



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**CATECHESIS PREPARED BY THE HOLY FATHER
FOR THE GENERAL AUDIENCE OF 19 MARCH 2025**

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[[Multimedia](#)]

Cycle of Catechesis – Jubilee 2025. Jesus Christ our hope II. The life of Jesus. The encounters 1. Nicodemus. “You must be born from above” (Jn 3:7b)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

With this catechesis we will begin to contemplate some of the encounters narrated in the Gospels, to understand the way Jesus gives hope. Indeed, they are encounters that enlighten life and bring hope. It can happen, for example, that someone helps us to see a difficulty or a problem we are experiencing from a different perspective; or it can happen that someone simply gives us a word that makes us feel that we are not alone in the pain we are going through. At times there can even be silent encounters, in which one does not say anything, and yet those moments help us to get back on track.

The first encounter I would like to look at is that of Jesus with Nicodemus, narrated in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. I will start with this episode because Nicodemus is a man who, with his history, shows that it is possible to emerge from darkness and find the courage to follow Christ.

Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night: it is an unusual time for a meeting. In John’s language, temporal references often have symbolic value: here the night probably refers to what is in the heart of Nicodemus. He is a man who finds himself in the darkness of doubt, in that darkness that we experience when we no longer understand what is happening in our lives and do not see the

way forward clearly.

If you are in the dark, of course you seek the light. And John, at the beginning of his Gospel, writes: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (1:9). Nicodemus therefore seeks Jesus because he has sensed that He can illuminate the darkness of his heart.

However, the Gospel tells us that Nicodemus does not immediately understand what Jesus is saying to him. And so we see that there are many misunderstandings in this dialogue, and also a lot of irony, which is a characteristic of the evangelist John. Nicodemus does not understand what Jesus is telling him because he continues to think with his own logic and categories. He is a man with a well-defined personality; he has a public role, he is one of the leaders of the Jews. But probably something no longer adds up for him. Nicodemus senses that something no longer works in his life. He feels the need to change, but he does not know where to begin.

This happens to all of us in some phases of life. If we do not accept to change, if we close ourselves up in inflexibility, in habits or our ways of thinking, we risk dying. Life resides in the capacity to change to find a new way to love. Indeed, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of a *new birth*, which is not only possible, but even necessary at certain moments in our journey. To tell the truth, the expression used in the text is already ambivalent in itself, because *anōthen* (ἀνωθεν) can be translated as either “*from above*” or “*again*”. Slowly, Nicodemus will understand that these two meanings go together: if we allow the Holy Spirit to generate new life in us, we will be born again. We will rediscover that life, which was perhaps fading in us.

I have chosen to begin with Nicodemus also because he is a man who, with his very life, shows that this change is possible. Nicodemus is able to do it: in the end he will be among those who go to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 19:39)! Nicodemus has finally *come to the light*, he is reborn, and he no longer needs to stay in the night.

Changes sometimes frighten us. On the one hand they attract us, at times we desire them, but on the other we would prefer to remain in comfort. Therefore the Spirit encourages us to face these fears. Jesus reminds Nicodemus – who is a teacher in Israel – that even the Israelites were afraid when they were walking in the desert. And they focused so much on their worries that at a certain point those fears took the form of venomous snakes (cf. *Nm* 21:4-9). In order to be freed, they had to look at the copper serpent that Moses had placed on a pole, that is, they had to look up and stand before the object that represented their fears. Only by looking into the face of that which frightens us can we begin to be set free.

Nicodemus, like all of us, can look at the Crucified One: the One who defeated death, the root of all our fears. Let us also lift our gaze to the One they pierced, let us also be met by Jesus. In Him we find the hope to face the changes in our lives and be born again.

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