

REJOICE in the LORD

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The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary affirms our belief in the resurrection of Jesus and anticipates the resurrection of all members of His Body

Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #966).

When we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Sunday, August 15, we are offering to Mary the highest possible form of veneration. We proclaim that our belief in the resurrection of the dead on the last day is not simply a profound hope. It is a reality that has already taken place in the life of Mary, the Mother of God and our mother.

When the dogma of the Assumption was promulgated in 1950, its whole purpose, clearly stated in the text of the proclamation, was “for the honor of the Son, for the glorification of the mother, and for the joy of the entire Church.” We who are the Church rejoice in Mary’s bodily assumption into heaven because it affirms our belief in the resurrection of Jesus and it anticipates the resurrection of all members of His Body. In other words, Mary confirms one of our deepest longings—to be united (body and soul) in heaven with God and with all those who have died and gone before us.

Pope Francis echoed this joyful belief in his Angelus message last year when he said: “The Madonna has set foot in paradise: she went there not only in spirit, but with her body as well, with all of herself. This step of the lowly Virgin of Nazareth was the huge leap forward for humanity.” We rejoice because we see ourselves, and our future happiness, in Mary. This simple, faith-filled woman has accomplished what no human being has even come close to experiencing. By the power of God’s grace, she has bypassed the bodily corruption of sin and death and, as a result, she lives with her Son Jesus, the source of all Life, in heavenly bliss for all eternity.

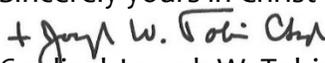
Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has written that joy is source of all Marian devotion. Even when we turn to her in our sorrow and distress, even when we implore her assistance in the face of evil and death itself, Mary’s response (her Magnificat) assures us that we are in God’s hands and, ultimately, all will be well. As our retired pope writes in “Daughter of Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief”:

Transcending all problems, Marian devotion is the rapture of joy over the true, indestructible Israel; it is a blissful entering into the joy of the Magnificat and thereby it is the praise of him to whom the daughter of Zion owes her whole self and whom she bears, the true incorruptible, indestructible Ark of the Covenant.

Mary reveals to us what we will be when, by the grace of God, we are raised from dead and take on the incorruptible body that will be ours for all eternity in the joy of heaven.

Nearly 18 months ago, when COVID-19 first began to inflict so much illness and death, so much economic hardship and social unrest, here in northern New Jersey and throughout the world, I began to ask our Blessed Mother at least once each day for her intercession. Mary never disappoints. She is always tender, loving and present to us, especially in our time of need. Mary is our hope, the sure sign that we are in God's hands and, in the end, all will be well.

Let's ask our Mother to stay close to us—now and at the hour of our death; to inspire us with her compassion, her courage and her hope; and above all to share with us her joy in the resurrection of her Son, and, on the last day, the joy-filled resurrection of all members of His Body.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

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

Eucharist document should unite, not divide, the church, panelists advise

Dennis Sadowski | Catholic News Service July 29, 2021

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in the middle of drafting a teaching document on the Eucharist, received words of advice from a panel convened July 28 to discuss the challenges facing the American church as it emerges from the coronavirus pandemic and seeks to overcome divisions that threaten church unity.

They heard about the importance of bishops being pastors rather than “chaplains to factions,” the need to communicate church teaching clearly and without fear, and hearing from as many voices as possible in the weeks remaining before they consider the document during their fall general assembly in November.

The 75-minute discussion left Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, with ideas to share with the document's drafters working to strengthen the foundation of the Eucharist being the source and summit of Catholic life.



Elevation of the Eucharist is depicted in a stained-glass window at St. Anthony's Church in North Beach, Md., July 15, 2021. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Bishop Rhoades is chairman of the bishops' Committee on Doctrine, which is charged with drafting the document.

He acknowledged the path ahead poses challenges, but it is one the doctrine committee is prepared to address.

“The goal of the document is to contribute to the eucharistic revival,” he said, recapping the USCCB strategic plan for 2021-2024 that is focused on the Eucharist being the foundation of Christian life.

“We’re striving to write a document that will contribute to a real eucharistic revival in the church in our nation by highlighting the truth about the amazing gift that Jesus gave on the night before he died, the importance of beauty and reverence in our celebration of this great mystery, and the wonderful graces that we receive in the Eucharist to grow in our Christian lives,” he explained.

