



Rejoice in the Lord

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

Archbishop of Newark

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Lent is the season for healing

Lent is the time of year when the Church encourages us to do a thorough examination of our spiritual health, and then to take whatever steps are necessary to let the healing power of Jesus make us whole again. The six and a half weeks of Lent provide a structure for diagnosing the symptoms, and the root causes, of our sinfulness. During this special time of year, the Church encourages us to take advantage of the healing power of the sacraments, especially the sacrament of penance, to admit our selfishness and sin (confession), to experience a change of heart (conversion), to deny ourselves (penance) and to change the way we live (performing works of mercy).



In order to be spiritually healthy, we periodically have to examine: 1) the symptoms of sin—our overt sinful actions, 2) the underlying causes of sin—the attitudes and habits of our heart, from which our actions spring, 3) the healing offered by Jesus, and 4) how the healing mission of Jesus is made available to us in the Church through the sacraments and through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

The sacrament of penance is a great gift of God's mercy that is readily available to us in all seasons of the Church's year of grace. Through this great sacrament, we allow Jesus to enter into our hearts and cleanse us of all the impurities—large and small—that have built up over time. We present ourselves to Him for the healing of both our symptoms and their root causes.

The Word of God is crucial for our Lenten journey. Even if we cannot attend daily or Sunday Mass, we should reflect on the readings that the Church proposes to us during Lent by using a Missalette or by accessing the Scripture readings for the day online (see bible.usccb.org).

If we look at the Gospel passages for the weekdays of Lent, they fall easily into two groups. From Ash Wednesday to the Saturday of the Third Week of Lent, we listen exclusively to accounts from Matthew, Mark and Luke that remind us of what Jesus expects of his disciples. It is significant that this first half of Lent ends with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14). The Word of God that has spoken to us for three and a half weeks helps shatter any convictions of our

own righteousness and we find ourselves standing next to the tax collector, asking humbly for mercy. Where can we find it?

The following Monday and for the rest of Lent, the weekday readings are from the Gospel of John. These passages illuminate the mystery of Christ, who is sent “so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3, 16). As we see God’s saving plan unfold in Jesus, we realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

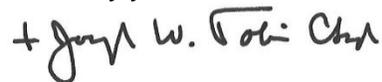
Jesus Christ is the Divine Physician of body and soul. In His Incarnation, Jesus reached out, by word and deed, to heal those with illnesses of the body and sicknesses of the soul. In His passion, death and resurrection, He conquered sin and death and became the source of ultimate healing for all. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus gave the apostles a share in His very life, so that the healing power of His words and deeds might continue to be present to the world through them. And through the sacraments, Jesus Himself continues to be present in every time and place, healing us and drawing us into the communion that He shares with the Father and the Spirit.

During this Lent, this season of healing, I want to remind every baptized Catholic in the Archdiocese of Newark of the great gifts of cleansing and healing that are available to us in the sacrament of penance. Through this great sacrament, the Divine Physician invites us to a healing that brings reconciliation and communion—with God, with each other, and with ourselves in our inmost being.

I sincerely hope that each of us will use this time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to come to know the depth of God’s love for us. And, in a special way, I hope that this Lent will be a time when each of us rediscovers the special healing power that is available to us through the sacrament of penance.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician of our souls and bodies, wants us to be spiritually healthy. He is eager to hear our confession and forgive our sins. Are we ready to let Him?

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, C.Ss.R.

Archbishop of Newark

Returning to Grace: A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist

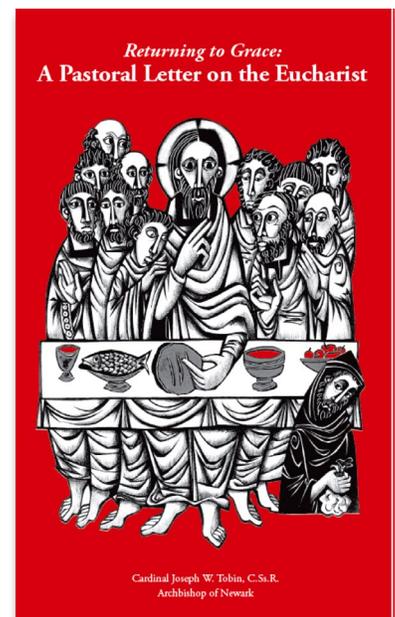
When church historians write about the Year of Our Lord 2020, I predict they will call particular attention to the “Great Eucharistic Fast.” COVID-19, the pandemic that has taken the lives of millions, obliged dioceses throughout the world to take the unprecedented action of closing our churches and effectively denying our people the opportunity to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Some scholars may point out that, as a result, Catholics in Europe and North America experienced what others have suffered for many years due to a shortage of priests or outright persecution, namely, the absence of the sacraments.

