



# **REJOICE in the LORD**

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### **Archbishop of Newark**

September 10, 2021. Vol. 3. No. 1.



My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On Wednesday, September 1st, in his weekly audience, Pope Francis continued his series of reflections on St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. According to the Holy Father, the prophetic tone of this letter can sometimes seem "harsh" compared to St. Paul's other letters. But as the pope explains, in this letter Paul is simply challenging the Galatians to remain faithful "to the beauty of the newness of Christ" rather than to "prefer something that attracts us momentarily but then leaves us empty inside." He is also warning them against adopting what he calls "an artificial asceticism" or rigidity in their Christian life.

There's definitely something prophetic about the teaching style of Pope Francis. Imagine John the Baptist with a hearty smile preaching God's "endless mercy." He doesn't hesitate to call attention to the ways that we are soft, lazy or self-indulgent, but he does it in ways that give us hope and encouragement. We are called to be better, the Holy Father says. We are meant to do more (and be more) than simply stay inside where it's safe and warm. We're called to "go forth from our own comfort zones" in order to be missionary disciples for Christ (*Evangelii Gaudete*, #20).

We tend to think of missionaries as other people (not us) who have a special calling and unique gifts. We have come to think of missionaries as clergy, consecrated religious or lay people who travel to distant lands and endure many hardships in order to preach the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ. Pope Francis tells us that this image is not wrong, but it's incomplete. We are all called to be missionaries, disciples of Jesus Christ who bring his good news to others—in our homes and workplaces, in our parishes and neighborhoods, and in our personal contributions of time, talent and treasure to the Church's worldwide mission. "Before all else," the Holy Father says, "the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others" (EG, #39).

The Gospel challenge to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" has both a local and a global dimension for us. As Pope Francis says, "The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility." Similarly, the Holy Father calls dioceses like ours to undergo a form of "missionary conversion" (EG, #28-30). Flexibility is essential to the effectiveness of our calling as missionaries.

Where is God leading us as missionaries? We may not know the details, but the direction is clear. We are being invited, and challenged, to move beyond our comfort zones, to go out to the ends of the earth, and to be missionaries for Christ.

Some critics like to contrast the teaching styles of Pope Francis and his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI by saying that where Francis emphasizes God’s Love, Benedict stresses God’s Law. No one who has listened to the two popes or read their writing can honestly make this claim. As the two selections below clearly indicate, the catechesis given by each pope on St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians shows a remarkable consistency.

Pope Benedict says that “in the Letter to the Galatians in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification St Paul speaks of faith that works through love (cf. [Gal 5:14](#)).” And Pope Francis teaches that “St. Paul invites us too to reflect: how do we live our faith? Does the love of Christ, crucified and risen again, remain at the center of our daily life as the wellspring of salvation, or are we content with a few religious formalities to salve our consciences?” Both popes recognize that “the love of Christ is before all else” and that “in the twofold love of God and neighbor the whole of the Law is present and carried out.”

Let’s pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our minds and hearts so that we can avoid the temptation to become rigid or inflexible in our practice of the faith. As dedicated missionary disciples, let’s also pray for the gift of joyful gratitude for Christ’s death and resurrection which have set us free to serve God and one another.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,  
*+ Joseph W. Tobin, C.S.R.*

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

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**Twentieth Anniversary of 9/11**  
9/11 Memorial Mass Homily  
Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart  
September 8, 2021

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

What are you remembering this afternoon? Together with so many around the world, we can recall exactly where we were on that sun-dappled Tuesday morning in early September two decades ago. Even at that distance, it is not difficult to taste the fear, feel the confusion, rekindle the fiery anger that washed over the nation as the events of September 11, 2001, unfolded. The soul-chilling sight of troops in full battle dress patrolling airports and train stations, as well as armed vehicles on the streets are fresh, even a generation later.

Whom are you remembering this afternoon? Here, 9/11 was more than a national tragedy for the people. Here, the carnage



*The 9/11 Memorial at Holy Cross Cemetery and Mausoleum in North Arlington offers a peaceful place for visitation and prayer.*

was personal. So many families along the Morristown, Northeast Corridor, and Raritan lines, parents, grandparents, siblings and fiancées in communities that necklace the Parkway and Turnpike, had no idea that morning they were saying a final goodbye to someone whose loss would rip out their hearts. In the days that followed, the fire and smoke that wreathed the Towers spewed toxins that would continue to kill long after the rubble had been cleared away.

