

**LET HIM WHO IS WITHOUT SIN AMONG YOU BE THE FIRST TO THROW A STONE AT HER –
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

John 8,1-11

..but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

In Luke's gospel there are eleven verses that no Christian community wanted, for a long time,. At first the evangelists were not united. Each community had its own evangelist and he transmitted to the other communities. Well, when in a community they arrived at Luke's gospel eleven verses were left out.

They are the verses that have found a place and hospitality in John's gospel, chapter 8, verses 1-11. Actually if these are taken from John's gospel and put back in their original place, in chapter 21, verse 38 of Luke's gospel, we see what was their context.

But as no community had wanted these verses, even for a century and for five centuries this part of the gospel never appeared in the liturgy until 900, therefore many years have passed, was it not commented on by the fathers of Greek? Well, we have the precious testimony of St. Augustine, in the IV century he wrote " For fear of granting impunity to their wives to sin, take away (the members of the Christian communities) from their codes (ie the text of the Gospel) the act of indulgence that the LORD did to the adulteress, as if the one who said " from now on sin no more "he had granted permission to sin."

Therefore it was the men, the husbands, that did not want these verses, because Jesus' indulgence towards the adulteress seemed to put their family in danger, and their wedded unity.

But let's read these important verses that, I repeat even if today they are found in John's gospel, they really are Luke's, the language is Luke's.

"Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning..." literally dawn. It is important this indication of time. *".. he came again to the temple. All the people came to him,.."* We have seen that as always, every time that the crowd goes to Jesus, he tries to liberate, to make them grow, to mature the people, straight away the reaction of the religious authority.

They want to control the people, not make them independent. In fact *"The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery,"* We know that it is dawn so probably they had spied this situation.

"..placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher,.." This is the hypocrisy of religious people, they do not want to learn from Jesus, they only want to trick him, they want to condemn him.

"...this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women." Note the contempt for this person.

"So what do you say?" From the fact that the punishment is stoning to death, it is understood that this woman is in the first phase of matrimony. In Israel the matrimony came in two parts. The first when the girl was twelve years old and the boy eighteen, there was the phase called the betrothal, a year later the co-habiting began and this second phase was the marriage.

If the woman committed adultery in the first phase, that of the betrothal, she was stoned to death. If, on the contrary, the adultery was committed in the second phase, she was strangled. The fact that they asked for the stoning, means the this girl was twelve to thirteen years old.

"So what do you say?" It is a trap. Whatever Jesus replies will be against him. Because if said: "It is good to obey the divine law", all these people had followed him because they had felt in him a different inspiration, had felt the echo of the love and mercy that of God, remain disappointed and leave him. If Jesus says: "No, do not stone her", we are in the temple, there are the police, and Jesus could be arrested because it violated the divine law, Moses' laws.

The evangelist comments: *"This they said to test him,..."* literally to "tempt him", it is the word that the evangelist uses for the devil, therefore these zealous defenders of the tradition and the orthodoxy in reality for the evangelist are nothing more than the instruments of the devil. *"..that they might have some charge to bring against him,"* The evangelist is fierce: the religious authority carry out the action of the devil. Who is the devil? He who tempts, he who accuses.

"Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground." What could be the significance of Jesus' silence and the writing? It is probably a reference to the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 17, 13 where it says: *"..you^[c] shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD"*, it is Jesus' declaration:

these zealous defenders of the orthodoxy, the tradition, these very religious people, in reality have abandoned the Lord because of their ardent hate and sense of death.

In John's first Letter he will say well: *"...whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God,"* (John 1, v.10)

"And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." " It is not, as we see sometimes in pictures or in films the people pick up a stone and throw it. The first stone was that thrown by the prosecution witnesses, it was a boulder that must weigh about 50 kg., and was thrown on the woman that had been lowered into a pit, and practically it was the stone that killed her. Therefore Jesus says "Let him who is without sin carry out the death sentence."

"And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones,.." The word used by the evangelist does not mean " the elderly", but the Greek word is "presbyter" ,who are the members of the Sanhedrin, they that judged, they are these that leave.

"..and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him." The ending is full of great tenderness.

"Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." Jesus shows great respect for this woman. "And Jesus said,.. " he is the only one without sin, the only one that can condemn her, throw the first stone, but Jesus does not scold her and says: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Jesus does not pardon the woman, because she is already pardoned by God, but he communicates the strength to return to live. Jesus does not throw the stone at this woman, but offers his word that helps to continue to live,