

V LENT– 7th April 2019

**“ 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.”***

In Luke’s gospel there are eleven verses which, for a long time, no Christian community wanted. In the early days the gospels were not united. Each community had its own gospel and transmitted it to other communities. Well, when Luke’s gospel arrived in a community these eleven verses were left out.

These are the verses that then found a place in John’s gospel, in chapter 8, 1-11 In reality if we removed this passage from John’s gospel and inserted it in its original place, Luke’s gospel in chapter 21, 39, we would see that this was its context.

But how come no community has wanted this passage, even for a century, and for five centuries this gospel passage did not appear in the liturgy and until 900, so many years have passed, has it not been commented on by the Greek-speaking fathers? Well, we have the precious testimony of St. Augustine, so in the fourth century he wrote: *For fear of granting their wives the impunity to sin, they remove (the members of the Christian communities) from their codes (that is, the text of the Gospel) the gesture of indulgence that the Lord performed towards the adulteress, as if he who said " from now on, do not sin anymore "had granted permission to sin.*

So it was the men, the husbands, who did not want this passage, because the indulgence of Jesus towards the adulterous woman seemed to endanger their family, their conjugal unity.

But we read this important passage that, I repeat, even if today it is found in the Gospel of John, in reality it is of Luke, the language is Luke’s.

*“Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning...”* literally at dawn. This is an important indication, *“.. he came again to the temple. All the people came to him,..”* By now we have seen that every time the people are with Jesus and he tries to free them, to make the people mentally mature, there is immediately the reaction of the religious authorities.

They want to subdue the people, not make them independent. In fact *“The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery,..”* We know it is dawn so they had probably spied on this situation.” *... and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher,..”* And

this is the hypocrisy of religious people, they don't want to learn from Jesus, they just want to deceive 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 creature.

*"So what do you say?"* From the fact that the penalty required is stoning, we understand that this woman is in the first phase of the marriage. In Israel marriage took place in two stages. The first when the girl was twelve and the male eighteen, there was the phase called the betrothal, a year later the cohabitation began and this second phase was the wedding. If the woman committed adultery in the first phase, that of the betrothal, she was stoned. If, on the contrary, adultery was committed in the second phase, it was strangled. The fact that they ask for this girl, the stoning, means that she is a girl between twelve and thirteen.

*"So what do you say?"* It's a trap, because if he says: "Right, obey the divine law" all these people who have followed Jesus because they felt a different inspiration in him, heard the echo of God's love and mercy, they will be disappointed and leave him. If on the contrary he says "No, do not stone her!" they are in the temple, there are the temple police and Jesus could be arrested because he goes against the divine law, Moses' law. In fact the evangelist comments: *"This they said to test him.."* literally "tempt him", it is the verb that the evangelist uses for the devil, so these zealous defenders of tradition and orthodoxy in reality for the evangelist are nothing but instruments of the devil.

*"..that they might have some charge to bring against him."* The evangelist is fierce: the religious authorities carry out the action of the devil. Who is the devil? The one who tempts, the one who accuses.

*"Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground."* What could be the meaning of Jesus' silence and the act of writing? It is probably a reference to the prophet Jeremiah chapter 17,13 where it is written: *"..those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord."* It is Jesus' denunciation: these zealous defenders of orthodoxy, of tradition, these very religious people, have actually abandoned the Lord because they harbour feelings of hatred and feelings of death.

In 1 John 3,14 it will say: *"Whoever does not love abides in death."*

However, since they insisted on questioning him, he got 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 a question, as we sometimes see in the images or films the people who take the stone and the spear. The first stone was the one that the prosecution's witnesses threw, it was a boulder that had to weigh about 50 Kg, and was thrown on the woman who had been lowered into a pit, and in practice was the stone that killed her. Therefore Jesus is saying "He who is without sin executes 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 term used by the evangelist does not mean much "the old, the elderly", but the Greek term is "presbyter", which are the members of the Sanhedrin, those who judged. The Sanhedrin was the highest juridical organ of Israel, composed of high priests, scribes and presbyters. They are the ones who judged, they are the ones who leave.

*"..and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him."* The end 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 addresses this woman with great respect. *"And Jesus said,.."* Jesus is the only one in which there is no sin, the only one who could condemn her, throw the first stone and could reproach her, but Jesus does not reproach and says *"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."* Jesus does not forgive the woman, because the woman is already forgiven by God, but communicates the strength to return to live. Jesus does not throw on this woman the stone that will kill her, but offers her his word to help her continue to live.