Perhaps your memories go beyond Archdiocese or nation, and you mourn the young men and women who died or were mutilated on the battlefields of the last 20 years. Perhaps you can glimpse the enormous tsunami of violence that the events of 9/11 unleashed, claiming hundreds of thousands of children, women and men. Father Thomas Merton observed that there is only one winner in war. The winner is not justice, not liberty, not Christian truth. The winner is war itself.

Today the Word of God invites us to remember. Its message is subtle, perhaps easy to miss. Let me try to introduce that message with a story that remembers another time, another place.

*Pane e vino* (“Bread and Wine”) is a novel published a few years before the onset of World War II. The setting is Italy and in one memorable scene, a young woman cries desperately to her parish priest: what can we do? The machinery of death is in motion, the armies of the night are on the march. After pondering her anguish, the old man replies, I don’t know what we should do. But I do know this: what topples evil empires and deprives despots of sleep is the little person who steals into the piazza at midnight and scrawls on a wall *no!*

Today the Church celebrates the birth of Mary. The Gospels recall that a young woman in a backwater town on the fringe of the Roman Empire conceived a child whose name was to be Yeshua or Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. How? Because Mary’s son would be recognized as Emmanuel – God with us.

The message is easy to misunderstand because the Creator of this world is often imagined as the star of a Hollywood blockbuster, assisted by an impressive cohort of angelic hosts. And, over the course of two millennia, the Mother of God has become so loved and so revered that it may be easy to forget that she was only teenager when she pronounced words that would change forever the history of the world as well as its destiny. Through her words, God could scrawl God’s *no!* to the evil that oppresses women and men, the iniquity that seeks to prevent God from going where God wants to go: the human heart. Forever.

Christianity has been dismissed by critics as the “worship of weakness” that features a cast of fragile, even sinful characters. A cult in which the absurdity of a crucified God claims center stage. Those who strove to change the world by might have written off the disciples of Jesus because of their weakness. Joseph Stalin is said to have asked an adviser dismissively, “How many divisions does the Pope have?” Had the adviser possessed greater courage, he might have replied: “How many does he need?”

Pope Benedict XVI described like this the saving story that began in fragility:

God did not take away our humanity but shares it with us. He entered into the loneliness of a ruined love as one who shares the sorrow, as a consolation. This is the divine way of redemption. Maybe from this we can best understand what redemption means in the Christian sense: not a magical transformation of the world, not that our humanity is taken

away from us, but that we are consoled, that God shares with us the burden of life, and that now the light of his compassionate love remains forever in our midst.

Because of what began in Mary, the *no!* of God's is scrawled forever across the machinery of death and dark armies. Because God became little and experienced our weakness, those who remember how a sunny morning disappeared into a dark night can be comforted that evil does not have the final word.

The saving love of God begs for imitation. Jesus still invites: *Follow me!* Mary teaches the far-reaching good that happens when a person says *yes!* to that love.

A friend of mine often says that today is the second-best day to plant a tree. The best occasion was thirty years ago. Since 1983, the Scholarship Fund for Inner-City Children has used that logic to imitate the saving love of God. Seeds planted decades ago bear fruit in assisting parents who want to educate their children in an environment of faith. Your gift will be a decisive *no!* to marginalization and a *yes!* to the message that saves a suffering world.

The Mother of God is also called the Sorrowful Mother. May she comfort those who are overwhelmed in sadness as they remember 9/11. May she lead them to hope, hope that has a name and a face, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

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

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## **Pope Benedict XVI called us to a Faith that works through Love**

*A Selection from the General Audience of Wednesday, November 19, 2008*

So what does the Law from which we are liberated and which does not save mean? For St Paul, as for all his contemporaries, the word "Law" meant the Torah in its totality, that is, the five books of Moses. The Torah, in the Pharisaic interpretation, that which Paul had studied and made his own, was a complex set of conduct codes that ranged from the ethical nucleus to observances of rites and worship and that essentially determined the identity of the just person. In particular, these included circumcision, observances concerning pure food and ritual purity in general, the rules regarding the observance of the Sabbath, etc. codes of conduct that also appear frequently in the debates between Jesus and his contemporaries.



