

1. February 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
“Jesus and the adulterous woman”

Jn 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. What do you say about her?” 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 with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked 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 do not sin again.”

All the people came to listen to Jesus. They had noticed that He spoke with authority and His words touched their souls. Indeed, whoever tastes good food wants more, and who could feed the people better than the One whose words were spiritual food? So they came to Him...

The attitude of the scribes and Pharisees was different. They were eager to gather accusations against Jesus. It seems that they had reached the point where they wanted to use everything He said and did against Him. So they confronted Him with an adulteress and the Law of Moses, which called for such a woman to be stoned. Now they asked Him what He said about this.

But Jesus, no doubt knowing their intentions, gave them no answer and 'began to write with His finger on the ground'. They were not satisfied and continued to insist that He should answer them. Then He uttered those words which echo forever in the hearts of

those who have accepted the teaching of the Son of God: *"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."*

This answer came as a complete surprise to them. They could not question Him further because Jesus had changed the situation completely. Each of them knew that he was not blameless, so none of them would have dared to cast the first stone at the woman. They remained silent and, as the Gospel tells us, *"they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest"*.

What must have happened to them, were they embarrassed, or were they pondering the turn of events, or did they begin to wonder who this man really was, whose answer deprived them of the opportunity to find further accusations against Him? We do not know whether at least one of them was moved. But this experience does not seem to have changed the attitude of the Pharisees towards Jesus in general, for we know what they did to Him in the end.

What a lesson for the future and what a deep insight into the heart of the Saviour these few words offer us, if we do not close our hearts! The Son of God does not come to punish sinners, but to save what is lost. Today's Gospel makes this clear. Jesus asked the woman who was alone with Him if anyone had condemned her. When she said no, Jesus told her that He did not condemn her either.

It is crucial to make that all-important distinction between sin and sinner. Sin is still sin. Jesus would never have minimised its seriousness, for that would be disastrous. Sin is still man's greatest misfortune, for it separates him from God, darkens his life and eats away at him like a cancerous tumour. Man must be saved from this evil, and for this purpose Jesus will give His life on Calvary. The Lord is concerned for the salvation of souls, for their healing and liberation: *"I did not come to judge the world but to save the world"* (Jn 12:47). He also wants to find this attitude in those who follow Him as His disciples. They should look at people with the eyes and the heart of Jesus. They should not throw stones at them, but lead them to the One who can save them.

Jesus showed great mercy to this woman. The admonition not to sin again is part of that mercy. It would be a false mercy to omit this warning, for her healing and liberation implies not only that she is not condemned and obtains forgiveness, but also that she herself is not again separated from God and people by sin, and thus harms herself.

This exhortation must also be part of evangelisation today. To call sinners to conversion and to proclaim God's mercy to them is the mission of the Church. This is no less urgent today than it was in Jesus' time.