Now that there seems to be a light and the end of this long, dark tunnel, many people are asking me if I think there will be long-term effects to separation imposed by the pandemic. As I’m sure you are aware, declining Mass attendance was a serious concern long before the pandemic. Has the current crisis accelerated this trend, or have we grown in our appreciation for the Eucharist precisely because we were denied access to it for so long? Has absence made our hearts grow fonder? When things return to whatever the “new normal” will be, will some of us prefer virtual worship, if we worship at all? Is it time to restore the Sunday obligation and require all Catholics to attend Mass in person every Sunday?

To respond to these, and many other questions, I have written *Returning to Grace: A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist*. I urge you to read this letter and to reflect prayerfully on the issues I identify as I seek to respond to the important questions that pastors and lay faithful in our archdiocese are asking today.

My reflections in *Returning to Grace* include some personal stories, some thoughts shared with us by Pope Francis during this time of pandemic, some ideas about the third commandment—to keep the Lord’s Day holy, and, most importantly, reflections on the wonderful mystery of Christ’s gracious gift of His Body and Blood freely given to us in the Holy Eucharist.

Ever since it became clear that this pandemic posed a grave threat to the lives and well-being of millions of people throughout the world, I have asked Mary, Mother of the Church, to intercede on behalf of all who are suffering as well as all who respond to the needs of others. I now ask our Blessed Mother to help us return to the Grace and Beauty of the Sunday Eucharist and the reverent reception of Holy Communion by inspiring all of us, clergy, consecrated women and men, and lay faithful, with an ardent love for her Son Jesus, and a deep trust in the Holy Spirit’s skill to guide us safely home.

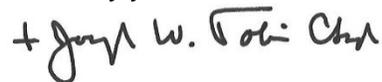


Please take a few minutes to read *Returning to Grace*, to pray about the questions it addresses, and to discuss it with family members, friends, and fellow parishioners. A digital copy is available on our [website](#). Printed copies will be distributed in parishes throughout the Archdiocese.

If we trust in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the continual reopening of our parishes, schools and archdiocesan ministries will truly be a Return to Grace for the Archdiocese of Newark. As Pope Francis reminds us, we are now in a crisis and no one will emerge from this pandemic unchanged. Things will be different. The challenge is: will they be better or worse? We hope and pray that God's people will emerge from this crisis renewed in the Spirit with an even greater love for Jesus' astonishing gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist.

May our Redeemer bless you, and all members of our archdiocesan family, as we seek to return to the grace of the Eucharist in these challenging times.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



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

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



Every time that we participate in Holy Mass and we are nourished by the Body of Christ, the presence of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit acts in us, shaping our hearts, communicating an interior disposition to us that translates into conduct according to the Gospel. Above all, docility to the Word of God, then fraternity amongst ourselves, the courage of Christian witness, creative charity, the capacity to give hope to the disheartened, to welcome the excluded. In this way, the Eucharist fosters a mature Christian lifestyle. The charity of Christ, welcomed with an open heart,

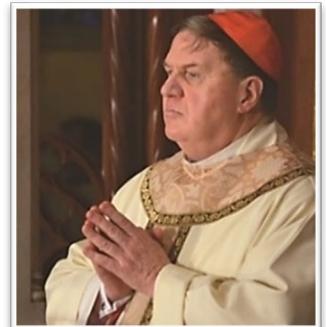
changes us, transforms us, renders us capable of loving not according to human measure, always limited, but according to the measure of God.

And what is the measure of God? Without measure! The measure of God is without measure. Everything! Everything! Everything! It's impossible to measure the love of God: it is without measure! And so we become capable of loving even those who do not love us: and this is not easy. To love someone who doesn't love us.... It's not easy! Because if we know that a person doesn't like us, then we also tend to bear ill will. But no! We must love even someone who doesn't love us! Opposing evil with good, with pardon, with sharing, with welcome.

Thanks to Jesus and to his Spirit, even our life becomes “bread broken” for our brothers. And living like this we discover true joy! The joy of making of oneself a gift, of reciprocating the great gift that we have first received, without merit of our own. This is beautiful: our life is made a gift! This is to imitate Jesus. I wish to remind you of these two things. First: the measure of God’s love is love without measure. Is this clear? And our life, with the love of Jesus, received in the Eucharist, is made a gift. As was the life of Jesus. Don’t forget these two things: the measure of the love of God is love without measure. And following Jesus, we, with the Eucharist, make of our life a gift. (*Angelus, June 22, 2014, Solemnity of Corpus Christi*)

My Prayer for You

In conclusion, I would like to once again make my own Pope Francis’s prayer to Our Lady, Health of the Sick, which concludes with 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 coronavirus pandemic and help us all Return to Grace in new ways when the time is right:



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.

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

