

3. April 2022

## Jesus and the adulterous woman

Jn 8:1-11

*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.'*

In Old Testament times, adultery was considered a grave sin, punishable by death, as the scribes and Pharisees demanded in this case. Indeed, marriage is a reflection of the relationship between God and humankind, as St Paul explains us (cf. Eph 5:25-32). Therefore, the breaking of the marriage covenant reflects the breaking of the covenant that God sealed with mankind. This is why the Old Testament frequently uses the term "prostitution" to refer to idolatry, when the people of Israel turned to other gods.

And indeed, adultery has profound repercussions, because it represents a betrayal of true love. The total gift of one person to another has a special character of exclusivity, because only one person can be given this gift of self. In a way, adultery is also a kind of "death of love".

It is the same in our relationship with God... This special love, that is, the total gift of ourselves, must be given exclusively to God... We cannot, at the same time, love a person in this way. If we were to do so, we would fall into idolatry, to put it in biblical language.

So the woman presented to us in today's Gospel was really at fault. And Jesus does not relativise its gravity, nor does he overlook it. However, the Lord did not come into the world to punish people for all their sins, but to forgive them and offer them conversion. Therefore, the first thing he wants to do is to make the scribes and

Pharisees understand that they too are in need of forgiveness and conversion. The phrase "Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her" touches them and, in fact, no one dares to stone the woman. Those words of the Lord must have reminded them of their own sins. And one by one they went away...

This is an important message for us: Sin is sin! It cannot be trivialised, because then we would no longer be living in the truth. However, it is not for us to pass judgement on the sinner, but to understand that the Lord has come to call sinners and not the righteous (cf. Lk 5:32). Therefore, our claim should not be to invoke God's wrath on the sinner, but His compassion.

Jesus does not condemn the woman; but, even so, He exhorts her not to sin again. These two aspects go hand in hand, and whoever omits one of them will not know how to understand this gospel passage correctly.