

GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER - 8A (1-11)

¹But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

This pericope has variant text readings. The history of the woman taken in adultery is not discussed by St. Chrysostom or by other Greek commentators. There were no commentaries on it for the first millennium, yet forms a counterpart to the Jews attempt to stone Jesus at the end of John 8. (Behr).

The passage is only read on one of the feast days of Mary of Egypt in the Orthodox church.

“...according to the spirit of John, (8:1-11), serves as an illuminating image that demonstrates the great difference between the judgment of Jesus and the judgment of the Jews: the Pharisees used the law to condemn; Jesus used love to correct and save. (Bp. Gerasimos of Abydos)”

Augustine: some weaker in faith may have removed the passage because it could appear as giving liberty to sin and commit adultery without consequences...They possibly brought a prostitute to the Lord to test him.

²And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and was teaching them. ³And the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been caught in adultery. And after they made her stand in *the* midst, ⁴they say to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught committing adultery, in the very act. ⁵“Now Moses, in the law, commanded us to stone such *women*. You therefore, what do you say?” ⁶But this they were saying, putting Him to the test, in order that they may have an accusation against Him.

Saint Bede: “They ask what He would order to be done with her, in view of the fact that Moses had given a mandate to stone such a one (Lev 20:10). If He also determined that she was to be stoned they would scoff at Him, inasmuch as He had forgotten the mercy which He was always teaching. If He forbade stoning, they would gnash their teeth at Him, and, as they saw it, rightly condemn Him as a doer of wicked deeds contrary to the law.” [Ib., 247.]

Augustine: “There was a wonderful gentleness that shone out preeminently in Jesus...So as a teacher He brought truth, as a deliverer he brought gentleness, as an advocate he brought righteousness (justice)...They laid a snare for him, but they were the ones caught in it because they did not believe in the one who could pull them out of the net...you bring me this sinner, you who are sinners yourselves. If you think I should condemn sins, I shall begin with you.”

But Jesus, having stooped down, was writing with *His* finger on the ground.

Saint Bede: “Humility is represented by Jesus’ bending, and subtlety of discernment is represented by the finger, which is flexible because of the physical arrangement of the joints. By the ground, we are shown the human heart, which customarily produces the fruits of good or bad acts. Typologically, His writing teaches us that when we look at any of our neighbors’ errors, we should not judge by censuring them before we turn humbly back to our own conscience and meticulously clear it of guilt with the finger of discretion...in accordance with the apostle, ‘Brethren, even if a man should be overtaken in some transgression, you, the spiritual ones, be restoring such a one in the spirit of meekness, looking out for yourself, lest you also be tempted [Gal. 6:1].’” [Ib.]

Jerome: “But Jesus, stooping down, began to write with his finger on the ground, the sins to be sure, of those who were making the accusation, as well as all the sins of mortal beings...’Those who depart from you shall be written in the earth (Jeremiah, 17:13).”

Augustine: “It was by the finger of God that the Law was written, and the finger of God now is the Holy Spirit.”

⁷And as they continued questioning Him, He lifted up Himself and said to them, “The *one who is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone at her.*” ⁸And again He stooped down and was writing on the ground.

“Cease judging, that you be not judged; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured in turn to you. “And why do you look on the splinter that is in your brother’s eye, but perceive not the beam in your own eye? (Mt. 7:1-3)

Saint Bede: “‘If Moses gave you a mandate to stone such a woman as this, see that he did not command sinners to do this, but the just. First fulfill the justice of the law yourself, and, with this done, being innocent in hands and clean of heart, come together to stone the guilty woman. First carry out the spiritual edicts of the law—faith, mercy, and charity—and, with this done, turn aside to judge fleshly things.”

[Jn. 8:8.] Saint Bede: “Figuratively speaking, the fact that both before and after He gave His opinion He bent and wrote on the ground admonishes us that both before we rebuke a sinning neighbor and after we have rendered to him the ministry of due correction, we should subject ourselves to a suitably humble examination....We can also understand the story as meaning when the Lord was about to give pardon, He wished to write with His finger, in order to point out that it was He Himself Who once wrote the ten commandments of the law on stone with His finger, that is, by the action of the Holy Spirit. It is good that it was written on stone, since it was given to subdue the inmost hearts of a hard-hearted and defiant people.”

⁹But after they heard and were convicted by *their own* conscience, they were going out one by one, beginning from the eldest. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman being in *the* midst.

Augustine: “They however, even if they could not acknowledge their Creator, knew their own consciences. Turning one after the other, they too in their confusion unwilling to look each other in the face, from the eldest to the youngest – all went out.”

Saint Bede: “No one dared to condemn the sinful woman, for they all began to discern in themselves what they recognized to be more damnable.” [Ib., 250.]

¹⁰And after Jesus lifted up Himself, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Did no one condemn you?”

Augustine: “...there is a single norm for both husband and wife, they would rather be subject to the standard of the world than the law of Christ, because civil law does not seem to restrict men with the same bonds of chastity as it does women. (4th C.)”

Augustine: “The two were left alone. They left the woman with her great sin in the keeping of Him who was without sin. And because she had heard, He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone

at her, she most likely expected to be punished by one in whom no sin could be found. But He...lifted on her eyes of mercy.”

¹¹And she said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and henceforth no longer go on sinning.”

Augustine: “What is this, O Lord? Do you therefore favor sins?...the Lord did also condemn, but condemned sins, not the sinner...God has promised pardon to anyone who amends their life.”

Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos: “This image is one of the most beautiful teachings about our judgements at the expense of others...The gospel gives us the opportunity to believe in the human person, to sympathize with him, to forgive him, and to give him the possibility to become a saint. We do not tell him that everything is alright, that sin does not matter – it matters a great deal. We tell him that sin is an evil thing and that we have the opportunity to make a new beginnings in our life without sin....only faith and repentance can heal.”