

From a Circle of Death to a Circle of Life



The scribes and Pharisees ran toward Jesus. They had caught a woman committing adultery. They formed a circle of death around her as they threw her to the ground. Her accusers knew what the Law prescribed and they asked Jesus for his opinion: *Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?* A strict interpretation of the Law would certainly lead to judgment and condemnation. Would Jesus agree with her accusers who were lined up in a circle of death? Would he distance himself from them? Would he reject the Law which meant rejecting divine law? Would he defend the woman who had sinned? In this case, he took a risk and positioned himself beside the woman at the centre of the circle of death. There was considerable suspense. Everyone waited for Jesus' judgment.

What a dilemma for someone whose mission was to incarnate God's tenderness and mercy, as demonstrated in the parable of the Merciful Father and the Prodigal Son! But the case of the woman caught in adultery was an event that had *actually* taken place and the consequences were harsh. Would Jesus reveal that God's love conquers evil by changing peoples' hearts so they could convert and return to the path of communion with the Father?

Jesus did not fear those who were ready to stone the woman. He welcomed the woman without ever diminishing the gravity of her situation. He did not endorse the condemnation put forward by the scribes and Pharisees that left out any possibility of forgiveness. Instead Jesus chose to confront the accusers and appeal to their consciences – including the woman caught in adultery – by inviting them to examine their own relationship with God. Instead of throwing stones that would kill her, Jesus told each person to recognize his own sins. One by one they slipped away. The accusers broke their circle of death and left Jesus and the woman in a circle of life. Jesus invited her to repent and remain faithful to God. Divine forgiveness would annihilate the destructive power of sin. The repentant sinner was reborn with a new lease on life and an opportunity to rebuild her relationship with God.

Yves Guillemette, priest

Translated by Honore Kerwin Borrelli

God Keeps His Promise : Be Confident !