



# Rejoice in the Lord

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

### Archbishop of Newark

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## Christ is the vine, we are the branches



*Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither. People will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples (Jn 15: 6–8).*

In St. John's Gospel (Jn 15:1-8), Jesus tells us that he is the true vine and his Father is the vine grower. "He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does, he prunes so that it bears more fruit" (Jn 15:2).

This is important information because this is no ordinary vineyard. Our Lord is speaking of the vine that is his body, and he tells us in no uncertain terms that we are the branches that are either thrown away to wither and be cast into a fire and burned, or that bear fruit and are pruned in order to be even more productive.

Christ is the vine, and we are the branches. If we remain true to God's Word, we can flourish and produce much fruit. If we refuse to listen to, or follow, God's commandments, we wither and die. "Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine," Jesus says, "so neither can you unless you remain in me" (Jn 15:4).

God's commandments are simple but not easy: We must love God with our whole heart and soul and mind. And we must love one another as we love ourselves. Or, as we read in the first letter of St. John, "And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of God's son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us" (1 Jn 3:23).

But we are sinners who frequently fall short of the goal to love God and each other. That's why we cling to the love and mercy of God, which restores us whenever we miss the mark because of our sin.

Remaining true to God's word and to our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ requires ongoing confession of our sins and genuine acts of repentance. We must stand up again after falling and, with the help of God's grace, continue on the road set out for us at the time of our Baptism. This is the life



story of all great saints—conversion experiences that are never once and for all, but are mixed with acceptance of God’s constant forgiveness. This should be our story as well.

By virtue of our Baptism, we are all called to be witnesses (martyrs, really) to the victory over sin and death won for us by our Lord’s death and resurrection. We carry out this mission in our daily lives as fruitful branches of the one vine that is Christ. The world around us is often hostile or, at best, indifferent to the message of love that we proclaim as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, but we must persevere confident that God’s grace sustains us even in the worst of times.

This has been the experience of Christians since the beginning. In spite of grave persecution, the early Church thrived, “walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers” (Acts 9:31) because after the Lord’s resurrection, and the disciples’ reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church kept the commandments and remained in Jesus as he remains with the Father.

We have just experienced a grave, year-long crisis not of active persecution but of sickness and death, fear and uncertainty, and separation from the people and institutions that mean the most to us. Thank God we were able to persevere—by the power of the Holy Spirit—but as individuals, as a society and as the Church, we have paid a high price. As Pope Francis admonishes us, there is no question that the pandemic has wrought change. The real question we must answer is: Will it be for the better or for worse?

As we emerge from the long dark winter of COVID-19, our faith in the springtime of the Lord’s resurrection should give us much hope. No matter how far we stray from the road that leads to union with Jesus Christ and the eternal life we are promised with him and with all the saints, the Holy Spirit is active among us always, redirecting us by God’s infinite love and mercy.

In the remaining weeks of this Easter season, let’s rejoice in the opportunities we have been given to believe in the name of God’s only Son. Let’s be fruitful branches of the vine that is Jesus Christ. And let’s love one another just as our risen Lord has commanded us.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

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

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## Homily During the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

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

Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart

April 3, 2021

Tonight is a night of vigil. The Lord is not sleeping; the Watchman is attentive in his care for his people (cf. Ps 121:4) to bring them out of slavery and to open before them the way to freedom.

The Lord is keeping watch, and, by the power of his love, he is bringing his people through the Red Sea. He is also bringing Jesus through the abyss of death and the darkness of the netherworld.

This was a night of vigil for the disciples of Jesus, a night of sadness and fear. The men remained locked in the Upper Room. Yet, the women went to the tomb at dawn on Sunday to anoint Jesus' body. Their hearts were overwhelmed with grief, and they were asking themselves: "How will we enter? Who will roll back the stone of the tomb?" But here was the first sign of the great event: the enormous stone was already rolled back, and the tomb was open!

"Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe..." (Mk 16:5). The women were the first to see this great sign, the empty tomb; and they were the first to enter...



"Entering the tomb." It is good for us, on this Vigil night, to reflect on the experience of the women, which also speaks to us. For, that is why we are here: to enter, to enter into the Mystery which God has accomplished with his vigil of love.

The reading from Paul's letter to the Romans invites us to remember how we have already entered into the tomb. By our baptism into Christ Jesus, we have entered into an intimate relationship with him. We have entered into the Body of Christ. We have entered into his death and no longer dwell under the tyrannical regime of sin.

