

- I When we as Christians think of the Jewish faith we see only difference. The Jewish people are somehow different from us and thus odd and alien. They don't go to church on Sunday but go to the Synagogue on Saturday. Some Jews are very religious and others not. Of course the biggest difference is that we as Christians believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Greek word for Messiah. He is the Savior of the world. The claim that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life is obvious and proven by his Resurrection and confirmed by the New Testament. For Jews, claims that Jesus is divine and the Messiah are false. They don't believe that. They believe that when the Messiah comes a new world will begin without all of the pain and tragedy that we have today. They would say since we live in a world of cancer and pain, terrorism, war and natural disasters the age of the Messiah is not here yet. Since there is no Messianic age there is no Messiah yet. The two come together.
 - A. Because of these and other differences the Christian people have had a long and sometimes tortuous history with the Jewish people. It is a complex history beginning with Jesus' relationship with his

own Jewish faith leadership. It continues when the early Christians and Jews separated in Jerusalem, so that Christianity became not just a sect of Judaism but a separate religion. In history Christian people have killed Jews accusing them of being “Christ killers.” In that same history Christian people have helped save Jews from the Holocaust of WWII. In the complexity of this history one truth that stands out yet often goes unrecognized is that we are spiritually Semitic; that is we as a Christian people have a Jewish spiritual heritage. “Christianity rides on the shoulders of Judaism.”

- B. This idea of Christianity riding on the shoulders of the Jewish faith and history is depicted in a great stained glass window 40 feet in diameter. This is not a recent work of art by a Jewish artist but is in the great Rose window of the 800 year-old cathedral of Chartres in France. Of course at the center of the window sits Christ surrounded by angels and the four writers of the Gospels. Below this wheel of color are five more long and narrow windows, featuring Mary at the center with the Matthew, Mark, Luke and John on either side of her. Each of these Gospel writers appear almost boyish in size and each sits on the shoulders of one of the taller prophets of the Old

Testament in the same way that when we were little our dads lifted us high on their shoulders for a better view of the world. These artists knew something 800 years ago that we sometimes forget. They wanted to make a serious point, namely that the gospels build on the shoulders of Judaism. “Christianity rides on the shoulders of Judaism.”

- C. It is correct to say then that the spiritual tradition we follow as Christians did not begin with Christ. It began long before Christ as God prepared the world for the coming of Christ through the Jewish people. The two readings before the gospel take us back in history to our spiritual beginning. The second reading takes us back to the time of Abraham almost 19 centuries before Jesus appeared on earth. Abraham and his wife Sarah are the parents of the Jewish people. The first reading occurs several centuries after the time of Abraham and Sarah when God’s people left Egypt to head for the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. That our spiritual tradition as Christians begins before Jesus is why we proclaim the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, at almost all Sunday Masses, with the exception of the Easter Season when both readings before the Gospel come from the New Testament and

focus on the post-Resurrection life of Jesus and the Church.

- D. The fact that our Christian faith is built on the Jewish faith is recognized by the Catholic Church. In 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and later to become Pope Benedict XVI stated in the Vatican official paper, *L'Obsservatore Romano*: “The faith witnessed to by the Jewish Bible (Old Testament for Christians) is not merely another religion to us, but is the foundation of our faith. Therefore, Christians—and today increasingly in collaboration with their Jewish sisters and brothers—read and attentively study these books of Sacred Scripture, as a part of the common heritage.”
- E. So the Jewish people should not seem so different to us since they are really our older relatives in the faith. They were chosen by God. Jesus was Jewish and from this people came the Savior of the world.