining why today is crucial; it's as plain as the nose on your face: Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation! Maybe our exhausted hearts mutter, Really?

The last year has been one of loss. We have lost jobs and school and money. We have gone without hugs, holidays and handshakes, grandparents, graduations, and get-togethers. Most tragically, we have lost hundreds of thousands of lives — many of us have lost some of our closest and most beloved companions on life's journey — without being able to say good-bye as we ached to do.

The season of Lent gives us space to reflect in a new way on the suffering that has resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. The traditions of prayer and fasting and almsgiving help us to unite our own suffering with the suffering of Christ. But after a year in which we have already given up so much, one could be forgiven for asking: haven't we been forced to give up enough?

I think a lot of you have given up enough this year, in terms of lives, health and money. In fact, I can't think of another year in which so many have sacrificed so much in so many places. God always welcomes our sacrifices, if they are done out of reverence for God and a desire to demonstrate a change of heart, a conversion. But this Lent, God might be just as happy if we spent more time in prayer — one-on-one time with God.

What would you pray about? One possibility would be to commit 10-15 minutes each day to praying from a personal gratitude list. A quarter of an hour each day to focus on simply being thankful. Every day, why not think of three things that you're grateful for? Call them to mind, cherish them and thank God for them. Even amid a pandemic, in the face of personal stress and –yes – especially during the season of Lent, God is offering you love, mercy and compassion every day. Take time to notice it. And let your heart swell in gratitude.

For this Lent, the usual practices may not seem to apply, since so much has been involuntarily “given up.” We could begin praying with gratitude and still ask for something more. When Pope John Paul I (Albino Luciani) was a boy, his mother taught him this prayer, which he carried with him for the rest of his life: “Lord, take me as I am, with my faults and with my sins, but make me become as you wish.” Perhaps we could make this our prayer as well. Repentance is not simply saying “sorry;” it is a willingness to allow God to remake us. Our faults are offered up to God along with the good that we do. We may not know where our efforts lead, but we can trust God will make something beautiful out of them.

Lent in the time of pandemic necessarily begins with a sacrifice. None of us will leave church today with foreheads emblazoned with the smear of a black cross. Still, the ashes sprinkled softly on our heads are a sign of a new beginning and invite us to think about the hidden ways we pray and the public ways we live out our faith.

Maybe that is appropriate. Much of what was considered private or personal has become public over the last year, like the view behind us in a zoom call, or the other members of our household, including pets, who enter the frame. Much more of what was once public has become more private in the last year: lunches during the workday, liturgies now seen on livestream in the living room, conferences retooled as webinars, gatherings of friends reduced to one-on-one phone calls or walks outside.

We have all become more acquainted with solitude, and perhaps with some of the ways we need to personally practice turning towards God and asking for mercy. This Ash Wednesday, as we begin again, we are invited to reflect on how God reveals God's self in solitude and in small, almost hidden ways. How would you like to start again this Lent? How would you like to practice turning towards God in your daily life and relationships?

Even now, even today is the acceptable time. Now is the time of salvation.



Dispensation from the obligation to abstain from meat on Friday, March 19, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph
March 2, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

One of the obligations imposed upon all of us during the season of Lent is the observance of abstinence from eating meat on all Fridays of Lent, as well as on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday. The law on abstinence binds all those who have attained the age of fourteen.

Every year our Lenten austerity is interrupted by one or two solemnities, feast days of the highest rank that celebrate a mystery of faith such as the Trinity, an event in the life of Jesus, his mother Mary, or another important saint. The Solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is commemorated on March 19th and, this year, that celebration falls on a Friday. What is more, last December, Pope Francis announced a special "Year of St. Joseph" to be celebrated from December 8, 2020, to December 8, 2021.

Some of the faithful have asked me to dispense the Archdiocese from abstinence from meat on Friday, March 19, 2021. I am happy to grant that dispensation to all as part of the celebration of this Solemnity during the Year of St. Joseph.

A most fitting way to celebrate the Solemnity is a festive meal with your household and a gift to one of our food pantries or soup kitchens to ensure that the poor will eat as well.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph W. Tobin, C.S.S.R.", written in a cursive style.

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

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Lent: A Time for Renewing Faith, Hope and Love

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus revealed to his disciples the deepest meaning of his mission when he told them of his passion, death and resurrection, in fulfillment of the Father's will. He then called the disciples to share in this mission for the salvation of the world. In our Lenten journey towards Easter, let us remember the One

who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).



During this season of conversion, let us renew our faith, draw from the "living water" of hope, and receive with open hearts the love of God, who makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. At the Easter vigil, we will renew our baptismal promises and experience rebirth as new men and women by the working of the Holy Spirit.

This Lenten journey, like the entire pilgrimage of the Christian life, is even now illumined by the light of the resurrection, which inspires the thoughts, attitudes and decisions of the followers of Christ. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving, as preached by Jesus (cf. Mt 6:1-18), enable and express our conversion. The path of poverty and self-denial (fasting), concern and loving care for the poor (almsgiving), and childlike dialogue with the Father (prayer) make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity.

