

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, 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, September 1, 2024
(Dt 4:1-2, 6-8 --Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6---Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27---Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23)

Link to the text on the USCCB daily readings page: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090124.cfm>

Suggestions for approaching these readings without misrepresenting Jews or Judaism:

- Regarding the Gospel reading
 - Point out that Jesus was a Jew whose Jewish context included sometimes intense debates about all aspects of the Law, especially the relationship between external, ritual acts and interior holiness.
 - Point out that Jesus elsewhere denied that he was abolishing the Law (Mt 5:17-20) and even encouraged his followers to adhere to Pharisaic tradition (Mt 23:1-3).
 - Point out that the text says that some – not all – of Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands. So even Jesus’ disciples had different opinions regarding the relationship of this particular ritual to Israel’s call to holiness (Ex 19:6; Lev 19:2).
- Point out that rituals are the way we hand on our traditions, whether it is how we celebrate birthdays and holidays or what we believe about God and how we are called to worship.
 - The Eucharist is a premier example of our use of ritual to hand on our tradition of faith – and it includes washing hands.
 - The rituals of the Jewish tradition, like the rituals of the Catholic tradition, are part of a much larger movement toward holiness, and must be considered within that context
- The emphasis on living an ethical and just life in the first and second readings is echoed by the last verses of the Gospel reading
 - Jesus is not the first Jew to provide a list of vices to avoid. Similar lists appear in other Jewish writings of the time such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 4:9-11) and Philo of Alexandria (*Sacr.* 32).
 - The list of vices includes both internal (avarice, envy, pride) and external (adultery, slander, theft) acts.
- Point out that Jews in Jesus’ time and Jews today regard the Torah as a gift from God that will guide them toward holiness. Pharisees, with their more liberal interpretation of Torah, attempted to make Temple-holiness part of everyday life and available to all the people.

Please avoid these errors:

- Making the word ‘Pharisee’ equivalent to ‘hypocrite’ and extending that false characterization to all Jews.¹
- The idea that Jews in Jesus’ time were obsessed with ritual (rather than moral) purity.
- Describing Jews as obsessed with the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law.
- Implying that Jews in Jesus’ time – or Jews now – all think and believe exactly the same things.

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190509_pont-istitutobiblico.html