While the document will include a section focused on eucharistic coherence, the church’s teaching on the reception of Communion, there is no plan to adopt a national policy to prohibit anyone from receiving the Eucharist, the bishop said.

It’s a statement Bishop Rhoades has repeated several times since the bishops’ virtual spring general assembly in June during which the bishops approved drafting the document. In the vote, 75% of the bishops said “yes,” while 25% said “no.”

During long discussions on the document before the vote, several bishops specifically pointed to President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who are Catholic, for not actively seeking to end legal abortion and called for them to be denied Communion.

Work has begun on sections of the document that pertain to church teaching while the section on eucharistic coherence will not be drafted until after a series of regional meetings among the bishops concludes by the end of August, Bishop Rhoades said.



As the drafting process continues, the USCCB’s actions related to the Eucharist are being watched around the world, said panelist Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey. “The Eucharist is on everyone’s mind,” he said.

Cardinal Tobin was one of the minority of prelates who voted against drafting the document at the current time. “Having the bishops on a Zoom call is not an opportunity for discernment,” he said

He called on the bishops to take up Pope Francis' call to synodality to discuss and hear from many voices before reaching consensus on the issues and concerns facing the church.

The pandemic has left people separated from the Eucharist and Cardinal Tobin suggested that the bishops reach out and welcome people back to the church rather than restrict participation in church life.

The debate that showcased the wide disagreements among the bishops on drafting the document should not be one that causes the bishops to fear developing a document that stresses church teaching, explained panelist Gretchen Crowe, editorial director for periodicals at Our Sunday Visitor in Indiana.

The OSV Newsweekly published an editorial supporting the vote to draft the document. Explaining the reasoning behind the editorial, Crowe said it is vital for Catholics to better know church teaching on the Real Presence in the Eucharist.

“In my mind, a fear of division or a fear of anything else really, never should prevent the church from teaching what it professes about anything, much less what it teaches about the real presence (of) Jesus Christ in the Eucharist,” Crowe said.

However, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly, editor-at-large at Commonweal magazine, expressed concern that a document on the Eucharist would bolster an apparent connection the Catholic bishops have with the Republican Party.

She questioned why some bishops have been so outspoken against Biden, the nation's second Catholic president, when they failed to be as vocal about the transgressions of former President Donald Trump's policies that also endangered lives.

Saying she agreed that Democratic politicians should be “pushed” for their support of abortion, Wilson O'Reilly said she believed that Catholics would flee in greater numbers because the document on the Eucharist will be perceived as political rather than genuine teaching.

Panelist John Carr, co-director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, which sponsored the panel, credited Bishop Rhoades for taking on a most difficult task in a time of divisiveness among the bishops and within the church.

“It's important to be candid about the differences here,” said Carr, who formerly was executive director of the bishops' Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development. “How did the Eucharist, which is the sign of unity at our parish and our lives and in our church, somehow become the thing we fight about in terms of politics? It seems to me like we've gotten ourselves in a terrible place.”

Carr said he disagrees with the bishops' decision to move forward on the document.

“The pastoral dimensions are really serious,” he said. “This is terrible timing and, as people have said, in the midst of a pandemic, racial reckoning, let’s have a fight about whether the president ought to be able to receive Communion. Publicly, this showcases our divisions and is a diversion.”

The program opened with a discussion between Archbishop Christophe Pierre, papal nuncio to the United States, and Kim Daniels, co-director of the Georgetown initiative. The archbishop recapped what he told the U.S. bishops during their spring general assembly in June.

The diplomat said in the discussion recorded July 27 that he had stressed that any work the conference undertakes must be rooted in synodality, as Pope Francis has invited the church to do. Synodality allows for discerning a path forward through thoughtful and respectful conversation that allows diverse voices to be heard and overcome misunderstanding, he said.

He also called on the bishops to remember that they are teachers and that the pope has invited them to teach about the sacraments “so we can receive the grace of God.” He also cautioned about the “instrumentalization” of the sacrament of the Eucharist lest it become a tool for ideologies to overtake.

“The sacraments of salvation are to be administered often to the people,” he said. “As such the church should remain united.”

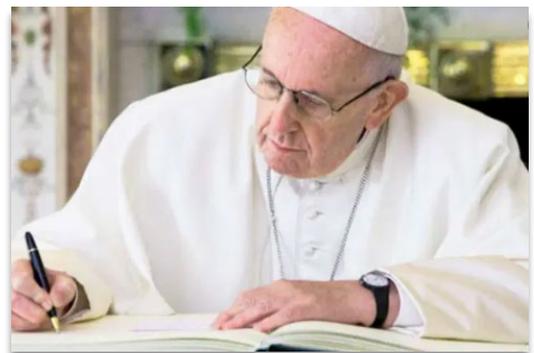
Cardinal Tobin also called for synodality to be part of the bishops’ process as the document is drafted.

“What we need is a broader consultation with the American church on the mystery of the Eucharist, and not one, like or not, that is perceived as a political action,” Cardinal Tobin said. “We have a perfect invitation from the Holy Father to adopt a more synodal church, people who are talking together as we walk the same road.”

(Source: <https://www.catholicnews.com/eucharist-document-should-unite-not-divide-the-church-panelists-advise/>)

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

When man set foot on the moon, he said a phrase that became famous: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. In essence, humanity had reached a historical goal. But today, in Mary’s Assumption into Heaven, we celebrate an infinitely greater conquest. The Madonna has set foot in paradise: she went there not only in spirit, but with her body as well, with all of herself. This step of the lowly Virgin of Nazareth was the huge leap forward for humanity. Going to the moon serves us little if we do not live as brothers and sisters on Earth. But that one of us dwells in the flesh in Heaven gives us hope: we understand that we are precious, destined to rise again.



God does not allow our bodies to vanish into nothing. With God, nothing is lost! In Mary, the goal has been reached and we have before our eyes the reasons why we journey: not to gain the things here below, which vanish, but to achieve the homeland above, which is forever. And Our Lady is the star that guides us. She went there first. She, as the Council teaches, shines “as a sign of sure hope and solace to the People of God during its sojourn on earth” (Lumen gentium, 68).

What does our Mother advise us? Today in the Gospel the first thing she says is: “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46). Accustomed to hearing these words, perhaps we no longer pay attention to their meaning, perhaps we no longer pay attention to their meaning. To “magnify” literally means “to make great”, to enlarge. Mary “aggrandises the Lord”: not problems, which she did not lack at the time, but the Lord. How often, instead, we let ourselves be overwhelmed by difficulties and absorbed by fears! Our Lady does not, because she puts God as the first greatness of life.

From here the Magnificat springs forth, from here joy is born: not from the absence of problems, which come sooner or later, but joy is born from the presence of God who helps us, who is near us. Because God is great. And, above all, God looks on the lowly ones. We are His weakness of love: God looks on and loves the lowly.

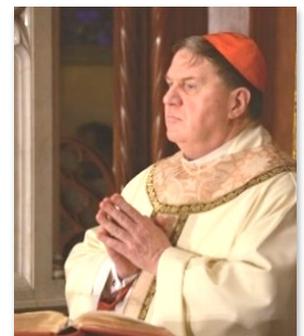
Mary, in fact, acknowledges that she is small and exalts the “great things” (v. 49) the Lord has done for her. What are they? First and foremost, the unexpected gift of life: Mary is a virgin yet she becomes pregnant; and Elizabeth, too, who was elderly, is expecting a child. The Lord works wonders with those who are lowly, with those who do not believe that they are great but who give ample space to God in their life. He enlarges His mercy to those who trust in Him, and raises up the humble. Mary praises God for this.

And we - we might ask ourselves - do we remember to praise God? Do we thank Him for the great things He does for us? For every day that He gives us, because He always loves us and forgives us, for His tenderness? In addition, for having given us His Mother, for the brothers and sisters He puts on our path, and because He opened Heaven to us? Do we thank God, praise God for these things? If we forget the good, our hearts shrink. But if, like Mary, we remember the great things that the Lord does, if at least once a day we were to “magnify” Him, then we would take a great step forward. One time during the day to say: “I praise the Lord”, to say, “Blessed be the Lord”, which is a short prayer of praise. This is praising God. With this short prayer, our hearts will expand, joy will increase. Let us ask Our Lady, the Gate of Heaven, for the grace to begin each day by raising our eyes to Heaven, toward God, to say to Him: “Thank you!” as the lowly ones say to the great ones.

(Angelus message for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2020).

My Prayer for You

Blessed Mother Mary, as we prepare to celebrate your glorious Assumption into Heaven on August 15, we turn to you and ask you to teach us how to say, and mean: “Let it be done to me as You say.” You were completely open to God’s will for you. Teach us to follow your example always. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we serve God’s people as faithful missionary disciples totally dedicated to Your Son Jesus. Amen.



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