A Chosen People, A Common Ancestry

All of today’s readings have a common theme: how Jesus’ words to his Jewish brothers and sisters influence our faith.

The Catholic Church’s relationship with our Jewish brothers and sisters has been strengthened dramatically over the last years. This is thanks in large part to Vatican II’s Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate), particularly Judaism.

Our deep connection with Judaism is rooted in the fact it was to these Chosen People God offered the Old Covenant. We are also indebted to them because their history and culture formed the lives of the people of God and the Holy Family, from which the early Church sprung.

Christianity’s firm belief that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah is the reason our Church is like a shoot sprung from the root of Jesse. This difference was something Paul’s Letter to the Romans dealt with directly—the need for all, both Jews and Gentiles, to accept Jesus.

The key element to this acceptance is the faith shown in the Gospels. Jesus reaches out to his fellow members of the house of Judah yet also recognizes that a Canaanite (Gentile) woman has faith that leads to salvation. This has key implications for both insiders and outsiders: One can no longer claim salvation by a bloodline or nationality but only by one’s acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God and active participation in his body, the Church. Jesus broadens the welcome and opens God’s house to all people.

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Piece: The Crossing of the Red Sea, 1481–82
Artist: Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, or Biagio d’Antonio
Location: Sistine Chapel, Rome

“For Reflection
How can you become more united with your ancestors in faith? How can you strengthen your bond with your brothers and sisters in Christ in your parish community or greater public community?”

“Them I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7).
Occasional and Genuine Grace

Remembering and bearing witness to the gift of faith

By PEG EKERD

The seventh and last Murphy brother walked from the altar, the eulogy for his brother now complete. All seven brothers had spoken. Yes, seven eulogies. In truth, only one of the seven Murphy boys spoke for himself, the others delivered by way of family members. But in the end, it was only one eulogy we (predictably) have been told, “But all seven of the Murphy boys spoke for themselves; they did. We have worked hard through the years to be consistent in pastoral decisions, but we believe that there were reasons, but it was a weak moment, way, to say it was the one eulogy we have told.”

We all know we are in trouble when the chronologically organized eulogy begins with the birth of the deceased and 15 minutes into it we are only beginning to hear the events of the college years.

For, when the deceased’s high school athletic abilities are extolled and exalted as if they had not transmigrated since graduation.

Or when a family insists that several people have spoken to do “justice to dad.” Less is more is not a concept that endorses a church minister to a group. If my own siblings could say, “Do not overestimate how much people want to hear our stories about mom. They are our family treasures. But, that is precisely it—they are ours.”

But, I would be sadly remiss if I did not say that some of the most tender and moving moments at our parish funerals are the occasional eulogies of family members. Indeed, they are unforgettable moments of grace. And, at times, some have even overshadowed homilies in their testament to faith.

So, we will continue to hear eulogies. Sometimes, we will wish for a writer who is perhaps a little more. Sometimes we may find ourselves fortifying. But, we will say, “Yes, go for it.” They called them, we close the door to occasional and genuine instances of grace.

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Dear Padre,

What are the gnostic gospels and apocryphal books? Is it OK to read them?

In the two earliest manuscripts of the Bible, both of which are in the Vatican Library, one contains the seven apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the other does not. The Catholic Church includes these apocryphal books and considers them to be the inspired word of God, as is everything included in Catholic translations of the Bible. Selections from these books are included in our Lectionary and proclaimed during Mass.

When Martin Luther left the Catholic Church, he used the Bible manuscript that did not contain the seven apocryphal books, but then he placed these books in a section between the Old and New Testaments, calling them Deuterocanonicals. He did not discard these books entirely but considered them of lesser importance than the other books. Some Protestant translations of the Bible exclude these books altogether.

The gnostic gospels, however, are entirely separate from these apocryphal books. Gnosticism is a heresy condemned by the Catholic Church. As part of their false proclamation, gnostics produced stories of Jesus’ life that supported their belief, and these “gospels” contain teachings that are contrary to our Catholic faith. While the gnostic gospels could be read out of interest in their historical or philosophical context, they are not the inspired word of God and should not be read in that light.

Fr. Patrick Keyes, CSsR

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A Word From Pope Francis

"Mutual understanding of our [Catholic and Jewish] spiritual heritage, appreciation for what we have in common and respect in matters on which we disagree: all these can help to guide us to a closer relationship, an intention which we put in God’s hands. Together, we can make a great contribution to the cause of peace; together, we can bear witness, in this rapidly changing world, to the perennial importance of the divine plan of creation; together, we can firmly oppose every form of anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination. May the Lord help us to walk with confidence and strength in his ways."

—Address to the two chief rabbis in Israel on a visit to Heichal Shlomo Center, Jerusalem, May 26, 2014