

22. March 2021

**“Let the one among you who is guiltless
be the first to throw a stone at her”**

Jn 8:1-11

And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle. They said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

A difficult situation for Jesus.

Adultery was considered a serious offence in Israel. The question Jesus was asked was built into a trap and the questioners were not really interested in the right answer. They wanted to find an accusation instead.

At first Jesus, who surely noticed their deceit, kept silent and wrote with his finger on the ground! Perhaps he wanted to wait first to see if the matter would resolve itself. But the persistence of the questioners leaves us with an answer from Jesus that still concerns us in the Church today.

What is the right way to deal with people who have fallen into sin and in this case with those who have sinned against the sixth commandment, even more concretely: what is it about adultery? How is it to be dealt with?

First of all, it should be noted that adultery is still one of the grave sins today, even if the general consciousness no longer shares this view. Jesus' answer to this question is therefore of great importance for us.

With his response, Jesus does not question the sin of adultery or diminish its significance. But he points to something else: The question is whether those who refer to the Law of Moses to demand the death penalty - in this case, the scribes and Pharisees - are so blameless as to be able to execute it.

With Jesus' injunction: "*Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.*" He, the Lord hits the situation exactly. Everyone should remember his own sins before judging another person. After this word - as described above - no one was in a position to start stoning.

A word of the Lord of tremendous depth!

If we would realise the word of the Lord in our lives, then all unkind and unjust judging would quickly be nipped in the bud. The remembrance of our own sins, and even more: of the mercy received from God, should always admonish us to deal with the guilt, or the supposed guilt of the other person in the way of the Lord.

How is this, his way, to be derived from this example?

Now after all had gone on the Lord's word, Jesus said to the woman that he too did not condemn her!

In a few words the Lord shows that he came to call sinners, not the righteous (*cf. Lk 5:32*). He did not come to judge, but to redeem (*cf. Jn 12:47*). Therefore, the Lord does not side with the accusers of this woman and does not confirm the execution of the law as Moses had prescribed. With the coming of the Son of God, God's readiness to forgive becomes clear, who has mercy on the sinner.

Nevertheless, the Lord does not trivialise sin. He clearly states that the woman has to change her life and gives her this word for her future path! With the renunciation of punishment because of God's mercy comes the call to repentance. It is not a relativisation of sin!

The sinful person is to lead his life back into the God-given order. For this he needs help. It is precisely mercy, which emphasises God's tender love in a special

way, that deepens this invitation and calls man to obey His commandments out of love for God and out of insight, more than out of fear of punishment!