



DR. J.T. VINCENT LOU LECTURE

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HEARTS OF STONE AND HEARTS OF FLESH

SISTER EILEEN M. CUNNINGHAM, OP



LEFT TO RIGHT: Cardinal Tobin with Sr. Margaret Palliser and Sr. Mary Murray.

The **Dr. J. T. Vincent Lou Lecture** on May 2, 2019 was an evening of inspiration and challenge. Our Sisters gathered with many friends from the local community to hear Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archbishop of Newark, share his vision of the potential of our faith: “As Catholics, we can be beacons to the world by reflecting the light of Jesus Christ ... living out the mystery of the Incarnation and choosing goodness and willingness to delve into the messiness of real human suffering.”

When asked what he thought was the greatest challenge we face today, Cardinal Tobin responded that we are challenged as a nation and a Church to address the “breach between faith and life.”

According to Cardinal Tobin, the Church is suffering from a kind of *cardiosclerosis*—a hardening of the heart. Drawing on Scripture, he reminded the audience of God’s promise: “I will put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” [Ezekiel 36:26]. Using Luke’s account of the

Samaritan who helped an injured traveler whom others had bypassed, the Cardinal remarked: “Samaritans see things differently.”

The audience was deeply moved by Cardinal Tobin’s words about the fear that can be seen etched on the faces of so many immigrants who could easily despair as they encounter almost insurmountable obstacles in their efforts to escape terrorism, poverty, and political upheaval. Cardinal Tobin remarked “Indeed, those who come to our border risk their lives in search of safety and opportunity. They need flesh-hearted Samaritans to console them in the face of atrocities, insults, separation, and deportation.”

“Hearts of stone and hearts of flesh” is an apt metaphor for the polarization that the Cardinal sensed in the USA upon his return after years of ministry overseas. Noting the current politic of polarization (red state vs. blue state; I win, you lose; my way, not yours), he explained that unchallenged bad politics can be personally harmful, overtaking faith and warping it, while leaving the political forum unbridled. A breach between faith and life can leave prevailing social needs unaddressed while harsh anti-immigration sentiments reign. He stressed “the river of life in the USA is flowing in the wrong direction. The teaching and values of our faith should direct our politics, not the other way around.”

Cardinal Tobin advocated for the creation of an immigration system that is just, humane, and responsive to the rule of law, one that would bear witness that our nation has certain values that must be upheld. He posited that the most humane solution would be “addressing the root causes of violence and poverty in the northern triangle of Central America.”

Encouraging his listeners to act in a way that reflects the light of Jesus Christ in the world, Cardinal Tobin left us with a clear mandate: “We live out the Incarnation by not failing to love—and that decision is transformative.”

You may see the video of Cardinal Tobin’s presentation in its entirety by clicking [HERE](#).