

## MARCH 23 2026 FATHER GUSTAVE INEZA

Dear sisters and brothers,

Today's passage from the Gospel of John has been acknowledged to be a special passage. The biblical scholar Moody Smith explained that the story of the woman caught in adultery was likely not part of the original Gospel of John, since all the manuscripts or the copies did not have it. Scholars point out that the style, the language, and the vocabulary of this passage are quite different from the rest of John's writings. The story also follows a pattern often found in the Synoptic Gospels, like Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

And during the 16th Century, Catholic and Protestant scholars noticed this absence while they were going back to the early texts written in Greek, wanting to move away from the Latin translation by Saint Jerome. You see the same pattern in this Gospel, and it is not similar to the rest of the Gospel of John.

In this Gospel scene, a woman accused of adultery is brought to Jesus in a trap set by her accusers. At the time, a married woman was seen as her husband's property and adultery brought shame on him. The accusers refer to the law of Moses, which is found in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 22, verse 22-23, which they claim required stoning, though such punishments had not been carried out for centuries.

And Jewish leaders under Roman rule could not legally impose the death penalty. You know what happened when Jesus was brought to the high priest. They had to take him to Pontius Pilat, because they did not have the right to kill him. So they hoped to force Jesus into choosing between breaking Roman law, or rejecting Moses' law.

Instead of answering them, Jesus bends down, and writes on the ground. A mysterious gesture, that may recall when God was writing the commandments. He then says that whoever is without sin should throw the first stone. Since the law required that those who are accusing should be also the first one to give the punishment, no one was left to punish the woman, because those who brought her had left.

Over the centuries, some important Christian thinkers wrote about women in ways that remind us of this story, of what we read in the first reading. People like Tertullian understood women as the occasion of sin and temptation. Even Saint Augustine, at some point, he focused too much on their sexual aspect and their bodies, which some did not find very appropriate. Thomas Aquinas, following the ancient biology, described them as weak, and many others did not really the space they should have. So we understand that for centuries women were not treated as full human beings.

These ideas were reinforced by certain patterns in our cultures. Associating women more with the body than with reason. Fearing women's sexuality, and assuming women were more naturally less capable. Even when not meant to harm, these views often justified limiting women's role in society and in the Church.

When we place this story beside John chapter eight, the story of the woman caught in adultery, we see a striking difference in Jesus' attitude. The woman is dragged forward as an object of shame, while the man who sinned with her remains invisible. Jesus refuses to join the crowd's moral judgement. Instead, he protects her dignity, challenges the hypocrisy of her accusers, and he speaks to her as a moral subject, capable of conversion. "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."

This Gospel, dear brothers and sisters, reminds us that Christ does not reduce people to their sin. Nor does he treat women as symbols of temptation. He restores dignity, responsibility, and hope. And modern Christian thinkers have increasingly tried to return to seeing women as full persons, called to freedom and holiness as men.

So, dear brothers and sisters, today's Gospel passage ultimately calls the Church not only to admire Jesus' mercy, but to imitate it. If Christ defends the dignity of the woman publicly shamed, and refuses to define her by her sin, then we too must examine the ways our words, attitudes, and structures may have become burdens to women. So the Gospel does not erase moral responsibility, but it always restores the person before judging the fault.

Let us do like Jesus, not show our insecurities, and let us see our sisters and our mothers as full human beings. Let us try to see that people's sufferings and weights are much bigger than their sins.

Amen.