



Revised Directives for the Liturgical Reading of the Passion Narratives in Holy Week

| Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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In July 1988 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued revised lectionary readings of the Passion narratives in the Gospels for Holy Week.

A special section deals with passages referring to the Jewish People. It recalls that the Passion narratives, like the rest of the Gospels, have been influenced by the rift that took place between Christianity and Judaism in the first century and the spread of anonymity and polemic that developed. In our times the Church has rediscovered the close bonds linking her with the Jewish People and has also become aware of Christian responsibility for the tragic centuries of antisemitism. The Church has therefore directed that "with regard to liturgical readings, care should be taken... to give them a correct interpretation especially when it comes to passages that seem to cast the Jewish People in an unfavourable light... Commissions responsible for liturgical translations should take special pains over how they translate terms and passages that... Christians could take in a prejudicial sense." Longer extracts from the recent Vatican Documents on the Church's Relationship with the Jewish People (1965, 1974, 1985) and from the speech of John Paul II at the Rome Synagogue are quoted. The liturgical calendar already shows the link between the Jewish festival of Passover and the Christian feast of Easter and draws attention to the anti-Jewish tone of parts of the Passion according to St John, calling on preachers to ensure the right understanding of the text. The new instruction takes further steps to implement the Vatican directive. The main points are:

1. "In nine places in the Passion according to John the term "the Jews" is used when speaking of the religious authorities or the leaders of the Jews rather than the whole Jewish People. These cases occur in Jn.18:14,31,36,38 and Jn.19:7,12,14,31,38. Lest the actions of the leaders of that time be taken as an excuse for condemning all Jewish people then or now, these references have been amended to specify the ones involved". The term "the Jews" has been changed to "the Jewish authorities" or "the Jewish leaders".
2. Mt. 27:25 ("his blood be upon us...") is to be omitted from the reading. The text explains, "in our history some Christians have used this line as an excuse for persecuting Jewish people or for accusing them of Christ's death. Both these positions are wrong and are explicitly

- rejected by the Second Vatican Council. For this reason, verse 25 is omitted in this edition."
3. Explaining that the aim of the liturgy is to proclaim life and reconciliation, arouse faith and lead to deeper relations with other religious groups. It is recommended that "the Passion narratives be proclaimed as they are in this lectionary, without any further dramatization. In particular crowd parts should not be assigned to the congregation, no gestures should be made, banners waved or other activities carried on during the reading of the text. Care must always be taken to avoid turning the proclamation of the gospel into a historic pageant or passion play."
 4. Because of their liability to misrepresentation, (the text states), it might be appropriate to omit the Reproaches which are included in the Roman Catholic liturgy of Good Friday as an optional text. The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews agreed in November 1985 that these changes are in accord with their directives. Three pages of helpful bibliography conclude this document. It is this kind of implementation that brings documents to life and fulfils their purpose. The new and rich understanding of God's revelation thus reaches the ordinary Catholic worshipper at the most important and solemn moment of the liturgical year, when hearts are most likely to be open to receive the Word of God that is given to us by the Church of our time.

These are examples of the prayers for the Jewish people from the liturgy for Good Friday, showing the changes made by the second Vatican Council.

Pre-Vatican II

Almighty and everlasting God. You do not refuse Your mercy even to the faithless Jews; hear the prayers which we offer for the blindness of that people so that they may acknowledge the light of Your truth, which is Christ, and be delivered from their darkness. Through the same our Lord.
Amen.

Post-Vatican II

Let us pray for the Jewish people,

the first to hear the word of God,

that they may continue to grow in the love of his name

and in faithfulness to his covenant.

(Pause)

Almighty and eternal God,

long ago you gave your promise to

Abraham and his posterity.

Listen to your Church as we pray

that the people you first made your own

may arrive at the fullness of redemption.

We ask this through Christ the Lord.

Amen.