

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – March 2, 2018
Gospel According to St. John – Third Year

The Woman Taken in Adultery

⁵³ Then they all went home, ⁸¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Entering Into Scripture: A Mediation on the Adulteress Before Jesus

I don't usually get worked up about things like this. But this is just too perfect. Some woman has been caught in adultery. There are two credible witnesses, and both will testify against her. Here is our chance. We can trap that trouble-monger Jesus with this bit of scandal. He will have no choice but to decide in favor of Law or against it – this is utterly delicious. Heads I win. Tails you lose! The Law of Moses says the penalty for adultery is death by stoning. Jesus will have to condemn this woman to a horribly barbaric death by stoning, or to break the law of Moses. Which will it be?

If He condemns her to death, it will utterly destroy His reputation as the friend of sinners. Even better, if He condemns her to death – the death she rightly deserves under the Law – He will run afoul the law of Rome – for under Roman law we Jews have no power to sentence anyone to death. Only Pilate can do that! But if He shows mercy He will utterly destroy His reputation for upholding the Law – because He will be teaching men to break the Law of Moses. It might even be said that He would be encouraging adultery! So we finally have Him on the horns of dilemma – and from these horns

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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there is no escape. I can almost taste the satisfaction!

We have been careful to do everything right – according to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions handed down by the great Rabbis. We can give Him no grounds to find fault with us. Every nuance of the Law has to be followed to exacting terms. We tried her case yesterday afternoon. The Law requires capital cases to be presented in the daylight hours and requires, in cases where the defendant is guilty, that the capital punishment be carried out the following day. That way there is leeway in case some evidence might be produced that could result in an acquittal.

Never-mind that we had to consult experts in the law. Truth is, capital punishment by stoning is rarely carried out, so we needed to be certain of the procedure. No mistakes. The Rabbis are cautious not to shed innocent blood, which is crime before God. Frankly, I have not seen a stoning in my lifetime, but I have heard stories of stoning's carried out in the countryside – far from Jerusalem. Vigilante justice, I suppose. But this Jesus is just too clever. To get Him we need everything to be just so.

Here is what we learned, and what we learned we did. Exactly as prescribed. The oral tradition requires a court of twenty-one members of the Great Sanhedrin in cases like this. All are men of high stature, wisdom, and pleasant appearance, and each is of suitable age so that they are respected. There was no problem or delay in gathering the judges, as there is great determination among us to kill Jesus. Many more members were eager to participate than the twenty-one required.

Having assembled the judges, the woman was brought before the court. Her name and her father's name were announced to all, as the law prescribes, for her crime not only brings shame upon her, but upon her father's household. The entire family is publicly shamed by her offence. Next the charge against her was announced. She was caught in the act of adultery. She is married.

The man she was caught with is not. He will be tried separately.

The two witnesses came and stood before her and the judges. Each, in turn, related what had happened and what they had seen. Two scribes were present, as required by the Law – one to write down the words spoken that favored acquittal and the other to write down the arguments for conviction. The first had nothing to write, for there was no testimony in favor of acquittal. Perfect. This is controversy-free.

The betrayed husband and her parents were present. They did their part. The Law forbids family members from having compassion for the guilty person regarding their offense because she should have known better. She knew the commandments we are to live by. Indignation seethed from her husband and father. It was simply energizing.

The woman never looked up from her place before the judges. All eyes glared at her in disgust. She broke the law. She did evil in the sight of God. She is a sinner. She deserves death. The tears streaming from her eyes made me sick – no mercy! She should have considered the consequences before she defiled herself. The law demands justice! And justice will be delivered by a hundred blows until the life is pounded from her sin-infected frame.

The trial was swift and to the point. There was nothing to contest. She had been caught red-handed. The judges voted unanimously, which the law requires for capital cases. Then we had to wait over-night. The Law provides a one-night reprieve between conviction and execution in case one of the judges would think of a good cause to acquit the defendant or evidence for acquittal would emerge.

Happily, nothing of this sort occurred, so we are off to find Jesus with the bound sinner in tow. All of those who sat in judgment yesterday are with us, and many more besides. I am so excited. Today is the day. We will finally get Him! And right in the open, too! All the people will know

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He is a demon-possessed deceiver! I could barely sleep for all the anticipation.

The morning air was crisp and still as we made our way through the city streets toward the Temple. Surely, Jesus will be teaching there again today. He has been there every day this week. Though it is early, the sun is up, and my heart is filled with expectant joy. Like the others, I have waited so long for this moment. It is about to be the perfect day!

We are not disappointed. As we climb the stairs to the Temple gate and enter in the outer court I can see the crowd through the portals of the inner courtyard. He is there – teaching in the court of women. My heart races in anticipation. This is going to be good.

We push our way into the assembled mob. At first some bristle as push our way forward. But they soon recognize the many members of the ruling council and at once make a way for us. As we move forward, the crowd steps back. The sinner is pushed to the front and we fan out around her.

Standing there, before a large crowd of mostly men, her humiliation is complete. Nothing brings more joy than when I can savor the humiliation of sinners. I have the great privilege of being the chosen representative of the Council. Stepping forward, I look Jesus in the eye.

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do You say?” My heart pounds in anticipation. I am ready. If He says to stone her, the people will surely see that He is a mean-spirited evil man – inflicting the most horrendous and tortuous death upon this victim. He will prove He is no friend of sinners. He will show that He is no better than one of us. But if He says to let her go, He will violate the law of Moses.

Anticipation builds. Which will it be?

Jesus looks at me. The moment seems to stretch on. Then He squats down before me. He begins to write on the ground using His finger. I tower

above Him, gazing down. Satisfaction wells up within me. This is delicious. He must surely know that He is trapped. I do not take notice of what He writes. It is not important. All that is important is that we finally have Him. The crowd falls completely still. I hear a pigeon call out. “oorhh!” It is the call of distress. How perfect, I think to myself.

“Teacher, what do You say? The Law of Moses says such women are to be stoned!” My voice was firm. Steady. He continued to write on the ground. I have Him. This is really good.

“Well, teacher? Have You nothing to say?” I press Him again. Jesus stopped writing. He straightened up and as He did our eyes meet again. Then His eyes scanned the crowd, first looking out to the left, then slowly scanning back across to the right. The silence is now deafening. No one moves. A man in the back lets out a cough.

“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” Jesus says. Then He stoops down and begins to write on the ground once more.

At first my shoulders slump, but then a silent rage forms within me. Damn it! My mind races. What is my next move? I can't let this happen. I don't look up. I don't want to see the faces around me. I continue to look down on the Man I tower over. I ponder what to say next, deep in thought as one ponders the next move in a game of chess – carefully considering the position of each piece on the board. Damn it. I had Him in check-mate. But then this...

The crowd is silent. No one speaks. I hear a shuffle here. A shuffle there. Mine is now a lonely vigil, standing over Jesus, the woman to my left. I can think of nothing to say. More shuffles. Now the pace quickens. The crowd around us begins to thin. I look up and glance around. It is mostly young men now. The elders have left, and it seems like the other Council members have moved on as well.

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I am embarrassed, and I am pissed. Embarrassed, because this was my moment. Pissed because He out maneuvered me.

Now there are only a handful of people around. There is nothing more to do. I turn away and pause. I look back down at the One I hate. He is still stooped over scribbling on the ground. He never looks up. Seething with rage, I slowly make my way, and as I do, the last few men follow me.

Jesus straightened up and looked at the woman. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" I am still within hearing distance. I stop, and half turn to listen.

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus said. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Then He bent down once more and began writing on the ground again. She stood motionless, then she turned away. Her eyes met mine. I wished I could burn a hole right through her.

She looked away and then walked by me, her pace accelerating as she reached the arch and then she ran through the outer courtyard and down the steps away from the Temple. Still seething, and now alone, I made my way. Whatever desire I harbored to shame Jesus before now, wells up in a complete and total determination to see Him killed. Nothing less will give me any satisfaction. And seeing Him die will allow my satisfaction to be complete!

Reflection 4: Writing on the Ground

There are two different words for "write." The one used most often has the meaning we typically associate – like when writing a letter. But the word used here means to delineate and the implication is that here, stooped over before these Pharisees, You begin to delineate the record of their sins – scrolling them onto the ground with Your finger. None take notice. What You write is never mentioned – although You do in one place say, "I have much to say in judgement of you." What is the record of my sin, Lord Jesus? The Psalmist joyfully sings about this. He proclaims that there is great joy awaiting the one whose record You have wiped clean of sin! He proclaims that there is great joy

awaiting the one whose rebellion against You is forgiven. The Psalmist delineates three sinful conditions from which You set us free – rebellion against You, missing the mark, and iniquity – which means being morally crooked. The Psalmist says that before he confessed his sin, he wasted away in the agony of a tormented conscience. But as soon as he confessed his sins, You forgave him and wiped the record clean. This is the hope I have in You, Lord Jesus. I am a sinner indeed, but when I confess my sin to You, You erase the record. You not only wipe the slate clean, You forget about my sins altogether. You cast them into the sea of forgetfulness.

Application: *Confession, it has been said, is like spiritual hygiene. It should be practiced as often as brushing our teeth. How practiced are my confession muscles? Do they need to be exercised a little more often?*

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Reflection 5: Mount of Olives

Lord, You often conceal hidden gems in Holy Scripture. What is before us is a perfect example. At the end of the previous day, everyone went home, but You went over to the Mount of Olives. It is easy to read over these words and miss the significance. It was here on the Mount of Olives that David's kingship had been confirmed a thousand years before. The prophets write that this place, the Mount of Olives will be the location of Your final victory, and it is during this occasion – the Festival of

Tabernacles – that the prophets say Your enemies will be subdued. So Your going over to the Mount of Olives during the Festival of Tabernacles is a proclamation of Your Kingship – a sign that You are that promised and long-awaited shoot from the stump of Jesse, King David's father. And it is a warning sign to Your enemies. And it will be here, at the base of this mount, in the Garden of Gethsemane, that You will pray to the Father before Your passion.

Application: Signs are given to build our confidence in our faith-walk. What are some of the more important signs of God's love and majesty in my life?

Reflection 6: The Adulterous Woman

The adulterous woman also represents the nation of Israel, and indeed, all mankind, since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The mercy and love You demonstrate towards this woman is also the love You have for me. When You tell her that You do not condemn her either, I am to observe by this that You also do not condemn me. You do not leave her free to return to her former way of living; You tell her to go and leave her life of sin. We cannot know what happened next, and whether she reformed her manner of life or not. But we do know that

those whom You forgive – those who are touched and cleansed by the healing balm of Your grace, are supplied with the grace required henceforth to avoid the temptations of sin. Even so, we are like sheep who will wander off and go astray. And when we do, we know You stand ready and eager to receive us gladly when we confess our sin. You are more ready to forgive than we are to beg forgiveness. You stand ready to give light and chase away darkness. We only need come to You.

Application: Do I truly grasp the magnitude of God's love of me? Am I prepared to accept God's love with the understanding that His love is so much greater than my worthiness?