

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 Year B, 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time, October 6, 2024
(Gn 2:18-24 -- Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6---Heb 2:9-11---Mk 10: 2-16)

Link to the text on the USCCB daily readings page: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/100624.cfm>

Suggestions for approaching these readings without misrepresenting Jews or Judaism:

- Point out that the Pharisees' question is not indicative of Jewish attitudes – then or now – toward divorce.
 - The evangelist says they were “testing” Jesus, meaning they were attempting to trap him into saying something that would discredit him in public (cf. Mk 12:13-17).
 - Like the Church's canon law, the commandment the Pharisees quote in response to Jesus counter-question (Dt 24:1-4) is not about divorce *per se* but about re-marriage after divorce. It did not dictate Jewish attitudes toward divorce, though it did become a focus for later rabbinic discussion about divorce (Mishnah, *Git.* 9:10).
 - The Pharisees ask Jesus whether divorce is permissible – not whether it is desirable. One rabbi from Jesus' time is reported to have lamented the practice: “If a man divorces his wife, even the altar sheds tears” (Babylonian Talmud, *Git.* 90b).
- Point out that Jesus, as a faithful Jew, turns to the Torah in answer to the question about divorce.
 - Debate about the meaning and application of the Torah is how Jews discern how to live holy and ethical lives.
 - Jesus does not contradict the Torah; he cites it to discredit his opponents and to support his more stringent stance on divorce in his private conversation with the disciples.
- Point out that “hardness of heart” is not the only reason spouses seek divorce or separation.
 - The reality (rather than the ideal) is that some relationships turn out to be abusive, as the US Bishops acknowledge.¹
 - The 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time often occurs in October, which is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
- With regard to the verses about Jesus blessing children
 - Point out that it is Jewish parents who seek Jesus' blessing for their children; it is the disciples who try to discourage them.
 - Point out that one must not only live ethically and justly, one must also receive the Reign of God as a child does – trustingly.

Please avoid these errors:

- Encouraging people to stay in abusive marriages
 - These readings, especially the statement in Hebrews that “the leader of salvation” was made perfect through suffering, have been used in the past to justify such advice.
- Saying that Jesus ‘liberated’ women from an unjust Jewish system
 - Women could and did initiate divorce in Jesus' time (note that in the text Jesus says ‘if she divorces her husband. . .’). Women could, and did, own property, have their own resources, travel independently (e.g., see Lk 8:2-3).

¹ <https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence>