



REJOICE in the LORD

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

Archbishop of Newark

October 22, 2021. Vol. 3, No. 4



The Opportunities and Risks of Walking Together on our Synodal Journey

When he formally inaugurated the synod process, Pope Francis identified three risks and three opportunities. The first risk is that the synod process will be a mere formality. Will we really commit ourselves to reaching out and listening to everyone? The second risk is that the synod's ambitious goal will remain an abstract idea that never becomes real. And the final risk is what the pope calls "complacency," the attitude that "we've always done it this way" and the refusal to try new approaches to the ministry of our Church.

These risks, which are serious, are counterbalanced by three opportunities. First, we have a chance to move toward what the pope calls "a synodal Church, where all can feel at home and participate." What a beautiful dream! No clericalism or elitism, but a Church that is open to all and that engages everyone in communion, participation and mission!

The second opportunity is to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine in order to stop and listen, firstly to the Spirit in adoration and prayer, and then to our brothers and sisters, their hopes, the crises of faith around the world, the need for renewed pastoral life. Imagine what it will be like to be a Church that is deeply sensitive to the hopes and dreams of all its members from all age groups in every walk of life in every region of the world!

The third opportunity is to become a Church of closeness—by her very presence, a Church that weaves greater bonds of friendship with society and the world. Pope Francis believes we should be "a Church that does not stand aloof from life but immerses herself in today's problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God." What a marvelous opportunity—to bring healing and hope to millions of people through "greater bonds of friendship" and through a genuine closeness to all members of God's family throughout the world!

How do we avoid the risks and realize the opportunities presented by the synodal process we are beginning now? By invoking the Holy Spirit with greater fervor and frequency and by humbly listening to Him and to each other!

In his homily for the opening Mass of the Synod on Synods, October 10, Pope Francis challenged us:

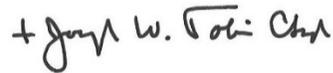
Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the "hearing" of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged?

Participating in a Synod “means discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit always surprises us,” the pope says, “to suggest fresh paths and new ways of speaking.” Listening to God’s Word and to one another does not come easily to us. We are often distracted by the noises that surround us in our society and by our own personal preoccupations and prejudices.

“The Spirit asks us to listen to the questions, concerns and hopes of every Church, people and nation,” Pope Francis says. “Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often, our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one another.”

As we journey together on the path of encounter, listening and discernment, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us and to remain close to us as we accept both the risks and the opportunities of becoming a Synodal Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin
Archbishop of Newark

Pastoral Letter on the Synod from Cardinal Tobin

October 11, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

This past weekend Pope Francis launched a two-year “synod on synodality,” a call to all the members of the Catholic Church across the world to enter a process of listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to discern the path we must walk together. Yesterday, Pope Francis celebrated the Eucharist in St. Peter’s Square as the first solemn act of the Synod. Next Sunday, October 17, in dioceses across the world, bishops will celebrate the opening of the synodal process in their respective dioceses. On that day, I will preside at the Eucharist in the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart at 12 Noon and would be delighted if you might join us.



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

The word “synod” traces its roots to the first centuries of the Church. Coming from Greek words meaning the “same road,” synod and synodality are expressions of the fundamental mystery of the Church: people who are gathered from every corner of the earth to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises” of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2,9).

While the Synod of Bishops has taken place up until now as a gathering of bishops with and under the authority of the Pope, the Church increasingly realizes that synodality is the path for the entire People of God. That means making pastoral decisions “that reflect the will of God as closely as possible, grounding them in the living voice of the People of God.”

The present synod will take place in three stages. From now until next April, every diocese in the world is expected to promote a special time of prayer, listening, dialogue and recommendations. After April, this dialogue will continue at national and continental assemblies of Catholics. Finally, in October 2023, bishops and others will gather in Roma with the Holy Father to chart the future of our Church.

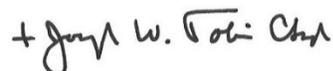
Who can participate in this synod? Is this just for the clergy? No. All of us baptized are invited. Pope Francis never tires of reminding us that the participation of all must be an undeniable commitment of the whole Church.

Sister Donna Ciangio, OP, the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, and Father Bismarck Chau, the rector of the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, have agreed to coordinate the synodal process throughout our Archdiocese. Together with their team, they will ensure that every parish will have the opportunity to participate in this important moment in the history of the Church. But they will also be concerned with voices from the “periphery,” voices that are easily and often overlooked in Catholic discussions. The Holy Spirit is moving throughout the Church, and we need to listen.

As a result of the diocesan consultation, a report will be written that will collect our voices. But the most important thing will not be answering a questionnaire or attending a meeting, but living synodality, that is, experiencing Church as walking with others. Each fellow pilgrim has received a call and gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. Through this blessed time, the Holy Spirit will enrich the magnificent mosaic that is the People of God, making us a gift for the life of the world.

Let us begin a time of prayer and listening. A time in which all – bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious and laity – will try to answer two fundamental questions: How are we living this “walking together” in our Archdiocese and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow?

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

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he encounters the rich man on the road; he then listens to his questions, and finally, he helps him discern what he must do to inherit eternal life. Encounter, listen and discern. I would like to reflect on these three verbs that characterize the Synod.



The first is encounter. The Gospel passage begins by speaking of an encounter. A man comes up to Jesus and kneels down before him, asking him a crucial question: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 17). So important a question requires attention, time, willingness to encounter others and sensitivity to what troubles them.

The Lord does not stand aloof; he does not appear annoyed or disturbed. Instead, he is completely present to this person. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent; everything is of concern to him. Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each individual’s history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies. He knows that someone’s life can be changed by a single encounter. The Gospel is full of such encounters with Christ, encounters that uplift and bring healing. Jesus did not hurry along or keep looking at his watch to get the meeting over. He was always at the service of the person he was with, listening to what he or she had to say.

As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to devote to prayer and to adoration – that form of prayer that we so often neglect – devoting time to adoration and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. Time to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say, to build rapport, to be sensitive to the questions of our sisters and brothers, to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of charisms, vocations and ministries. Every encounter – as we know – calls for openness, courage and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and the stories of others.

(A selection from the homily of Pope Francis for the opening Mass of the Synod on Synods, October 10, 2021)

My Prayer for You

Let us pray with Pope Francis:

Dear brothers and sisters, let us have a good journey together! May we be pilgrims in love with the Gospel and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. Let us not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening and discernment. In the joyful conviction that, even as we seek the Lord, he always comes with his love to meet us first.



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin