

5 points

from *Nostra Aetate*, n.4

With Vatican II began a new era of reconciliation between Christians and Jews. In paragraph 4 of the 1965 document *Nostra Aetate* ('In our times') the Church publicly embraced the uniqueness and sacredness of its spiritual ties with Judaism. Here we summarize its key statements:



1. Historically and spiritually, Jews and Christians share a common ancestry in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. It was through the Jewish people that the Church received the revelation of the Old Testament.



2. The Church emerged from the Jewish people. Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and others among the first Christians, were Jews. (We might add, in keeping with our belief in the resurrection, that Jesus is still Jewish!)



3. The Jews remain God's chosen people, a people dear to God's heart. (In 1980 at Mainz, Germany, Pope John Paul II referred to the Jews as the people "of the old covenant, never revoked by God.")



4. The Jews, as a people, are not to be held responsible for the death of Jesus. In his death and resurrection Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles (see Eph. 2:14-1). Jewish-Christian dialogue is to be encouraged.



5. There must be no discrimination against Jews. Anti-semitism is the antithesis of Christianity. Its appearance in any form, at any time or place, is tragic and unacceptable.

This *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes encourages parishioners to be attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2009. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Further reading: www.lightoftorah.net; www.batkol.info and www.etz-hayim.com.



Light of Torah

Ancient texts
through fresh eyes,
alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

"The New Testament writings were never presented as something entirely new. On the contrary, they attest their rootedness in the long religious experience of the people of Israel, an experience recorded in diverse forms in the sacred books which comprise the Jewish Scriptures. The New Testament recognizes their divine authority."

The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures, n.3
(PBC, 2001)

After centuries of estrangement between Christianity and Judaism, a gradual revolution is underway as Christians rediscover their deep historical and spiritual links with the Jewish people. This radical reappraisal was officially set in motion at the Second Vatican Council with the document *Nostra Aetate* and has continued to find expression in subsequent documents and initiatives of the Church down to this day.

This leaflet series, *Light of Torah*, seeks to bring the message of *Nostra Aetate* into the hearts and homes of parishioners. It does so by engaging Catholics in Torah reflection. Each week, we explore a portion of the Torah (the first five books of the bible) drawing on Jewish sources and insights. In this way, Catholics engage with the ancient stories of their own Scriptures with an appreciation of the Jewish people, their long history of biblical interpretation, and the fact that Jesus himself was a son of the Jewish people.



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Genesis 44:18–47:27

This week we find ourselves in the midst of one of the greatest of the Torah narratives as Joseph, in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh, reveals that “I am Joseph your brother.” It is a line that has meaning for interreligious dialogue in our times. At the historic meeting between Pope John XXIII and Jewish leaders at the time of Vatican II, Pope John (whose Christian name was Giuseppe, ‘Joseph’) opened his address with the words “I am Joseph your brother” thus marking a new era of Jewish-Christian reconciliation.

* Rashi: 11th C. Torah commentator. Sources: Goldstein (ed.), *The Women’s Torah Commentary* (Woodstock, Vermont, 2000); Munk, *The Call of the Torah* (NY, 1994); *Nostra Aetate* (1965) accessed at www.vatican.va. Scripture quotations: Rabbi Chaim Stern (trans. of Genesis in Goldstein).

Tasting Torah

“I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold to Egypt” (Gen. 45:4).

Read through the whole of this reconciliation scene in 44:18-45:15. Read it again, and aloud, with a friend. Place yourself in the drama of the narrative and the emotion of the characters. What stands out to each of you? How does God’s Word speak to the curiosity of your minds, to the movement of your hearts? As you ponder this, let’s hear what some of the sages of Israel find noteworthy in the text.

Touching Torah

The sages were fascinated by Judah’s speech just prior to Joseph’s self-disclosure:

“My Lord, please give your servant a hearing and do not let your anger flare up at your servant—for you are like Pharaoh” (44:18).

How do you understand Judah’s words? Is he saying ‘You are merciful like Pharaoh’? or ‘You are cruel like Pharaoh’? Is Judah being politically wise, or risking foolhardy insolence? He certainly knows how to pull Joseph’s heart-strings by mentioning their aged and lonely father. The sages present a variety of views ranging from Judah’s absolute sincerity to his ability to gain the upper hand over Joseph. How do you view Judah’s approach to Joseph? Note, too, the irony that Judah should beg to replace Benjamin as a slave to Joseph. Judah, who was the principal architect of the sale of Joseph into slavery, now proposes that he become Joseph’s slave!

Depthing Torah

In the face of Joseph’s revelation, his brothers are dumbfounded. “They were unable to answer him—they recoiled in fear of him” (45:3). A number of the sages remark on Joseph’s display of compassion. Rashi*, for instance, says that Joseph cries “Send everyone away from me!” because he could not bear having the Egyptians there, witnessing to the humiliation of his brothers when his true identity was revealed. Says Rashi, Joseph calls his brothers to “Come, draw near to me!” (45.4) so as to speak to them gently, in Hebrew no less, and to prove his identity by showing that he is circumcized.

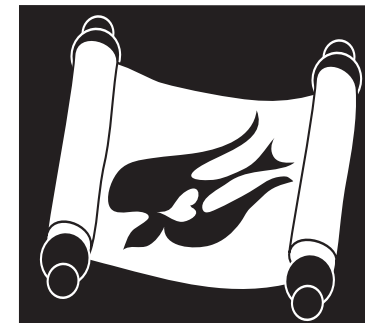
A striking aspect of this scene is Joseph’s willingness to forgive, even reassuring his brothers that the episode of their mistreatment of him was the work of God who directs all human destiny. “For it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” (45.5). It takes maturity of faith and life experience to exhibit such confidence in divine providence. It appears that Joseph’s past, filled with tragic events, has shaped him into a man of steadfast confidence. Do you agree?

Doing Torah

What steps can I take to grow into being a person of steadfast confidence in the ways of God?

How hard is it for you to stay hopefilled and faith-filled in the midst of grief and setback?

Continue to explore and discuss this week’s Torah reading, gleaning insights into human nature and the challenges of reconciliation.



Faith & Life

My wife and I returned home one evening to discover that two of our children had had a major fight. There was a hole in the wall and another in the door. Our elder son said that his younger brother had gone off ‘in a huff.’

I set out in the car to look for him, my futile searching leading me into a mild panic. Had he caught a bus to the city? Had he been drawn into the peer group that surrounded him? I was praying wildly, stumbling past strangers in the shadows, when I spotted him. He was sitting in a park, in the middle of some infant play equipment. “Thank you, Lord,” I said in an audible voice.

I sat down next to my son. He was emotionally distraught, almost transfixed. Never before had he been so angry with his brother. I talked with him gently. I listened to his anger. I stopped and felt his hurt. I held him and told him I loved him very much. He wept. I wept.