



February 24, 2004 - Statement of Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, OFM Cap, regarding the film, The Passion of the Christ

This Lent a new film depicting the suffering and death of Jesus is about to open. I have not seen the film but Jewish friends have voiced concerns that the movie could encourage anti-Semitism by portraying the Jewish people in an unfavorable way. I hope that this is not the case.

In the landmark Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirmed that Christianity has its own roots in Judaism and that God's Covenant with the Jewish people remains, "for the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." They also declared that neither the Jewish people as a whole at the time of Jesus nor the Jewish people of today can be held responsible for the death of Jesus.

In the years since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has produced authoritative documents which further our understanding of Judaism and of our relationship to the Jewish people. As a result, insight into our own faith has deepened, for as Pope John Paul has observed, Christians and Jews share a unique relationship because they are linked at the very level of their identity.

As we approach the Lenten season, I want to take this occasion to remind those who have responsibility for leading worship and teaching our children that they should familiarize themselves with the most recent documents of the Church and avail themselves of the best of current biblical scholarship which is consonant with Catholic teaching so that, when presenting the passion, they may take special care not to "teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the gospel and the spirit of Christ." (Nostra Aetate)

The Archdiocesan Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs has assembled many helpful resources for responsible preaching and teaching on the passion and, in addition to mailing this information out to all ministerial personnel and Directors of Religious Education, the Office has posted this information on our archdiocesan website.

It is our hope that as Christians reflect on the Passion of Jesus we will all accept our own responsibility for Christ's death. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that the sufferings of Jesus must teach us about the enormity of sin that caused Christ to suffer so much and about the grandeur of God's love for sinners and His desire to save us.

I pray that the film, the Passion, will inspire all who see it to imitate Jesus' sacrificial love and be resolved to promote reconciliation among all ethnic and religious groups.

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