

In this excerpt from her book, *Walking With Wisdom's Daughters*, Gloria Ulterino recounts the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery and then allows that woman, touched by Jesus' mercy, to reflect on her experience: "Here, at dawn, it's hard for me to remember that there ever was a time when I lived in the shadows, cowering under someone else's control. For that heart strength of Jesus becomes mine, right here and right now. Even as I re-live, once again, that day I'll *never* forget. Clamoring crowds surge toward me... pilgrims there for the Feast of Booths. Arrogant scribes and Pharisees shove me toward Jesus! And I am once again on trial! Or so I think..." [Read more](#)

A Story Of Forgiveness: The Woman Caught In Adultery

By Gloria Ulterino

This dialogue illustrates a powerful story of forgiveness, as told in the Gospel of John (7:32b, 45-48, 51-8:11) in word and action by the Narrator, Jesus, the woman, the temple police and the scribes and Pharisees. *Words in italics, spoken by the Leader, are not part of Scripture.*

Leader: *This story takes place in the fall of the year, during the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem. It is a seven- day harvest feast, when many pilgrims come to the Temple. Now, at this time, the Pharisees heard that many in the crowd believed in Jesus.*

Narrator: and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him...Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them,

Chief priests and Pharisees: "Why did you not arrest him?"

Police: "Never has anyone spoken like this!"

Pharisees: “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?” ...

Narrator: Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?”

Pharisees: “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

Narrator: Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him,

Scribes and Pharisees: “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

Narrator: They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them,

Jesus: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Narrator: And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her,

Jesus: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Woman: “No one, sir.”

Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not

sin again.”

Narrator: The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection by the woman: Have you ever been stuck in life? Overwhelmed, with no way out? I have. I’ve even been caught in a barrage of hateful words. Poised, like so many missiles, for the kill.

But the miracle is the healing. The way through. The ability to speak... confidently, honestly, beyond fear of retribution. The ability to say “No,” in peace. Without vengeance. Without the desire to hurt in return. “No, somebody else’s idol will *not* control my life. Not any longer.” How did that happen? Let me tell you about it.

Here I am, once again, on the Mount of Olives...delighting in the delicious breath of life. Oh, how I *love* to come here early in the morning, while it’s still cool! Especially this time of the year... the fall... with the plump aroma of full-grown olives hanging in the air. Aaaahh! Can’t you smell it? Can’t you almost feel the penetrating warmth of its massaging oil? With the shadows lifting here at dawn, can’t you see the Temple looming large over Jerusalem? Can’t you almost see Jesus, once again, stepping onto the Temple precincts? Can’t you almost hear him teaching fearlessly, one more time? Authentically, with words intended to pry open fist-ed hearts?

Words that Jesus found right here, in prayer, on the Mount of Olives, whenever he needed them. God-given words. Heart-strength words.

Here, at dawn, it’s hard for me to remember that there ever was a time when I lived in the shadows, cowering under someone else’s control. For that heart strength of Jesus becomes mine, right here and right now. Even as I re-live, once again, that day I’ll *never* forget. Clamoring crowds surge toward me... pilgrims there for the Feast of Booths. Arrogant scribes and Pharisees shove me toward Jesus! And I am once again on trial! Or so I think. I’m condemned. Doomed. I know the law, and I’m liable to death under it. For we are taught that “if a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman.” And I know the reason for the law. The men need to

preserve their honor and the purity of their male offspring. But, there's a lot I don't yet know. That it's my very own husband who has set me up. Oh, I had felt his control, time and time again; it had even become bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. But, I couldn't imagine that he would stoop to this stripping of my dignity! He knew that I hungered for basic human affection; and he guessed that I would give myself to anyone who seemed to offer it. So, here I stand, with no way out, feeling utterly naked before eyes that are mocking me.

And then I begin to see. *I'm* not the one on trial. *I'm* just another object, once again... soon to become an object lesson. It's *Jesus* that the religious leaders are really after. *He's* the one to be condemned. For he has healed on the Sabbath. Why, there's even talk that he's the Messiah! No matter what he says, he's done for, or so they think. If he refuses to indict me, he will reject the law of Moses. If he calls for my stoning, he will break the new Roman law, forbidding the Sanhedrin to impose the death penalty. They're almost smacking their lips with certain victory! There's no way out for Jesus!

Until... Jesus draws a line in the sand with a few short words. Accountability, yes. Condemnation, no. Life beyond imagining, yes. Deadly control, no, whether at home or at the hands of religious authorities. Suddenly, *they* are the ones on trial. One by one, they silently slink away... having found *themselves* guilty. Even the crowd begins to thin out, until I am alone with the healing words of Jesus.

But healing is never once and for all. That's why I come here, so often, to the Mount of Olives. For peace... healing... and heart strength. It's *here* that I remember Jesus. And know his presence. It's *here* that I feel safe. It's *here* that I begin to see the sin of domination, condemnation and control. It's *here* that I can say "No"—one more time—to my part in that sin. No to passivity in the face of threat and domination. No to my too eager desire to please. No to my tendency to fall back into being "The Victim." No to my temptation to condemn in return. Only then can I pronounce my "Yes!" Yes, to drawing my own line in the sand. Yes, to accountability. Yes, to Jesus, the cornerstone my life. Yes, to the gift of another new day!

This is taken from my book, *Walking with Wisdom's Daughters*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2006), pp. 159-162.