

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, 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, November 10, 2024
(1 Kgs 17:10-16 -- Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10---Heb 9:24-28---Mk 12:38-44)

Link to the text on the USCCB daily readings page: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/111024.cfm>

Suggestions for approaching these readings without misrepresenting Jews or Judaism:

- Point out that, like the offering tray circulated during mass, the purpose of the Temple treasury was to enable Jews to actively contribute to the community's worship.
 - While adult Jewish men were required to annually dedicate a half-shekel for the upkeep of the Temple, *all* Jews – young and old, male and female, single, widowed or married – were free to voluntarily donate money to the Temple. (This latter activity is what the Gospel is depicting.)
 - Freedom to devote one's personal resources expressed the fact that the Temple existed for the sake of the wellbeing of God's people – not the other way around (cf. 2 Macc 5:19).
- Point out that monetary support for the Temple neither devalued nor stood in tension with concern for the poor and vulnerable.
 - In Jesus' time, Jewish piety was defined by **both** devotion to the Temple **and** almsgiving (Tob 1:6-8; 4:11; 12:8-9).
 - The rabbis who codified Jewish practice a century and a half later summed this ethos with the saying, "The world stands on three things: the Torah, the service [of the Temple], **and** deeds of loving kindness" (Mishnah, *Avot* 1:2)
- Point out that Jesus' observation about the widow's contribution picks up on last week's Gospel reading.
 - Jesus and the scribe agree that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, with **all** your soul, with **all** your mind, and with **all** your strength" (Mk 12:30). The evangelist uses the same Greek word for "all" in that passage and "whole" in describing the widow's contribution in this passage. The widow fulfills the greatest commandment.
 - This connection also raises a question: Now that the widow has devoted her whole livelihood to God, who will see to it that her own needs are met? Remember, the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31).
 - Care for widows is a core value of Judaism (Dt 10:17-19; 14:28-29; 24:17-22; 26:12-13; 27:19; Is 1:17, 23; Ruth 2:11; Tob 1:8; Sir 4:10; 35:17).
 - In the Old Testament reading, the widow also gives all that she has and her needs are met by the prophet Elijah; both widows rely on God for their sustenance and survival.
- Point out that Jesus' praise of the widow has no relationship to his criticism of scribes who "devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers" in the previous verse (Mk 12:40)
 - The evangelist neither states nor implies that the widow of the present passage was a victim of scribal rapacity. Instead, he presents her as exercising control over her own resources.
 - Jesus locates scribal rapacity not inside the Temple (an institution over which scribes exercised no control) but outside it.
 - That not all scribes are targeted by Jesus' criticism is clear from his conversation with the scribe in last week's Gospel reading, who affirms that love of neighbor is "is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mk 12:33)

Please avoid these errors:

- Saying that the scribes ran the Temple. They did not.
- Saying that the Temple system was evil, robbing the poor of their sustenance. In this story the widow is not forced to contribute but gives freely.
- Saying that Jews were/are concerned only with externals. Jesus does not impute bad motives to the rich Jews who donate to the Temple from their surplus wealth.