There are no translations available.

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”
(Jn 8:7)

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, the Scribes and Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They said to Jesus, “In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” (Jn 8:5).

They wanted to set a trap for him with this question. If Jesus had shown himself to be against the stoning, they could have accused him of going against the law. According to the law, the actual witnesses were to begin throwing stones at the one who had sinned, and then the people were to follow in turn. If, instead, Jesus had confirmed the sentence of death, they would have succeeded in making him contradict his own teaching about God’s mercy toward sinners.

But Jesus, who was bent down writing on the ground with his finger, remained unperturbed and finally straightened up and said:

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

When they heard this, “the accusers went away one by one, beginning with the elders.” Jesus then turned to the woman and asked, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she replied. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore” (Jn 8:10–11).

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

With these words, Jesus certainly does not wish to appear permissive with regard to wrongdoing, such as adultery. His words, “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore,” clearly express God’s commandment.

Instead Jesus wishes to unmask the hypocrisy of those who set themselves up as judges of their fellow human beings who have sinned, without recognizing that they themselves are sinners. His words here underline the well-known command: “Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged” (Mt 7:1–2).

Speaking in this way, Jesus also addresses himself to those who, in the name of the law, ignore the person involved and do not take into account the repentance that sinners may feel in their hearts. This clearly shows what Jesus’ attitude is toward one who has done wrong: he is

merciful. As St. Augustine put it, when the accusers of the adulteress had gone away, “two persons remained: one in need of mercy and the other Mercy itself” (Homilies on the Gospel of Saint John 33:5).

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

How can we put this word of life into practice?

In all our dealings with others, let us remember that we too are sinners. All of us have sinned. Even if we think that we ourselves have not fallen into serious sin, we must bear in mind that we do not know just how strongly circumstances have influenced others, causing them to fall and to stray far from God. We do not know how we would have acted had we been in their place.

In any case, we too have broken the bond of love that was meant to unite us to God. We too have been unfaithful to him.

If Jesus, who was certainly without sin, did not throw the first stone at the adulteress, neither can we condemn others.

We should have compassion toward everyone, resisting those impulses that drive us to condemn others without mercy. We must learn how to forgive and forget. We should not harbor traces of judgment or resentment in our hearts, since these can easily give rise to anger and hatred that alienate us from others. We should see every person as “new” in every moment.

If our hearts are filled with love and compassion toward all, rather than judgment and condemnation, we will help others to begin new lives, to find the courage to start anew.

Chiara Lubich

Each month a Scripture passage is offered as a guide and inspiration for daily living. This commentary, translated into 96 different languages and dialects, reaches several million people worldwide through print, radio, television and the Internet. Ever since the Focolare’s beginnings, founder Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) wrote her commentaries each month. This one was originally published in March 1998.

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- Lubich, Chiara. “Our Aim: ‘May they all be one’,” Essential Writings , New City Press, 2007, p.18-19.
- Lubich, Chiara. “Banish Judgment,” The Art of Loving , New City Press, 2005, p.34.
- Mueller, Joan. “Taking the First Step to Love,” Forgiveness , New City Press, 2012, p.62.

Next month:
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“Do not grumble against one another, my brothers” (James 5:9).