

Rejoice in the Lord

By Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
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No one is a stranger



Love of God and Love of Neighbor are the two great commandments given to us by our Redeemer. Nothing is more important. Nothing should be allowed to get in the way of our wholehearted, unconditional observance of these Laws of Love.

But the question we invariably ask (consciously or subconsciously) is “Who is my neighbor?” Who are we required to love especially when we are in the midst of a pandemic that threatens our health, our economic well-being and our peace of mind?

Jesus was asked this question (cf. Lk 10:25-37) by a scholar who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus had initially answered: Love God and love your neighbor. But the scholar obviously thought that some people were not a neighbor. Jesus answered with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The punchline of the parable reverses the question of the scholar; it now becomes to whom is he called to be a neighbor? The answer: everyone who is in need. Everyone deserves respect, kindness, justice, compassion and the basic necessities of life.

In a recent issue of this newsletter, I quoted Pope Francis’s statement that “selfish indifference” can be a worse virus than COVID 19. Selfish indifference is exactly what the priest and the Levite in Jesus’ parable were guilty of. They had their own problems, their own concerns and preoccupations. Whatever their reasons, they “passed by on the opposite side of the road” and offered no help at all. It was the foreigner, one detested by Jews in Jesus’ day, who assisted the man who was beaten, stripped, robbed and left for dead as he traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho.

As St. Luke tells us so movingly:

But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.

He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him.

The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back' (Lk 10:33-35).

This Samaritan acts as the man's neighbor because he looks beyond the differences between them and sees their essential unity as human beings. And not only does he recognize their common humanity, he acts with kindness, compassion and generosity to ensure that his neighbor is restored to full health and dignity.

During this pandemic, which understandably causes us to focus on the needs of our own kind — especially our families, the elderly and those who are most vulnerable—it's important that we remember the lessons taught by Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If we focus exclusively on our own needs, excluding those who are outside our inner circles, we succumb to the virus of selfish indifference, and we fail to observe the Great Commandment of Love.

How can we be good neighbors to those who are outside our inner circle when we are required to practice social distancing and place our own needs first? How can we resist the temptation to be selfish and indifferent to the needs of those we don't see and can't touch? We need help!

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

On Pentecost, the Risen Lord breathed again on the community of his disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit..."

This gift of the Holy Spirit is crucial today, for the people of our country are living an apocalypse. The Bible refers to different apocalyptic events. These are not exclusively descriptions or prophecies regarding the end of the world. The momentous or catastrophic happenings are foretold, not simply to scare the hearers or readers, but to warn them of serious trouble on the horizon. In the Word of God, an apocalyptic event often reveals powerful people who are bent on the exact opposite of a faithful, logical, loving response to the saving initiatives of God, who creates and redeems.

Preparing to celebrate this Pentecost, I became convinced that we must pay special attention to the crucial words and gesture of the Risen Christ, who bestows the Holy Spirit. For we are living dreadful events that paralyze and terrify precisely because they deprive human beings of breath. Today the responsorial psalm recalls the fate of living creatures who are deprived of breath: they perish.

370,000 human beings across the world – more than 100,000 in the United States – have perished in the pandemic. The last conscious thought of many, probably most, must have been *I can't breathe*. We know that, as he was dying on a Minneapolis street under the knee of his murderer, George Floyd gasped *I can't breathe!* The news of these deaths and the destruction they have generated, literally takes our breath away. Frightened people often hold their breath. Panicked people must be told emphatically to breathe again.

Covid-19, the murder of George Floyd, the needless deaths of so many people of color, the shameless exploitation of social division for personal gratification or political gain – THESE ARE APOCALYPTIC EVENTS that are not meant simply to scare us – to take our breath away – but to warn us of serious trouble on the horizon as well as the true meaning the peril that is already among us. We desperately need to breathe, so that we can recognize that the efforts by people of great power to divide us are diametrically opposed to the plan God has for this world.