1. Faith calls us to accept the truth and testify to it before God and all our brothers and sisters.

In this Lenten season, accepting and living the truth revealed in Christ means, first of all, opening our hearts to God's word, which the Church passes on from generation to generation. This truth is not an abstract concept reserved for a chosen intelligent few. Instead, it is a message that all of us can receive and understand thanks to the wisdom of a heart open to the grandeur of God, who loves us even before we are aware of it. Christ himself is this truth. By taking on our humanity, even to its very limits, he has made himself the way – demanding, yet open to all – that leads to the fullness of life.

Fasting, experienced as a form of self-denial, helps those who undertake it in simplicity of heart to rediscover God's gift and to recognize that, created in his image and likeness, we find our fulfillment in him. In embracing the experience of poverty, those who fast make themselves poor with the poor and accumulate the treasure of a love both received and shared. In this way, fasting helps us to love God and our neighbor, inasmuch as love, as Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches, is a

movement outwards that focuses our attention on others and considers them as one with ourselves (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 93).

Lent is a time for believing, for welcoming God into our lives and allowing him to “make his dwelling” among us (cf. Jn [14:23](#)). Fasting involves being freed from all that weighs us down – like consumerism or an excess of information, whether true or false – in order to open the doors of our hearts to the One who comes to us, poor in all things, yet “full of grace and truth” (Jn [1:14](#)): the Son of God our Savior.

2. Hope as “living water” enabling us to continue our journey.

The Samaritan woman at the well, whom Jesus asks for a drink, does not understand what he means when he says that he can offer her “living water” (Jn [4:10](#)). Naturally, she thinks that he is referring to material water, but Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit whom he will give in abundance through the paschal mystery, bestowing a hope that does not disappoint. Jesus had already spoken of this hope when, in telling of his passion and death, he said that he would “be raised on the third day” (Mt [20:19](#)). Jesus was speaking of the future opened up by the Father’s mercy. Hoping with him and because of him means believing that history does not end with our mistakes, our violence and injustice, or the sin that crucifies Love. It means receiving from his open heart the Father’s forgiveness. In these times of trouble, when everything seems fragile and uncertain, it may appear challenging to speak of hope.

Yet Lent is precisely the season of hope, when we turn back to God who patiently continues to care for his creation which we have often mistreated (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 32-33; 43-44). Saint Paul urges us to place our hope in reconciliation: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor [5:20](#)). By receiving forgiveness in the sacrament that lies at the heart of our process of conversion, we in turn can spread forgiveness to others. Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and to give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain. God’s forgiveness, offered also through our words and actions, enables us to experience an Easter of fraternity.

In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with “speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 223). In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be “willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference” (*ibid.*, 224).

Through recollection and silent prayer, hope is given to us as inspiration and interior light, illuminating the challenges and choices we face in our mission. Hence the need to pray (cf. Mt 6:6) and, in secret, to encounter the Father of tender love.

To experience Lent in hope entails growing in the realization that, in Jesus Christ, we are witnesses of new times, in which God is “making all things new” (cf. Rev 21:1-6). It means receiving the hope of Christ, who gave his life on the cross and was raised by God on the third day, and always being “prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls [us] to account for the hope that is in [us]” (1 Pet [3:15](#)).

3. Love, following in the footsteps of Christ, in concern and compassion for all, is the highest expression of our faith and hope.

Love rejoices in seeing others grow. Hence it suffers when others are anguished, lonely, sick, homeless, despised or in need. Love is a leap of the heart; it brings us out of ourselves and creates bonds of sharing and communion. “Social love makes it possible to advance towards a civilization of love, to which all of us can feel called. With its impulse to universality, love is capable of building a new world. No mere sentiment, it is the best means of discovering effective paths of development for everyone” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 183).

Love is a gift that gives meaning to our lives. It enables us to view those in need as members of our own family, as friends, brothers or sisters. A small amount, if given with love, never ends, but becomes a source of life and happiness.

Such was the case with the jar of meal and jug of oil of the widow of Zarephath, who offered a cake of bread to the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 17:7-16); it was also the case with the loaves blessed, broken and given by Jesus to the disciples to distribute to the crowd (cf. Mk 6:30-44). Such is the case too with our almsgiving, whether small or large, when offered with joy and simplicity.

To experience Lent with love means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned and fearful because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these days of deep uncertainty about the future, let us keep in mind the Lord’s word to his Servant, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you” (Is 43:1). In our charity, may we speak words of reassurance and help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.

“Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 187).

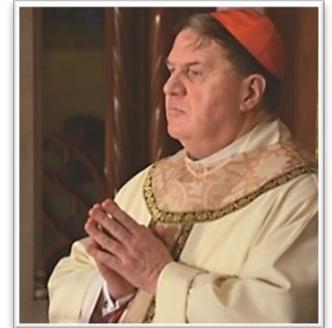
Dear brothers and sisters, every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving. The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father.

May Mary, Mother of the Savior, ever faithful at the foot of the cross and in the heart of the Church, sustain us with her loving presence. May the blessing of the risen Lord accompany all of us on our journey towards the light of Easter.

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2021, Rome, Saint John Lateran, 11 November 2020, the Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours

My Prayer for You

During this holy season of Lent, create a clean heart in us, Lord. Help us to seek your love and mercy in the Sacrament of Penance and through our observance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. May our faith in You sustain us through all the hardships we must endure in this time of pandemic, social unrest and economic difficulties. Help us to cast all our anxieties onto You, Lord. We know that you will care for us and that you will protect us from every harm.



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

