

THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
Task Force on the Representation of Jews and Judaism
in Catholic Exegesis, Homiletics, and Catechesis

Possible problem areas in lectionary readings for the Solemnity of Christ the King, November 24, 2024
(Dn 7:13-14 -- Ps 93:1, 1-2, 5---Rv 1:5-8---Jn 18:33b-37)

Link to the text on the USCCB daily readings page: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/112424.cfm>

Suggestions for approaching these readings without misrepresenting Jews or Judaism:

- Point out that Pilate’s dialogue with Jesus negatively contrasts Roman concepts of power with positive Jewish ideals of servant-leadership.
 - “King of the Jews” is a title the Romans bestowed on their ally, Herod the Great, who, in 37 BCE, violently seized control of Jerusalem with Roman military assistance (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.282). It was a title only Rome could grant, and it advertised the Jewish king’s subordination to the Roman empire.
 - Jesus negatively characterizes this form of coercive power: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:25-28; cf. Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:24-30)
 - This contrast between ruling “like the Gentiles” and leading through service derives from Israel’s scriptures (Dt 17:14-20; 1 Sam 8; 1 Kgs 12:1-16; Ps 72).
 - When Jesus speaks of his kingdom being “not of this world,” he means “not based on coercion and violence.” This is clear from the other readings in today’s lectionary sequence:
 - Daniel 7 contrasts “one like a son of man” (who represents God’s sovereignty over “all peoples, nations, and languages”) with the violent empires (symbolized by monstrous beasts) that have dominated human history.
 - Revelation 1 presents Jesus’ universal kingship as an extension of God’s kingship over Israel, which began by God’s saving the Jewish people from the oppressive rule of the Pharaoh (Ex 19:4-6).
 - Psalm 118 (paraphrased by Mk 11:9-10), which celebrates God’s royal victory over Gentile adversaries.
- Point out that Jesus was killed by Romans – not Jews.
 - The Romans did not allow their subject peoples to execute prisoners.
 - Despite the evangelist’s efforts to exculpate Pilate (Jn 18:38; 19:6, 11), it is Pilate who orders Jesus’ execution on the charge of claiming to be “king of the Jews” (Jn 19:19-22) – reflecting the crowds’ earlier affirmation of Jesus as embodying “the kingdom of our father David that is to come” (Mk 11:10).
 - Jesus himself predicted that “the Gentiles” – not “the Jews” – would kill him (Mk 10:33-34).
 - Revelation 1:7’s “those who pierced him” alludes to the Romans (cf. Jn 19:34-37).
 - John amplifies Jewish culpability for Jesus’ death by routinely labelling his opponents “the Jews.” But as all the evangelists attest, not all Jews were hostile toward Jesus.
 - “Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion” (Nostra Aetate, Article 4).

Please avoid these errors:

- Saying that the Jews killed Jesus.
- Saying that the Jews had the wrong ideas of leadership/kingship
- Reading the text apart from its historical and literary context. John is highly stylized, filled with symbolic language that must be carefully parsed.