

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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.

Insights from the Jewish-Christian Dialogue

Mark 4:35-41 draws us to the question at the heart of Christian faith: *Who is Jesus?*

By calming a storm, Jesus is shown to have divine authority, for only the Creator God has such command over the forces of nature and elements of destruction. In light of Jesus' rebuke to the disciples, the homilist is likely to emphasise our call to *faith* in Jesus Christ, to acknowledge his *divine status* as son of God, and the importance of trusting in the One whose presence and actions reveal the immediacy of God's presence and power in an unsurpassed way.

This is well and good. What we can avoid, however, is inadvertently de-Judaizing the Gospel text in such a way that the focus on divinity eclipses Jesus' earthly Jewish identity, thereby obliterating "Jewishness" from Christian consciousness. We can point out that the Jesus who has power over the wind and sea, and over destructive forces, is *this Jew*, Jesus. We can show how, as much as the Gospel points to Jesus' divine authority, the Gospel and the accompanying readings also reinforce his earthly Jewish identity. How so?

The Gospel begins with Jesus heading for 'the other side' of the Sea of Galilee. In this, he is identified as a Jew traveling from the Jewish side of the lake to Gentile territory.

Allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Scriptures of Israel, can be identified in this Gospel. Consider, for example:

- The playful similarities to the story of Job (today's first reading); e.g., journeying by boat towards gentile land; expressions of fear amidst a life-threatening storm; Jonah/Jesus asleep amidst the wild seas; wonder expressed at the stilling of the storm.
- References to the 'deep' and to the Almighty's power to calm the sea: Psalm 65:7; 106:9; 107:23-32 (NRSV); and references to 'sleep', 'slumber', and 'awakening' God in Psalm 121:3-4; 35:23; 44:23; Isaiah 51:9 (NRSV).
- The murmurings/discontent of the disciples in the storm-tossed boat evoke memories of the murmurings/discontent of the Israelites in their life-threatening desert-trek.

Other ways of appreciating this Gospel, especially for those who have visited Galilee:

- The storm in this Gospel is not 'any' kind of storm but a reference to the sudden squalls known to whip up the waters of the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee).
- The story of the 20th century archaeological discovery of the 'Jesus boat' at Ginosar provides a glimpse into an actual first-century fishing vessel, which may be similar to that which Jesus and his disciples used. View video [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

Details like these put us in touch with the earthly experiences of a first-century Jewish community living and working in a particular time and place. They keep us anchored in the 'scandal' of the Incarnation: in Jesus the Word became flesh, yes; but not in an abstract genre that we call 'humanity'; rather, in the concrete and the particular – the Word became enfleshed *as a Jew* who lived and laboured as a member of a Jewish community.

Thus, this Gospel leads us to affirm that Jesus is fully Jewish *and* truly the son of God! Stated this way, any tendency to ‘over-spiritualise’ the Incarnation is challenged and the integrity of the Gospel’s Jewish elements is maintained. We are confronted by the particularity and relationality of Jesus’ earthly story, in and through which divine mystery and miracle are embodied.

Notable Ecclesial Texts

Pontifical Council for Religious Relations with the Jews

“Fully and completely human, a Jew of his time, descendant of Abraham, son of David, shaped by the whole tradition of Israel, heir of the prophets, Jesus stands in continuity with his people and its history.”

2015 “*The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable*” (Rom 11:29).
*A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations
on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate (No. 4).*

Pope John Paul II

“By taking part in the synagogue celebrations where the Old Testament texts were read and commented upon, Jesus also came humanly to know these texts; he nourished his mind and heart with them, using them in prayer and as an inspiration for his actions. Thus he became an authentic son of Israel, deeply rooted in his own people’s long history. . . . To deprive Christ of his relationship with the Old Testament is therefore to detach him from his roots and to empty his mystery of all meaning.”

Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Rome, 11 April 1997.

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 . . .”

2020 Directory for Catechesis, 348c.

Pope Benedict XVI

“[W]e must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. Mk 12:29-31). Consequently, ‘the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament (cf. 1 Cor 5:6-8; 1 Cor 10:1-11)’. For this reason the Synod Fathers stated that ‘the Jewish understanding of the Bible can prove helpful to Christians for their own understanding and study of the Scriptures’.”

2010 Apostolic Exhortation: *Verbum Domini*, 41.

Second Vatican Council

“The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable.”

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 14.

Bibliography: Beale and Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 33; Hans Hermann Henrix, ‘The Son of God Became Human as a Jew: Implications of the Jewishness of Jesus for Christology’, in Cunningham et al., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People*, 114–43, at 119–20; Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 79; [Dialogika](http://www.dialogika.org) online library of documentation of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.