

APRIL 13, 2026 FATHER GUSTAVE INEZA

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Gospel according to John is remarkable for the number of conversations it presents to us. Some take place between Jesus and large crowds; others are intimate exchanges with individuals. And sometimes the evangelist even recounts discussions between people in which Jesus is not directly involved, like when the blind man was talking to the leaders of the Jewish community.

These dialogues become windows through which we see faith and fault. Questions arise, and understanding slowly grows.

We do not have much of that in the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. We do not see understanding happening towards the end. In the chapters just before today's passage, Jesus had mainly been speaking publicly, and to smaller groups of disciples, or some other people, like when he was changing the water into wine in Cana.

In the Gospel of John, chapter three, verse one to eight, the scene becomes personal. Jesus speaks not to a multitude, but one person. And this attention to the individual is something deeply characteristic of John's Gospel. Remember the conversation with the Samaritan woman. Or Jesus talking to Pontius Pilate before he was executed.

The man who comes to see Jesus is Nicodemus. John introduces him as a Pharisee, and a leader among the Jews. He is not an ordinary seeker. He belongs to a respected religious group, and holds a position of authority. His very name, derived from Greek, means victorious among his people.

Yet, despite his learning and his status, he comes to Jesus at night, perhaps because he wishes to avoid the scrutiny of others. Perhaps he's

still uncertain about what he believes. Yet he begins the conversation with a sincere acknowledgement:

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one can do the signs that you do unless God is with him.”

It is striking that a man with such standing still approaches Jesus cautiously, under the cover of darkness. Knowledge, reputation, and religious position do not automatically bring clarity of faith. Even someone who appears confident and victorious may still be searching. And so this respected leader approaches Jesus, not as a teacher with answers, but as a seeker with questions.

Nicodemus’ questions, however, are very literal. When Jesus tells him that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again, he immediately imagines the physical impossibility of returning to the womb. His misunderstanding opens the door for Jesus to explain a deeper truth.

Jesus contrasts natural birth with the birth that comes from the Spirit. Age, our intelligence, and physical ability cannot give access to God’s kingdom. What opens the door is something entirely different: the gracious, transforming work of God. “One must be born of water and the spirit.”

In verse six, the distinction becomes clear: “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit.” Natural birth gives a human life, but cannot overcome the brokenness and limitations that belong to our condition. The spirit, however, gives a new kind of life—a spiritual life that enables us to enter the kingdom of God. Our first birth explains our need. Our second birth reveals God’s answer. What seems impossible from a human perspective becomes possible through the saving power of God.

Now this language of flesh and spirit, light and darkness, sometimes sounds like a sharp dualism, almost a binary way of looking at life. And you find that all over the Gospel of John. And biblical scholars have debated, saying that John almost did not make it into the canon of the Gospels.

Yet, in the Gospel of John, these images are meant to reveal the decisive nature of God's grace, even though they may not go entirely into what was the major teaching of the Church, especially vis-a-vis the dualism. When God acts, something truly new begins.

And perhaps the most beautiful evidence of that grace appears later, in the story of Nicodemus. At the beginning, he comes secretly, under the cover of the night. But at the end of Jesus' life, after the crucifixion, we see him again. Alongside Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus comes forth to claim the body of Jesus, and prepare it for burial.

When many others have fled, he is willing to be publicly associated with the crucified Christ. The man who once came quietly in the darkness now acts with courage.

Many people experience faith in a similar way. They begin searching quietly, sometimes hesitantly, unsure of what they will find. Yet, over time, that search can lead to surprising courage, and deeper commitment. This Gospel invites us to make the same discovery. It is also a call for us to pray for those who carry responsibility in the Church—religious leaders who, in difficult times, may feel tempted to remain in the shadows. May they, like Nicodemus, move gradually from fear to courage, trusting that their help and their hope comes from the risen Lord.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus:

“The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.”

With this image, Jesus reminds Nicodemus, who was a respected religious leader, that the work of God cannot be controlled, predicted, or confined with human assistance. Just as no one can command the wind, no one can manage the spirit.

For Nicodemus, being born of the spirit meant learning that faith is not about mustering God, or placing God neatly inside our religious categories. Even for a cultured Pharisee, the invitation was to humility—to recognize that God acts freely, often beyond our expectations, and beyond the structures we try to impose.

The spirit moves where it wills, touching lives and transforming hearts, in ways we cannot fully plan or regulate. So in that sense, being born again also means letting go of the temptation to police God. And let us pray that we may have the same spirit, that we may understand that God works in God's ways, not in human ways. Amen.