

Let the one with no sin cast the first stone at her

Readings: Is. 43:16-21; Ps. 125; Phil. 3:8-14; Jn. 8:1-11

From the Gospel according to John

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 middle 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."

FROM GRATITUDE TO AUTHENTICITY

This Sunday's Gospel passage is a scandal for believers. The first Christians would certainly have eliminated it if they could. Unfortunately, the incident was well known and removing it from the text would have been too much. The reason it was a scandal is immediately clear. Jesus forgave an adulterous woman; thus far, nothing new. Today, we are so accustomed to the expression "God's forgiveness" that perhaps we no longer even desire it. We feel that we are all good, and if we make a mistake, then it is due to fatigue or misunderstanding. Bad people no longer exist. Neither does sin. Holy people don't exist any more, either; only the mediocre, who are a bit bad, and a bit good. I said that today's Gospel passage does not scandalize us because Jesus forgives the adulteress; it scandalizes us because the Master *forgets* what she did. He does not take into account, does not "remember" our past deeds, unless they are good. This is what we cannot tolerate about God: the fact that he does not remember other people's mistakes; the fact that after he forgives someone, he then once again gives that person his trust. This is the heart of the matter. On our part, we may sometimes forgive others but we don't forget what they did and give them our trust once again because "trust needs to be earned!" In our circle, we hear it said: "The Church forgives but doesn't forget." How sad. What an un-Gospel-like way to treat those who have failed. Can we still be called disciples of Jesus when we paternally squeeze the shoulder of a penitent brother or sister and with the other hand write "untrustworthy" after their names in our little black book? Jesus is so wonderful: he knows that without trust people will not change. He is the only one who knows how to do this; that is why he alone can be called "Teacher." Today in the Church there is a great yearning for integrity: "Away with the weak! Get rid of the immature. Make better choices! Everyone must be beyond reproach!" This is the pure illusion of a person who does not know the surprises grace brings. Flawlessness and authenticity are necessary and sacrosanct, but they spring from gratitude for God's love, not from an Institution's monitoring of individuals. The adulteress first tried to be pure: she knew she would pay a high price if she was "caught." She failed. But I think that after her meeting with Jesus, she succeeded. Because of her gratitude.

Father Giuseppe Forlai, igs

Prayer

*Thank you, Lord: yours is true love that never condemns.
You speak clearly about justice, but you never judge anyone.
Help us because often we love our own truth so much
that we mercilessly condemn even the people we love.
Give us the wisdom and courage to understand that truth-filled love
must not humiliate others, and that the power of your revelation
will give us the creativity to know how to love in truth and charity..*