



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben August 6, 2026

It has been interesting to see how the movie version of *The Odyssey* has caught the imaginations of many people. I have been particularly intrigued by three things that never came up in school. The first was the geo-political reasons behind the Trojan War. These become clear when you remember that while the rocky soil of ancient Greece was great for growing olives and sheep, it didn't work so well for grain. The grain needed to feed the growing population of Greek city states came from the fertile fields on the shores of the Black Sea in present-day Ukraine. It was transported by ship. Located on the coast of modern-day Turkey, Troy controlled a maritime choke point between the Black Sea and the Greece and had become rich by harassing and demanding tribute from passing Greek vessels. Though poetry suggests the Trojan War was about a beautiful woman, political science suggests it was a fight for freedom of trade.

The second thing they never mentioned in school was the connection between Homer and Judaism and Jewish thought. Noting that many of the names of both heroes and gods derived from Hebrew words and comparing the theology of the two sources, some scholars suggest that Homer knew the Jewish scriptures and even interwove certain of its narratives with his poems. This cross fertilization shouldn't be a surprise to readers of Josh Franklin's new book (and those who have listened to recent sermons here) who will note that Haran (another crossroads in Turkey) has been home to a large Jewish population since the time of Abraham, more than 1000 years before Homer began writing his poems.

Cross-fertilization also came up in discussion related to what the movie referred to as "Zeus' Law". The phrase "Zeus' law" didn't show up in school. It is an artifice, a bit of artistic license, designed to make the film more accessible for a general audience. However, while the phrase "Zeus' law" is new, "Xenia" – Greek rules of hospitality and the treatment of strangers – have been there all along. I found the repeated references to "Zeus' Law" irksome because I had assumed that the commands to welcome strangers because they might be angels (or God) and treating others the way we would like to be treated were uniquely Christian. A quick google search showed that these concepts exist in various forms across most religions. (I digress, but imagine if, instead of the 10 Commandments, we put parallel versions of the Great Commandment, the Golden rule, and the imperative to welcome the stranger from different religions on classroom walls.)

These insights are not threatening to my faith. In fact, they work together to help it grow stronger. The questions that they raise lead me on a journey, a quest, and an odyssey of my own. I hope they do the same for you.