

Pentecost Sunday, 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.

Suggestions in view of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue

Link Pentecost to the Jewish festival of Shavuot.

Here are two ways these links hold true:

First, we can remind our listeners of the Christian feast's historical roots in the Jewish festival of Shavuot, originally an agricultural festival involving a Temple offering of the 'first fruits' of the wheat harvest, and later evolving into a celebration of God's gift of the Torah (the giving of the 'Law') to the people of Israel, through Moses, at Mount Sinai. [Read more about Shavuot here.](#)

Second, we can observe that the Jewish people today *continue* to celebrate Shavuot; it is a *living* tradition of a *living* people. As Christians celebrating Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, we can be mindful of Jewish communities celebrating Shavuot, fifty days after the Passover festival (which in 2021 was celebrated 16-18 May).

These connections might feature only briefly in a homiletic setting, however small steps count; they are a way of being faithful to the Church's calling that we put into action Jewish-Christian friendship, mutual understanding and reconciliation. (See Ecclesial Texts below.) Like water dripping on stone, even brief acknowledgements can educate congregations over time.

Avoid supersessionist overtones

The universal implications of the Gospel are especially relevant to Pentecost Sunday. However, take care to avoid triumphalist, supersessionist overtones that suggest that the Church 'trumps' the people of Israel and replaces Judaism. Sometimes we hear from pulpits statements like this: "*The one nation, Israel, is transcended as people from many nations now hear the word of God.*" If this statement is heard as negatively contrasting 'insular Israel' versus the expansive outreach of Christianity, then something has been miscommunicated. It would be to overlook the universal perspectives inherent in Jewish biblical interpretation. According to Jewish tradition, the Torah is intended for all nations; it is not to remain Israel's sole prerogative, as illustrated by these two samples from the midrash:

From the Midrash

"And all the people perceived the thunderings" (Exod. 20:15). Since there was only one voice, why "thundering" in the plural? Because God's voice mutated into seven voices, and the seven voices into seventy languages, so that all the nations might hear it.

- Tanhuma B, *Shemot*, 22

At Sinai, when the Holy One gave the Torah to Israel. He manifested marvels upon marvels for Israel with His voice. How so? As the Holy One spoke, the voice reverberated throughout the world. At first Israel heard the voice coming to them from the south, so they ran to the south to meet the voice there. It shifted to the north, so they ran to the north. Then it shifted to the east, so they ran to the east; but from the east it shifted to the west. Then it shifted to heaven. But when they raised their eyes toward heaven, it seemed to rise out of the earth. Hence Israel asked one another, "But wisdom, where shall it be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12).

- Exodus Rabbah 5:9

Notable Ecclesial Texts

Second Vatican Council

“Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”

Declaration on Relations with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 4

Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

“The existing links between the Christian liturgy and the Jewish liturgy will be borne in mind. The idea of a living community in the service of God, and in the service of men for the love of God, such as it is realized in the liturgy, is just as characteristic of the Jewish liturgy as it is of the Christian one. To improve Jewish-Christian relations, it is important to take cognizance of those common elements of the liturgical life (formulas, feasts, rites, etc.) in which the Bible holds an essential place.”

Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate, 4” (1974), 25.

“This concern for Judaism in Catholic teaching has not merely a historical or archaeological foundation. As the Holy Father said in the speech already quoted, after he had again mentioned the ‘common patrimony’ of the Church and Judaism as ‘considerable:’ “To assess it carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life pastoral of the Church.”

Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Catholic Church (1985), I.3.

“Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as ‘the living Torah of God’.”

“The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable” (2015), 26.

Note: The phrase “God’s living Torah” applied to Jesus is used in the theological reflections of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and has entered the discussions of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue; e.g., see CRRJ, *“Gifts and Calling”*, 26.

Pontifical Biblical Commission

“On the practical level of exegesis, Christians can, nonetheless, learn much from Jewish exegesis practised for more than two thousand years, and, in fact, they have learned much in the course of history.”

The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible (2001), 22.

Pope Francis

“Dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus’ disciples.”

2013 Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii Gaudium*, 248.

Bibliography: Bialik & Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992); [Dialogika](http://Dialogika.org) online library of documentation of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.