

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B

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. The readings follow the lectionary for Mass used in the Roman Catholic rite, in Australia.

Guiding thoughts from the Jewish-Christian Dialogue

I. Careful handling of negative references to Jews and Judaism

"It was you . . . who demanded the reprieve of a murderer while you killed the prince of life." (Acts 3:14-15)

New Testament references that portray Jews in a negative light need to be explained and contextualised in view of the historical development of the scriptural text. Where Jesus' disciples (themselves Jews) are depicted in conflict with other Jews, this may reflect tensions long after the time of Jesus. The Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) puts it this way:

The Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work. . . . Hence, it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favourable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for the Christians of today. All this should be taken into account when preparing catechesis and homilies . . . (CRRJ, "Notes", IV, 21).

In view of the accusative tone of Acts 3:14-15, parishioners can be reminded of the teaching of Vatican II:

"[W]hat happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews . . . [T]he Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

II. Highlighting of positive references to Jews and Judaism

"Peter said to the people: 'You are Israelites, and it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus . . .'" (Acts 3:13)

" . . . that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms . . ." (Lk 24:44).

"Lord, let your face shine upon us" (Ps 4:7).

These verses provide an opportunity to draw a congregation's attention to the following:

- The Jewish roots of Christianity. The words attributed to Peter are strong affirmation of the Jewish ancestral story grounding testimony to the risen Jesus.
- The unity of the Christian Bible. God's word is one single, undivided reality.
- The beautiful Psalm we sing at church to glorify God during Easter is from the Hebrew Scriptures.
- The Hebrew Scriptures are foundational to the Christian Bible. The New Testament is grounded in the divine authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an unintelligible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither" (PBC, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures*, 84).
- The texts which form the Christian Old Testament are, in the first place, the Scriptures of the Jewish people.¹ Christians should be respectful of and grateful for these Jewish sacred texts,

¹ Catholic Bibles include some Jewish texts which have not been included in the Jewish Bible (the TANAKH).

inherited by the Church and reinterpreted through a Christological lens. Thus, Jews and Christians share a common Scripture. These same sacred texts continue to be cherished, interpreted and lived by the Jewish people, after the time of Jesus and still today.

III. Nuanced comments regarding “fulfilment”

“... God carried out what he had foretold...” (Acts 3:

“... everything written about me in the Law of Moses... has to be fulfilled” (Lk 24:)

In speaking about Jesus Christ as the One who fulfils the Scriptures, a few nuanced comments might be included:

- What we mean by “fulfilment” and “messianic prophecy” in the Bible are part of a complex discussion that requires attention to historical and literary context. An over-simplification can lead to a fundamentalist reading of Scripture, or a kind of “join the dots” way of relating the two Testaments.
- Gently discourage the over-simplified idea that ‘we only need to read the Bible’ to see messianic prophecies fulfilled, as there is a chance that some people will wonder why Jews don’t read the Bible and accept those prophecies as fulfilled. The charge against Jews for their so called ‘blindness’ and ‘refusal’ to believe in Jesus is today repudiated by Catholic teaching. Our post-*Nostra Aetate* Church fosters respect for the Jewish people in their interpretation of the word of God, while respecting doctrinal differences between Judaism and Christianity.
- The saving work of Christ continues to unfold in human history; it has a future-oriented as well as a realised dimension – Christ has come, *and will come again*. Jews and Christians share messianic hope, albeit in differing ways, and work together towards a future Day, known to God alone, when all peoples will serve God “shoulder to shoulder” (cf. Zeph 3:9; *Nostra Aetate* 4).

Notable Ecclesial Texts

Second Vatican Council

“... what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.” (Declaration on Relations with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 4)

Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

“The Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work. . . . Hence, it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favourable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for the Christians of today. All this should be taken into account when preparing catechesis and homilies . . .” (1985 “Notes”, IV, 21)

Pontifical Biblical Commission

“Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an unintelligible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither.” (2001, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 84)

Directory for Catechesis

“The Old Testament is an integral part of the one Christian Bible, and the Church bears witness to her faith in the one God who is author of both Testaments, thus rejecting any presumed opposition between the two.”

(2020 *Directory for Catechesis*, 348c)