All of these observances that express a social, cultural and religious identity had become uniquely important in the time of Hellenistic culture, starting from the third century B.C. This culture which had become the universal culture of that time and was a seemingly rational culture; a polytheistic culture, seemingly tolerant constituted a strong pressure for cultural uniformity and thus threatened the identity of Israel, which was politically constrained to enter into this common identity of the Hellenistic culture. This resulted in the loss of its own identity, hence also the loss of the precious heritage of the faith of the Fathers, of the faith in the one God and in the promises of God.

Against this cultural pressure, which not only threatened the Israelite identity but also the faith in the one God and in his promises, it was necessary to create a wall of distinction, a shield of defense to protect the precious heritage of the faith; this wall consisted precisely in the Judaic observances and prescriptions. Paul, who had learned these observances in their role of defending God's gift, of the inheritance of faith in one God alone, saw this identity threatened by the freedom of the Christians this is why he persecuted them.

At the moment of his encounter with the Risen One he understood that with Christ's Resurrection the situation had changed radically. With Christ, the God of Israel, the one true God, became the God of all peoples. The wall as he says in his Letter to the Ephesians between Israel and the Gentiles, was no longer necessary: it is Christ who protects us from polytheism and all of its deviations; it is Christ who unites us with and in the one God; it is Christ who guarantees our true identity within the diversity of cultures. The wall is no longer necessary; our common identity within the diversity of cultures is Christ, and it is he who makes us just. Being just simply means being with Christ and in Christ. And this suffices. Further observances are no longer necessary.

For this reason Luther's phrase: "faith alone" is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in love. Faith is looking at Christ, entrusting oneself to Christ, being united to Christ, conformed to Christ, to his life. And the form, the life of Christ, is love; hence to believe is to conform to Christ and to enter into his love. So it is that in the Letter to the Galatians in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification St Paul speaks of faith that works through love (cf. [Gal 5: 14](#)).

Paul knows that in the twofold love of God and neighbor the whole of the Law is present and carried out. Thus in communion with Christ, in a faith that creates charity, the entire Law is fulfilled. We become just by entering into communion with Christ who is Love.... And charity is the fulfillment of communion with Christ. Thus, we are just by being united with him and in no other way.

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## A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



In this way, Saint Paul invites us too to reflect: how do we live our faith? Does the love of Christ, crucified and risen again, remain at the centre of our daily life as the wellspring of salvation, or are we content with a few religious formalities to salve our consciences? How do we live our faith? Are we attached to the precious treasure, to the beauty of the newness of Christ, or do we prefer something that attracts us momentarily but then leaves us empty inside? The ephemeral often knocks at the door during our days, but it is a sad illusion, which makes us give in to superficiality and prevents us from discerning what is truly worth living for.

Brothers and sisters, let us however keep the certainty that, even when we are tempted to turn away, God still continues to bestow His gifts. Throughout history, even today, things happen that resemble what happened to the Galatians. Even today, people come and harangue us, saying, "No, holiness is in these precepts, in these things, you must do this and that", and propose an inflexible

religiosity, the inflexibility that takes away from us that freedom in the Spirit that Christ's redemption gives us. Beware of the rigidity they propose to you: be careful. Because behind every inflexibility there is something bad, which is not the Spirit of God. And for this reason, this Letter will help us not to listen to these somewhat fundamentalist proposals that set us back in our spiritual life, and will help us go ahead in the paschal vocation of Jesus.

This is what the Apostle reiterates to the Galatians when he reminds them that the Father “supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you” (3:5). He speaks in the present tense, he does not say “the Father has supplied you with the Spirit”, chapter 3, verse 5, no: he says – “supplies”; he does not say, “has worked”, he says “works”. For, despite all the difficulties we may pose to His action, God does not abandon us but rather abides with us in His merciful love. He is like that father who went up onto the terrace every day to see if his son was returning: the love of the Father never tires of us.

Let us ask for the wisdom always to be aware of this reality, and to turn away the fundamentalists who propose to us a life of artificial asceticism, far removed from the resurrection of Christ. Asceticism is necessary, but wise asceticism, not artificial.

*(A Selection from the General Audience of Pope Francis, Wednesday, September 1, 2021)*

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## **My Prayer for You**

Teach us to be wise, Loving Father, and to recognize that you always send your Spirit to teach us the Law of Love. Help us to avoid the kind of artificial asceticism that hardens our hearts and prevents us from being kind and compassionate toward others. May We become just not by clinging to customs or laws but by entering into communion with Christ who is Love.

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

