

Anti-Semitism in the New Testament? April 12, 2021



In St. Ann Chapel, near the Tabernacle, we have a stained glass window titled "Jacob & the Wrestler" depicting the event in Genesis 22 when Jacob spends the night wrestling with the Angel of God. At the end of the struggle, the Angel changes our ancestor's name from "Jacob" to "Israel"---a name meaning "one who has contended with God". In John's Gospel Jesus says of Nathaniel, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him" (John 1:47). To be a true son or daughter of Israel is to be, at times, a wrestler. After wrestling with God, Jacob/Israel walked the rest of his life with a limp. Also after wrestling with God, Jacob/Israel walked the rest of his life in the light.

The Gospel According to John

Of the **sixty-four** times St. John uses the term “the Jews” in his Gospel, **thirty-five** (55%) are neutral, **seven** (11%) are positive, and **twenty-two** (34%) are negative. As we begin the “Season of John” we need to admit that about one third of the time John refers to “the Jews” he is presenting them in a collective negative light. Since Anti-Semitism is a sin, what are we to make of this?

The Acts of the Apostles

Throughout the 50 days of Easter Season the first readings at Mass are taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*. Of the 67 times the phrase “the Jews” occurs in *Acts*, I would say that twenty-one (31%) are neutral, seven (10%) are positive, and thirty-nine (58%) are negative. Mindful that Anti-Semitism is a sin, what are we to make of this?

What Are We To Do?

I think we face these facts and remember that God speaks to us in Sacred Scripture, in Catholic Tradition, in the failures and sins of our past, in the questions of the present, in our hopes for the future, through others, and in our own hearts. It is important to keep the conversation alive and not to fear wrestling with things that challenge us. We too, as descendants of Jacob/Israel are called to walk in the light even if (maybe especially when) we walk with a limp.

For more on our relations to the Jewish People check the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraphs 60-64, 218-219, 597-599, 762, 839, 1611-1612).