



Good Friday is one of the holiest days in the Catholic liturgical calendar. On this day, the Church commemorates the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ—the redemptive act that opened the gates of salvation to all humanity. Within this context, the “Prayer for the Jews” in the Liturgy of the Passion holds special significance, as it directly touches on the relationship between Christianity and the Jewish people—a deep and sometimes complex bond rooted in salvation history.

Over the centuries, this prayer has undergone revisions and discussions, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, to understand its true meaning, it must be viewed within its theological and liturgical context. Why does the Church pray for the Jews on this day? What is its significance in traditional Catholic theology? How should we understand it today from a perspective of faith?

In this article, we will explore the origins, history, theology, and current relevance of this prayer, always in fidelity to the traditional teachings of the Church.

I. The Origin of the Prayer for the Jews on Good Friday

From its earliest days, the Catholic Church has included a series of prayers in the Good Friday Liturgy known as the “Solemn Prayers.” These prayers intercede for various groups: the Christian faithful, the Pope, catechumens, heretics and schismatics, pagans, rulers, and among them, also for the Jews.

Since the most primitive liturgies, the Church has prayed for the conversion of the Jewish people. This practice is rooted in the teaching of Saint Paul, who expresses his deep desire for Israel to be saved and to recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah (cf. Romans 9–11).

II. The Relationship Between the Jewish People, Christ, and the Church

To understand the meaning of this prayer, it is essential to recall the special relationship that the Jewish people have with God and salvation history.

1. **The People of the Old Covenant:** God chose Israel as His holy people, gave them the Law, and established the Old Covenant with them. This election was not due to Israel’s own merits but was purely an act of divine grace (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6–8).
2. **The Rejection of Christ and Its Consequences:** However, when the fullness of time came, many in Israel did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The Gospels recount how



He was rejected by the religious authorities of His time and ultimately condemned to death. This event, though painful, was part of God's divine plan of salvation (cf. Acts 2:22-23).

3. **The New Covenant in Christ:** With the coming of Jesus, the Old Covenant found its fulfillment in the New Covenant, sealed with His Blood. The Church, as the New Israel, inherits the promises and becomes the true People of God. However, this does not mean that the Jews are forsaken; rather, they are also called to faith in Christ.

Saint Paul explains this mystery in the Letter to the Romans (chapter 11), where he uses the image of the olive tree: the Jews are the natural branches, but some were broken off due to their unbelief, and in their place, wild olive branches (the Gentiles) were grafted in. Nevertheless, God can graft the Jews back in if they come to believe in Christ.

III. History of the Prayer and Its Changes in the Liturgy

For centuries, the traditional prayer for the Jews on Good Friday was formulated in Latin as follows:

"Oremus et pro perfidis Iudaeis..."

Which translates to: "Let us also pray for the perfidious Jews..." The Latin word *perfidis* means "unbelieving" or "without faith," but over time, it took on a pejorative connotation in modern languages.

For this reason, in the 20th century—especially following the Second Vatican Council—the prayer was modified to eliminate any possible misunderstandings or offensive interpretations. In the 1970 liturgical reform under Pope Paul VI, the prayer was changed to a more generic version that prayed for the Jews' fidelity to God without explicitly referring to their conversion.

However, in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI introduced a new version for the Extraordinary Form of the Mass (*Usus Antiquior*), which maintains the petition for the conversion of the Jews but in a more charitable manner. This version reads:

"Let us also pray for the Jews, that God our Lord may enlighten their hearts so that they may recognize Jesus Christ as the Savior of all men."

This change was significant because it reaffirmed the Church's traditional teaching that salvation is found only in Christ, while removing expressions that could be misinterpreted as



derogatory.

IV. Meaning and Relevance Today

Today, the Prayer for the Jews remains a testament to the Church's universal mission. It is not an expression of contempt or hostility but rather an act of genuine love. The Church desires the salvation of all people, including the Jewish people, and therefore prays that they may come to recognize Jesus Christ.

It is important to remember that this prayer does not contradict the Church's respect and appreciation for the Jewish people. The Second Vatican Council, in *Nostra Aetate*, reaffirmed that the Jews are still loved by God, for "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

However, this does not mean that there are two separate paths of salvation—one for Jews and another for Christians. As the Magisterium teaches, there is only one path to salvation, and that is through Christ (cf. John 14:6). Therefore, the Church prays with charity that the Jews may also come to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Conclusion: A Prayer of Love and Hope

The Prayer for the Jews on Good Friday is a testament to the Church's fidelity to its evangelizing mission. It is not a prayer of contempt or condemnation but a humble supplication that the people of the Old Covenant may recognize their own Messiah.

Over the centuries, this prayer has been reformulated to express its intent more clearly, but its essence remains unchanged: the Church's longing that all people, including the Jews, may come to the fullness of truth in Jesus Christ.

As faithful Catholics, we should pray this prayer with deep love, recognizing that God has a plan of salvation for all. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Daughter of Zion, intercede for the conversion of all hearts and grant us the grace to be authentic witnesses of the Truth.

May this Good Friday, our prayer echo Christ's love for all humanity!