Tonight, eight young people will enter with us. Let me say their names: Camila, Jack, María Isabel, Kelly, Keila, Cristy, Hilary, Crisóstomo. They will be baptized, confirmed, and receive the Body of Christ for the first time. With us, they receive the Body of Christ and, like us, they become what they receive.

We reckon with the consequences of our baptism – the promises that we will renew but also, that we are living for God in Christ Jesus that we might be united in a resurrection like his.

We cannot live Easter without entering into the mystery. Easter is not something intellectual, something we only know or read about... It is so much more!

"To enter into the mystery" means the ability to wonder, to contemplate; the ability to listen to the silence and to hear the tiny whisper amid great silence by which God speaks to us.

To enter into the mystery demands that we not be afraid of reality: that we not be closed in on ourselves, that we not flee from what we fail to understand, that we not shut our eyes to problems or deny them, that we not dismiss our questions or live only for our fears.

To enter into the mystery means going beyond our own comfort zone, beyond the laziness and indifference which hold us back, beyond our prejudices and politics, forgetting ourselves and going out in search of truth, beauty and love. It is seeking a deeper meaning, an answer – and not an easy one – to the questions which challenge our faith, our fidelity, and our very existence.

To enter into the mystery, we need humility, the lowliness to lower ourselves, to come down from the pedestal of our ego, which is so proud, of our presumption; the humility not to take ourselves so seriously, recognizing who we really are: creatures with strengths and weaknesses, sinners in need of forgiveness. To enter into the mystery, we need the lowliness that is powerlessness, the renunciation of our idols... in a word, we need to adore the living God. Without adoration, we cannot enter into the mystery.

The women who were Jesus' disciples teach us all of this. They kept watch that night, together with Mary. And she, the Virgin Mother, helped them not to lose faith and hope. As a result, they did not remain prisoners of fear and sadness, but at the first light of dawn they went out carrying their ointments, their hearts already anointed by love. They went forth and found the tomb open. And they went in. They had kept watch; they went forth and they entered into the Mystery. May we learn from them to keep watch with God and with Mary our Mother, so that we too may enter into the Mystery which leads from death to life. ✨

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## **A Reflection on the Resurrection of Jesus**

**By Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI**

It is part of the mystery of God that he acts so gently, that he only gradually builds up his history within the great history of mankind; that he becomes a man and so can be overlooked by his contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that he suffers and dies and that, having risen again, he chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom he reveals himself; that he continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to him.



And yet—is this not truly the divine way? Not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love. And if we really think about it, is it not what seems so small that is truly great? Does not a ray of light issue from Jesus, growing brighter across the centuries, that could not come from any mere man and through which the light of God truly shines into the world? Could the apostolic preaching have found faith and built up a worldwide community unless the power of truth been at work within it?

If we attend to the witnesses with listening hearts and open ourselves to the signs by which the Lord again and again authenticates both them and himself, then we know that he is truly risen. He is alive. Let us entrust ourselves to him. Knowing that we are on the right path. With Thomas let us place our hands into Jesus' pierced side and confess: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

From *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two, Chapter 9, "Jesus Resurrection from the Dead," #3 "The Nature of Jesus' Resurrection and Its Historical Significance."* Copyright 2011 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana and Published in the United States by Ignatius Press.

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



(Photo CNS/Paul Haring)

The grave is the place where no one who enters ever leaves. But Jesus emerged for us; he rose for us, to bring life where there was death, to begin a new story in the very place where a stone had been placed. He, who rolled away the stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb, can also remove the stones in our hearts.

So, let us not give in to resignation; let us not place a stone before hope. We can and must hope, because God is faithful. He did not abandon us; he visited us and entered into our situations of pain, anguish and death. His light dispelled the darkness of the tomb: today he wants that light to penetrate even to the darkest corners of our lives.

Dear sister, dear brother, even if in your heart you have buried hope, do not give up: God is greater. Darkness and death do not have the last word. Be strong, for with God nothing is lost!

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## My Prayer for You

Risen Lord, help us to enter into the mystery of your love. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we will have the courage and the strength to set aside our hesitation and fear, to step outside of our comfort zones, and to proclaim the Gospel of Easter joy in our words and actions. Help us remember that you are the vine and we are the branches. Help us to bear much fruit and to love one another as you have commanded us. Amen.

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

