

## Throwing Stones

My Sisters and Brothers in the Risen Lord,

In our world today, we often see people caught in dilemmas where the truth might expose their shortcomings. Imagine someone on trial, facing accusations that could ruin their reputation. Instead of admitting fault, they dodge responsibility by pleading the Fifth, clinging to silence as a shield against judgment. It's a familiar scene: the fear of being "caught" blinds us to the reality of our own hearts. In the Gospel of John 8:1-11, we encounter a moment when the scribes and Pharisees attempt to corner Jesus with a similar dilemma. But instead of evasion, Jesus offers them—and us—a lesson in grace, forgiveness, and the power of God to transform lives.

The scene is tense. A woman caught in adultery is dragged before Jesus, the law of Moses demanding her death. Yet, the accusers' real aim isn't justice but a trap. They want to discredit Jesus, forcing him to choose between upholding the law and showing mercy. How does Jesus respond? First, he says nothing. He bends down and writes in the sand, a deliberate pause that shifts the focus away from the woman and onto the accusers. When he finally speaks, his words pierce like a sword: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

As writer-philosopher Peter Kreeft notes, the true question wasn't about the woman's guilt but about the hearts of her accusers. The woman's sin became a mirror reflecting their own. But instead of facing their reflection, they chose blindness. Jesus's response, far from an evasion, exposes their evasion. He becomes the questioner, forcing them to examine their motives. In doing so, he not only dismantles their test but also opens a path for grace. One by one they walk away, their stones left unthrown.

Jesus then turns to the woman, offering her both freedom and a challenge: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Here we see the balance of divine love and justice. Jesus does not condone her sin, but neither does he define her by it. He loves the sinner while hating the sin, offering her the chance to begin anew.

This Gospel invites us to reflect on our own readiness to forgive. As St. John Paul II once said, "We cannot forgive if we do not let God forgive us first, recognizing that it is we who are the object of his mercy." The late pope lived these words when he forgave Mehmet Ali Ağca, the man who tried to assassinate him. After being gravely wounded, John Paul visited his would-be killer in prison, extended his forgiveness, and formed an enduring bond with him. This act of mercy reminds us that forgiveness is only possible when we first accept the depth of God's forgiveness for us.

So, the next time we find ourselves gripping stones of judgment, let us pause, as Jesus did, and examine our own hearts. For it is only through the grace of God that we can forgive and be transformed, leaving the stones behind to walk in mercy and truth.

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Rudy