



Cardinal Joseph William Tobin, C.Ss.R.
By the Grace of God and the Favor of the Apostolic See
Archbishop of Newark

October 11, 2021

TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

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.

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 cross at the beginning and "Card" at the end.

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