Like he did *on the evening of that first day of the week*, the first moment of a new creation, Jesus is here among his frightened disciples. He breathes on us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is our Advocate, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it (Jn 14, 17). Today the faithful promise of the Risen One is again fulfilled, as he gifts his disciples with the holy *Spirit that the Father will send in my name — he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you* (Jn 14, 26).

The Holy Spirit will create true unity in diversity and bestow gifts given for the life of the world. May Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church who prayed with the 120 disciples on the first Pentecost, plead for us today, so that we can receive the Gift and breathe. The Spirit will remind us that Jesus teaches us how to *be* a neighbor.

Statement of Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R. on the death of George Floyd and the national protests

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The people of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark join with Catholic dioceses across the United States as well as all people of good will in condemning the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. We extend our deep sorrow to his family and friends, who face soul-sapping grief because of his terrible death.

We offer heartfelt prayer for the people of Minneapolis and St. Paul, expressing special solidarity with our beloved brother, Archbishop Bernard Hebda and the people he serves. The murder of George Floyd, which is simply the latest instance of a person of color dying at the hands of those sworn to protect the community, has provoked justified anger and peaceful protest across the United States. Rage, as well as shameful exploitation of this tragedy, have spawned inexcusable violence in cities throughout this nation. As we witness the asphyxiation of our country, many of us cry in anguish: why?

How we answer the question is crucial because we will then know what to pray for and how we must act. No one comes to Jesus with the lame request of wanting to feel better. They name the evil and ask for relief. We need to turn to the Lord of the Universe, for the malice we name cannot be eradicated by our unaided efforts.

The necessity of naming the evil of racism humiliates us, since so many events in our lifetime, let alone the history of our nation, have compelled us to shamefully recognize the national sin that

obliges African Americans to endure unique and relentless humiliation, indignity, and unequal opportunity. Our tolerance of racism as well as collective deafness to the cry of those so grievously offended and the conscious and unconscionable promotion of divisions in this nation has encouraged the heinous evil of racism to propagate.

Certainly, tolerance of tribalistic factions in the United States, especially in our political forum, promotes a savage law of the jungle and an immoral ethos of “might makes right”. Violent rhetoric, selfishness and even the crude appropriation of religious symbols conspire to produce a malevolent miasma in which the sin of racism may flourish unchecked. Our society will make no progress in addressing the evil of racism without the will to leave behind the purveyors of polarization.

The Archdiocese of Newark must renew our commitment to making the dream of peace built on justice and racial equality a reality for all our sisters and brothers, here in northern New Jersey as well as throughout the United States. Since this is our goal, we embrace gratefully the prophetic words of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

In great sorrow, but also with profound hope, we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and ask for her protection and care during these troubled times. This young woman sang of One whose mercy is from age to age to those who fear him...who has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart...who has thrown down the rulers from their thrones, but lifted up the lowly (Luke 1, 50-52). May she inspire us with courage to do the work of justice and to eliminate—once and for all—all hatred, bigotry and violence from our hearts, our homes and our communities.

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

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time, it has to be recognized that the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost.

I pray for the repose of the soul of George Floyd and of all those others who have lost their lives as a result of the sin of racism. May there be national reconciliation and peace.

Today I wish to emphasize that the problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the well-being of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected. With particular sadness I think of the sufferings, the marginalization and the very real persecutions

which not a few Christians are undergoing in various countries. Let us combine our efforts in promoting a culture of encounter, respect, understanding, and mutual forgiveness.

Scapegoats are not only sought to pay, with their freedom and with their life, for all social ills such as was typical in primitive societies, but over and beyond this, there is at times a tendency to deliberately fabricate enemies: stereotyped figures who represent all the characteristics that society perceives or interprets as threatening. The mechanisms that form these images are the same that allowed the spread of racist ideas in their time.

Let nobody turn their back on society and feel excluded! No to segregation! No to racism!

My Prayer for You

Loving Father, during this time of worldwide crisis, and catastrophic happenings here at home, how can we walk with our brothers and sisters who are suffering? How can we share their journeys? Lord, show us how to follow in your footsteps as you walk with those who truly are our neighbors because they cry out to us to be welcomed, protected, healed and fully integrated into our communities.

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