

The Woman Caught in Adultery – John 8:1-11

PRAYER BEFORE MEDITATING: Lord Jesus, help us to understand the new law that you are writing in our hearts, so that we may grasp the depth of your love for us and discern what is wrong without condemning our neighbour.

¹ Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them.

³ Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. ⁴ They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Homily of Pope Francis for the penitential celebration in Saint Peter's Basilica, 29 March 2019:

“The two of them alone remained: mercy with misery” (Saint Augustine, *Tractatus in Johannem* 33, 5). In this way Saint Augustine sums up the end of the Gospel we have just heard. Those who came to cast stones at the woman or to accuse Jesus with regard to the Law have gone away, having lost interest. Jesus, however, remains. He remains because what is of value in his eyes has remained: that woman, that person. For him, the sinner comes before the sin. I, you, each one of us come first in the heart of God: before mistakes, rules, judgements and our failures. Let us ask for the grace of a gaze like that of Jesus, let us ask to have the Christian perspective on life. Let us look with love upon the sinner before his or her sin; upon the one going astray before his or her error; upon the person before his or her history.

FOR THE REFLECTION:

- This is the only time we hear about Jesus writing (vv. 6, 8). It recalls “the stone tablets inscribed by God’s own finger” given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 31:18) and the new covenant proclaimed by Jeremiah: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days - oracle of the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).
- Try to imagine yourself present in the scene. You can either be the woman or be yourself being brought in front of Jesus by people who accuse you. Or you can be one of the accusers who realizes not to be without sin and walks away.
- Are you able to accept the loving gaze of Jesus upon you even when you experience your own sinfulness? Can you look at others with that same gaze?
- How do you find the balance between being able to judge other people’s actions and not condemning the persons? When have you been too quick to judge your neighbour?