

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, 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time, November 3, 2024
(Dt 6:2-6 -- Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51---Heb 7:23-28---Mk 12:28b-34)

Link to the text on the USCCB daily readings page: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/110324.cfm>

Suggestions for approaching these readings without misrepresenting Jews or Judaism:

- Regarding the Gospel reading
 - Point out that Jesus is not introducing a new commandment but is citing Moses' exhortation to Israel from the first reading (Dt 6:2-6).
 - Jesus does not reject or replace Judaism; he points to the Shema ("Hear O Israel") as the heart of Jewish faith.
 - The second commandment Jesus cites is likewise not original to him; it is an excerpt from Israel's call to holiness ("Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy") in Leviticus 19.
 - Point out that Jesus was not the only Jew to propose these commandments to be "the greatest."
 - "The world stands on three things: the Torah, the service of God, and deeds of loving kindness" (Mishnah, *Avot* 1:2)
 - "Love of neighbor is the greatest principle of the Torah" (*Sifr. Lev.* 19:18)
 - "The Lord I loved with all my strength; likewise, I loved every human being as I love my children" (*T. Issachar* 7:6)
 - Point out that the scribe questions Jesus not out of ignorance but out of shared understanding, mutual appreciation, and agreement about what the heart of Judaism is.
- Regarding the Hebrews reading
 - Point out that, while Hebrews does say that Jesus' priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood, it does not say that God's everlasting covenant with Israel has ended (*Nostra Aetate*, Article 4).
 - Point out that Hebrews does not say that the sacrifices of the Levitical priests are ineffective – just that Jesus' sacrifice is so much more effective that it needed to be done only once.
 - Point out that, while the Church's clergy participate in Jesus' unique priesthood, they – like the Levitical priests – are "men subject to weakness," "many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office" and who, though the Eucharist itself is singular in origin and ongoing in effect, "offer sacrifice day after day."
 - Point out that Judaism, like Christianity, supersedes the sacrificial system of Leviticus.
 - Even before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, Jews regarded acts of loving kindness to be equivalent in effect to sacrificial offerings (Sir 3:3-6, 14-15; 35:1-5; Tob 4:10-11; 12:8-10).
 - God's everlasting covenant with Israel does not depend on the existence of Temple sacrifice – as both Jesus and the scribe in today's Gospel reading, while conversing in the still functioning Temple, agree.

Please avoid these errors:

- Saying that the covenant God made with Israel has ended.
- Saying that Jews have salvation only through blood sacrifice, and that since the Temple and its sacrifices no longer exist, Jews no longer have access to God's salvation.
- Saying that Jews were focused on sacrifice/external ritual while Christians are focused on love/interior disposition. (See, again, the scribe's response to Jesus in the Gospel reading.)