



REJOICE in the LORD

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

Archbishop of Newark

December 17, 2021. Vol. 3, No. 8



Christmas is a feast of j-o-y

You will meet with joy and gladness; sorrow and mourning will flee. (cf. Is 35:10)

We associate "joy" with Christmas. Do we know what joy is? Have we experienced it lately?

In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, the English writer C. S. Lewis speaks of joy as something very different from pleasure or even happiness. Joy is something deeper, richer and more elusive. It takes us by surprise and affects us profoundly. Joy is the satisfaction of our deepest desires. It is intimately connected to the longing for God that St. Augustine referred to when he wrote that our hearts are restless until they find their ultimate rest in God.

Pope Francis has a similar definition of joy: "To be full of joy is the experience of the highest consolation, when the Lord makes us understand that this is something different from being cheerful, positive, bright...No, it is another thing; it is an overflowing joy that really hits us. Receiving the joy of the Spirit is a grace."

When I was a boy in elementary school, the sisters gave us a very simple—but profound—tool for learning what joy is. They told us that when you spell j-o-y, the "j" stands for Jesus, who should always come first in our lives. The "o" stands for others who come second. And the "y" stands for yourself. Place Jesus first, others second, and yourself last of all, and you will know joy.

Isn't it amazing how these simple teaching devices cut right to the heart of the matter? Volumes of philosophy, theology and spirituality have been written on the concepts of joy and happiness. The nuances they contain are important, I know, for the fullness or accuracy of our understanding, but what the sisters taught is no less profound. If we place Jesus first in our lives, if we think of others before we think of ourselves, we will be surprised by joy!



Jesus Christ is the greatest Christmas gift, the source of all real joy. He is the gift of God the Father, who became one of us in all things but sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. This amazing gift was first given to Mary and then to all of us to save us from the destructive power of sin and death. This is the joy, the fulfillment, of all human desiring. This is what we celebrate at Christmas time—on earth as, I hope, in heaven. This is the time of year when we call to mind most vividly the mystery of the Incarnation and the joy of Christ's birth.

All other Christmas gifts pale in comparison to this one: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:16-17).

On Christmas Day, and throughout this joyous season, we are invited to join with Mary, and all the angels and saints, in a joy-filled festival of happiness and peace. In heaven, there are no tears, no sorrow and no worries about tomorrow.

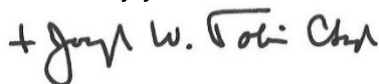
Because heaven is not really a place—a geographic location—but is an experience of loving closeness (communion) with the God who is our hearts' desire, it's hard to imagine what this grand celebration of joy looks like. We use images of music and dancing and sumptuous food because that's what our earthly celebrations are like.

The joy in heaven on Christmas Day cannot be accurately described in earthly words or images, but we believe with all our hearts that those who have gone before us to our heavenly home rejoice on this day. And, as I say above, we hope and pray that this joy will spill over and bring peace on earth—today and always.

Jesus is our j-o-y. When we place Him first, others second and ourselves third, everything falls into proper perspective.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for this marvelous gift of your love. Help us be good stewards of this abundant joy by sharing it generously with others this Christmas season.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph W. Tobin" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin
Archbishop of Newark

A Selection from For a Synodal Church, Preparatory Document, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

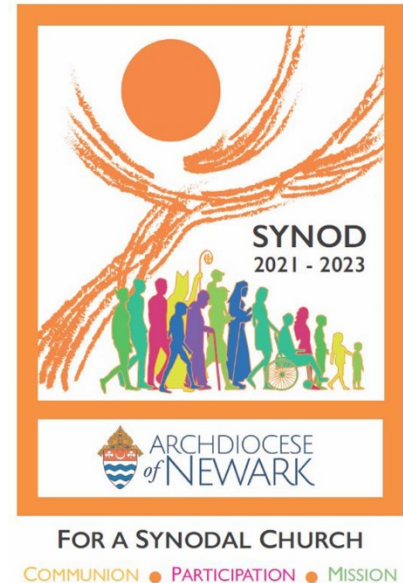
1. The Church of God is convoked in Synod. The path entitled "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission" will solemnly open on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following 17th of October in each particular Church. One fundamental stage will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase that will again involve the particular Churches (cf. EC, arts. 19-21).

With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium." This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. Our "journeying together" is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.

2. A basic question prompts and guides us: How does this "journeying together," which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?

Addressing this question together requires listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind "blows where it will; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (Jn 3:8), remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way. Thus, a dynamism is activated that allows us to begin to reap some of the fruits of a synodal conversion, which will progressively mature. These are objectives of great importance for the quality of ecclesial life and for accomplishing the mission of evangelization, in which we all participate by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. Here, we will indicate the main objectives, which decline synodality as the form, the style, and the structure of the Church:

- recalling how the Spirit has guided the Church's journey through history and, today, calls us to be, together, witnesses of God's love;
- living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God;



- recognizing and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family;
- exploring participatory ways of exercising responsibility in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world;
- examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel;
- accrediting the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship;
- regenerating relationships among members of Christian communities as well as between communities and other social groups, e.g., communities of believers of other denominations and religions, civil society organizations, popular movements, etc.;
- fostering the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of recent synodal experiences on the universal, regional, national, and local levels.

To learn more about Synod 2021-2023, visit www.rcan.org/synod2023 and www.synod.va/en.html.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



The Joy of the Gospel

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept His offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation, I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.

A joy ever new, a joy which is shared

The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and

fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord."^[1] The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways, I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace." How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another "seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22), has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again, he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness that never disappoints but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus; let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

(Selected from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, by Pope Francis)

My Prayer for You

As we continue our observance of Advent and prepare for Christmas, let us pray in the words of the Marian antiphon, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*:

*Loving mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature, you bore your Creator,
yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,
have pity on us, poor sinners.*



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