

Fourth 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. Highlight the abundance of OT echoes in John 10:11-18.

"I am the good shepherd . . ." (Jn 10:11).

This Gospel contains abundant Old Testament allusions and echoes, especially in the images of 'shepherd', 'sheep', 'flock' – imagery familiar to everyday ancient life and powerful metaphors permeating the Hebrew Scriptures.

The following examples are indicative of the Gospel's firm grounding in the Hebrew Scriptures ('Old' or 'First' Testament).

- God is Israel's Shepherd (Gen 49:15; Ps 23:1; Isa 40:11; Jer 31:9; Ezek 34:11-31).
- God's people are the "sheep of his pasture" (Ps 74:1; 78:52; 79:3; Ezek 34:31).
- Moses is "shepherd of his flock" (Isa 63:11; Ps 77:20).
- David was a shepherd before he became king, and risked his life for his sheep (1 Sam 17:34-37).
- Messianic sacrifice (hinted at in Isa 53:12; Zech 12:10; 13:7-9).
- David / Davidic messiah as shepherd king (2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:70-72; Ezek 37:24; Mic 5:4).
- The shepherd leads out his sheep, and goes ahead of his sheep (Num 27:15-18; Ps 80:1).
- Sheep without a shepherd (Num 27:17).
- Shepherding images for Exodus, restoration, deliverance (Ps 77:20; Mic 2:12-13; Isa 49:9-10).
- The "gate" as a messianic image (Ps 118:20).
- Shepherds who only care about themselves (Ezek 34:2-4; Jer 23:1-2; Zech 11:4-17).
- "Hired hands" versus permanent shepherd leaders (1 Sam 17:34-36).
- Shepherds who themselves have turned into wolves (Ezek 22:27).
- "Go in and out" - a Semitic expression (Deut 28:6; Ps 121:8).
- "Find pasture" as an expression of God's provision, abundant life (Ps 23:2; Ezek 34:25-31; Ps 23).
- "Other sheep" as an image of the messianic ingathering of the Gentiles (Isa 56:8).
- "One flock, one shepherd"; God leading a united people (see Ezek 34:23; Jer 3:15; Ezek 37:15-28).
- "I am" statements of Jesus recall the divine Name revealed to Moses (Exod 3:14).

II. Handle with care:

“the one you crucified” (Acts 4:10)

Take care to note that (a) Peter’s words reflect *intra*-Jewish tensions, and (b) the ‘deicide charge’ (the accusation that ‘the Jews killed God/Christ’) has been firmly repudiated by Catholic teaching ever since Vatican II (NA, 4).

“for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This verse (rightly) conveys something of the Christian belief in Jesus as universal Saviour, however it has at times been used (wrongly) to make judgements which are not ours to make, e.g., the idea that unless you are a baptised Christian you are not “saved” and condemned to hell. Catholic teaching on salvation is nuanced. God’s love is a deep mystery. Vatican II affirmed in the world’s great religions “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men and women” (NA, 2). With respect to Judaism, Catholic teaching has gone further to acknowledge that God’s saving, covenantal relationship with the Jewish people remains in force after the time of Jesus, for God’s Covenant is “irrevocable” (see Rom 11:28-29; NA, 4; Addresses by Pope John Paul II, 1980, 1986, 2000).

“The hired man . . . abandons the sheep” (Jn 10:12).

Given the placing of this Gospel passage following a story of (an intra-Jewish) conflict with the Pharisees, commentaries tend to conclude that the “Jewish leaders” are being critiqued here. Late first-century tensions between Jesus-followers and mainstream Jews may be influencing the author’s perspective. This Gospel also resonates with ancient Israel’s long tradition of holding its leaders to high standards, which, according to biblical testimony, were repeatedly unmet, thereby engaging the wrath of the prophets (e.g., Ezek 34).

Mindful of centuries of anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians, homilists can take care to *affirm* Judaism’s prophetic tradition and to note that all human leadership is susceptible to weakness and failure. In affirming Israel’s prophetic call for authentic ‘shepherd’ leadership, the NT can be read as placing Jesus within this tradition as prophet and shepherd *par excellence*, without denigrating Jewish tradition.

Notable Ecclesial Texts

Second Vatican Council

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men and women.” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2)

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*, 84)

St Pope John Paul II

“For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect but also great fraternal love; for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God who has called them with *an irrevocable calling*.” (Address to Jewish community leaders, Sydney, 1986)

LIGHT OF TORAH

Pope Benedict XVI

“Christ, the Son of God, became flesh in a people, a faith tradition and a culture which, if better known, can only enrich the understanding of the Christian faith. Christians have come to this deeper understanding thanks to the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Lk 24:26). But they must always be aware of and grateful for their roots. For the shoot grafted onto the ancient tree to take (cf. Rom 11:17-18), it needs the sap rising from the roots.” (*Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 21)

Directory for Catechesis

... the confession of the universal and exclusive salvific mediation of Jesus Christ ... does not mean that the Jews are excluded from salvation; in fact, “the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and ‘serve him shoulder to shoulder’ (Zeph 3:9)” (NA 4). (2020 *Directory for Catechesis*, 348e)

Bibliography: *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, rev. ed., edited by Levine and Brettler (New York: OUP, 2011, 2017); [Dialogika](http://www.dialogika.org) online library of documentation of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.