**A Note on Holy Week Scriptural References to “The Jews”**

As Christians, we live under the burden of a sad and violent history of anti-Semitism, in the sobering shadow of the Shoah (Holocaust), and with the painful awareness of current events in Israel/Palestine. It is important to us to be clear about what our sacred texts mean when they make reference to “the Jews,” especially during Holy Week, when we contemplate Jesus’ death.

When the crucifixion narratives speak of “the chief priests and leaders of the people,” they are referring to officials who collaborated closely with the Roman systems of oppression, and were viewed with contempt by much of the Jewish community of their time. They are never to be identified with the Jewish people as a whole, past or present.

It may be helpful to recall the cultural context of our Christian scriptures, emerging as they did from a small, originally Jewish community of believers in Jesus, who for reasons of faith in him as the Messiah, were eventually “put out of the synagogues” (John 9:18-23), their places of worship. In John’s usage especially, “the Jews” functions as a technical term for those among the people who did not accept Jesus as Messiah. It is a term that reflects the growing antagonism and mutual recrimination that developed in the latter part of the first century between church and synagogue. The gospels’ use of the term “the Jews” should never be understood, therefore, as a blanket condemnation of Jews in particular or in general.

It is one of the bitter ironies of history that our sacred texts have been used to justify the persecution of the covenant people who were and are forever God’s first love.