

**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***

***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.”***

The decision has been made, Jesus must be eliminated. But there is a problem: the great crowd that hang onto His every word, that follow Him, the enthusiasm that the people have for Jesus. But why must Jesus be killed? Because Jesus went and touched the crucial point of the religious institution, the temple, turning everyone away.

He revealed that the real divinity worshiped in the temple is not the Father of Jesus, but the money god. For this the house of prayer has been transformed into a den of thieves. Therefore the high religious authority decide to kill Jesus, but, writes the evangelist, *They did not know how because all the people hang on His every word.*

When speaking of the “evangelist”, even if the verses that we comment now are found in John’s Gospel, actually it is a text of Luke. Only it was a difficult and scandalous text because of the great novelty and for centuries was not wanted by any community. And then it found a place in chapter 8 of John’s Gospel, but it is actually from Luke’s Gospel, chapter 21,38.

So, let's read what the evangelist tells us. So the decision has been taken, but the crowd depend on Jesus; so He must be made to lose popularity. And so begins, against Jesus, a series of attacks designed to discredit or to ridicule Him. One failure follows another and every time Jesus seems stronger and the people more enthusiastic, until they prepare a perfect trap.

This. Jesus is in the temple, teaching. The people listen and the religious authority plot to get rid of Him because Jesus had gone and touched their true god: convenience and interest. Luke writes *"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?"*

They call Him Teacher and ask for an opinion, actually they are there to condemn Jesus not to learn from Him. They bring a woman. From the punishment that they decide for this woman, it seems that she is in the first phase of marriage, therefore between twelve and thirteen years old, but this does not interest them. She is an instrument to have Jesus killed.

Amongst other things the adulterer, as adultery takes two, is absent, but the man is not there, there is only the woman. So the perfect trap is this: we are in the temple where there are the guards, they bring this poor unfortunate to Jesus and ask Him: *"Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"*

Whatever reply Jesus gives He is condemned. Because if He says "Follow the law of Moses", all those that follow Him have heard from His mouth a new thought, a new side of a God that does not condemn but pardons, a God that does not exclude and welcomes, a God that is not interested in obedience to the doctrine, but welcomes with his love, so all these people will be disillusioned and will leave Him.

On the other hand if Jesus says "let her go", the law of Moses that condemns this woman to be stoned would be broken and there are the guards of the temple nearby ready to arrest and kill Him. Therefore the trap is perfect. And the evangelist writes that *"This they said to test him,"* The same word used by Luke for the devil.

The highest representatives of the religious tradition, people zealous of devotion, for Luke are really instruments of death because they have no love for mankind, but they have feelings of death. *"..that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground."* Jesus' gesture is a prophetic gesture recalling the prophet Jeremiah saying to the Lord *"...those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth.."* (Jeremiah 17 ,13)

They are insistent and so Jesus gives this reply that has become famous as a sentence : "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." It was not, as we image, a stone to stone her, but they were great, heavy stones that the accused had to throw over the condemned. It was practically a condemnation to death.

And again He turns to writing, we see that the list of the carriers of death is long! The evangelist presents a great irony *"But when they heard it, they went away one by one,.."* While, at the moment of the sentence they were all together, when they see the danger they creep away,

slyly, one by one “..beginning with the older ones,..” They are not the old ones, but the priests, the members of the Sanhedrin who competed to issue the sentences and justice.

“...and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they?” Jesus uses a word meaning a “married woman” when speaking to the unfortunate one, while the scribes and the Pharisees had said “ this one”, Jesus sees the dignity of the person.

“Has no one condemned you?” *She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you;..”* Jesus is the only one without sin, the only one that could throw the first stone, but He says: “Neither do I condemn you;..” Jesus’ God does not condemn, but pardons! “...go, and from now on sin no more.” Jesus does not throw the stone that kills, but offers His word of pardon like the bread that gives life.

Well, this Gospel, with this pardon that Jesus gives to this adulterous woman, was thought to be so scandalous that for centuries no community wanted it.