

## *Easter Sunday, Year B*

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*These Teaching Tips offer brief pointers for avoiding anti-Jewish bias and for highlighting positive observations about Judaism which might otherwise go unnoticed in Catholic preaching and teaching.*

### **Easter Sunday: John 20:1-9**

#### **Jewish details of the Gospel narrative and OT links**

For example, an observation could be made re:

- Ancient Jewish burial customs. The anointing of the body with spices, wrapped in linen cloth (cf. Jn 19:39-42; Mk 16:1). Mary returns to the tomb after the Sabbath (cf. Mt 28:1; Lk 23:56).
- The repetition of ‘running’ (Jn 20:2, 4). Other biblical stories where key figures ‘run’, hasten, toward a graced moment: Abraham runs to prepare hospitality for his mysterious guests (Gen 18:7); Abraham’s servant runs to greet Rebekah (Gen 24:17), the future wife of Isaac, and Rebekah runs to offer hospitality in return (Gen 24:20); in one of Jesus’ parables, a father runs to greet his once lost, homecoming son (Lk 15:20).
- From Sabbath to Sunday. The “first day of the week” (Jn 20:1), i.e., the day after the Jewish Sabbath. Recall the first day of the week in the creation account of the Hebrew Scriptures: “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). Light/darkness imagery is at work in John’s Gospel. The first day of the week is the day of Resurrection, the Day of the Lord, the “day of light” (John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 28), heralding the dawn of salvation, the ‘re-creation’ of all things in Christ.

#### **Darkness/Light symbolism.**

Regarding this last point, it is important to take care that a congregation does not hear us suggesting ‘dark/bad/blind Judaism’ versus ‘enlightened/good/visionary Christianity’. That would certainly be a distorted interpretation of the biblical imagery. In speaking of ‘light’, listeners can be reminded of the biblical image of Israel as ‘light to the nations’ (Isa 49:6), a light that is integral to the salvation story that has led to this *kairos* moment. When God acts in salvation history, God acts relationally, in *partnership*.<sup>1</sup> The Christ event does not take the Christian’s attention *away* from the story of the people of Israel, but rather affirms the God-Israel relationship and magnifies the significance and wonder of what God accomplishes in and through Israel. The Gospel authors interpret the events relating to Jesus’ resurrection through the lens of the Hebrew Scriptures.

#### **A relational God who calls for human cooperation.**

Christians readily speak of God’s redeeming work in Christ that addresses a wounded, sinful, broken world. And, even amidst a fallen world, God’s redemptive action calls for active human cooperation. Mary, a Jewish woman and mother, is the most profound example of this. Her ‘yes’ to bearing the Christ-child and is at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation. Her ‘yes’ continues to resonate in the mystery of Christ’s resurrection and glory. The events of the resurrection also engage the cooperative work of a

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<sup>1</sup> In *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), the renowned Christian biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann sums up the insights of his entire career by posing “relationship” or “partnership” as the key to interpreting the Old Testament. In Brueggemann’s schema God engages four partners, listed as Israel, the human person, the nations, and creation.

# LIGHT OF TORAH

wider circle of Jewish disciples, apostles, ancestors, scriptures, witnesses, and authors of Gospels. Jesus himself does not act in a vacuum. His earthly life is enmeshed in the story and traditions of Israel, along with vital responses from Gentiles that point to the role of ‘the nations’ in the unfolding salvific drama.

## **When ‘Christians’ were Jews**

After all the intensity of Lent and Holy Week—including the passion narrative with its Jewish Passover context, and Gospel references to “the Jews” which sometimes carry adversarial connotations—we should not overlook those Jews who fill the resurrection accounts in the Gospels proclaimed during Easter. In other words, the Jewishness of the narrative continues. A congregation could be reminded that the “the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people” (Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

## **The kingdom is both ‘now’ and ‘not yet’.**

Easter reflections typically convey messages about the “fulfilment” of Old Testament promises and Christ’s “victory” over sin and death. We can take care to note that the salvation inaugurated by the risen Jesus is still unfolding in a Spirit-led human history. The story is not finished! Christ will come (is coming) again, bringing all things to completion. The term “fulfilment” can be used, not in a simplistic way that ‘closes down’ the Christian narrative, but in an eschatological key that ‘opens up’ to infinite mystery with a view to the Eschaton. The latter approach helps Christians to listen more attentively to how our saving God continues to act in and through the Jewish people, remembering that—even with our significant credal differences—messianic hope is something that both Christians and Jews share.

## **The Old Testament is just as important *after* Easter as before.**

Easter Sunday has us rejoicing in the risen Christ, drawing on the words of Psalm 117 from the Hebrew Scriptures: “*This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad.*” It could be pointed out to a congregation that the ‘Old’ Testament (‘First’ Testament) continues to speak to us in this Easter season. Even where the first reading draws from the New Testament, the Church does not leave the Old Testament behind, but continues to treasure and draw from its transformative power as indicated by Psalm 117. We need *both* Testaments to receive and express our Easter faith.

## **Notable Ecclesial Texts**

### **Directory for Catechesis**

“The Old Testament is an integral part of the one Christian Bible . . .”

“The New Covenant does not replace God’s Covenant with Israel, but presupposes it: that first Covenant has never been revoked (cf Rom 11:28-29) and retains its validity, which finds complete fulfilment in that which Jesus accomplished with his mystery of salvation;”

Vatican Directory for Catechesis (2020), 348 c, d.