

Year B Advent 1

These Teaching Tips are not Scripture commentaries, but rather brief pointers for avoiding unintended anti-Jewish bias and for highlighting positive observations about Judaism which might otherwise go unnoticed.

Introducing the Gospel of Mark for a new church year

Comments that introduce Mark's Gospel might include the following contextual remarks.

The new Church year (Year B) has a focus on the Gospel of Mark, the shortest and likely the earliest of the Gospels. Mark's Gospel has a strong focus on suffering, on the relationship between the cross and authentic faith, and a perspective of the Endtimes as heralded by tumultuous earthly events. Mark's Gospel emerges in a church community experiencing violence and chaos, perhaps as a result of persecutions under the emperor Nero [64-66 C.E.], or possibly amidst the unrest of the Jewish-Roman War [66-72 C.E.]

In terms of perspectives on Judaism that require careful handling, three passages in particular stand out: Mk 2:23-28; 7:1-8; 7:18-19. These passages convey the author's rather harsh view that sabbath, dietary observances and other cultic practices are of little or no value in the face of the salvific drama of the final days prior to the Christ's return in glory. However, scholars generally agree that these views are more likely to reflect the editorial voice of the author and intra-church controversies of a later time than the actual words and views of Jesus himself. They certainly should *not* be taken as a 21st century

Christian position of negative judgement on Judaism. This would do violence to the text and contradict contemporary Catholic teaching that calls for a relationship of respect for and reconciliation with the Jewish people (*Lumen Gentium*, 16; *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

While Jesus, like all Jewish teachers of his time and culture, would have engaged in debates about the interpretation of Torah, there is no clear evidence that he spoke a definitive word on matters like sabbath, dietary observances and other forms of ritual practice. Rather, these issues attracted heightened controversy later with the influx of Gentiles into the early Christian communities. Mark's position on these issues likely reflect this later period. It reflects the tensions within the Marcan community as its members grappled with conflicting points of view about how to live in the way of God, as followers of Jesus, amidst the stress of disturbing events.

Bibliography: Philip Cunningham, 'The Gospels and Their Presentation of Judaism', ch. 5 in *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship Between Catholics and Jews* (Eerdmans, 2015), 86-90; Marilyn Salmon, *Preaching Without Contempt* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 'Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church' (1985).