

## **Inviting the Confrontation: The Raising of Lazarus**

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March 8, 2020

Now, when [Jesus] heard that [Lazarus] was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. John 11:6

The Gospel of John records the event of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead as deliberately inviting a confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord did not immediately respond to the call of Mary and Martha for His help. He waited two days with the result that the miracle He performed exceeded anything He had done before. The signs of danger were already apparent. When Jesus told His disciples that He planned to go to Judea, they responded, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" (*John 11:8*) The Lord raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four days within approximately two miles of Jerusalem, near Passover time when the largest number of people would likely hear of this incredible miracle. The Lord's actions and growing fame could not be ignored by the religious authorities.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." . . . Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. (*John 11:47-50, 53*)

Why did the Lord deliberately provoke this response? Most people think of conflict as something to avoid. Some are willing to do almost anything to avoid it. Yet the Lord knew precisely what the result of this miracle would be.

The anger and fears of the chief priests and the Pharisees led them to seek the Lord's death. The Lord had spoken only the truth and His deeds were all ones of service and love. Yes, the gospels do record the event of Him driving from the temple the dishonest money changers and those who sold animals for sacrifices, apparently at inflated prices. He did powerfully criticize the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. But compared to all the miracles of healing that the Lord had done and all the wise and loving things that He had taught, these few events hardly characterized His life.

But conflict was inevitable. Good and evil cannot exist together. Consider the following passage from the teachings for the New Church.

There are two fires of life with a person; one is the love of self, the other is love to God. They who are in the love of self cannot be in love to God, because these loves are opposite. They are opposite because the love of self produces all evils, which are contempt for others in comparison with self, hostility for those who do not favor, and finally hatreds, revenges, ferocities, cruelties; which evils wholly resist the [Lord's inflowing life], and consequently extinguish the truths and goods of faith and of charity, for these are what flow in from the Lord. Anyone who reflects is able to know that every one's love is the fire of his life; for without love there is no life, and such as the love is such is the life; and from this it can be known that the love of self produces evils of every

kind, and that it so far produces them as it is regarded as the end, that is, so far as it reigns. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10038:2)

Too many of the religious leaders of the church at the time of the Lord's life made great show of their obedience and holiness. But they had rejected the truth of the Word. As the Lord said to them:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (Matthew 23:23)

People's rejection of justice, mercy, and true faith was perfectly represented by the sad events of Good Friday. Their terrible treatment of the Lord was an image of what they had done to the essential message of the Word. We are told:

The Lord as to His Divine Truth, or as to the Word in its true meaning, was rejected by the chief priests and scribes and was shamefully entreated, scourged, spit upon, and crucified. This is clearly evident from the fact that [the people of the church at that day] applied and ascribed everything to themselves according to the letter, and were not willing to know anything about the spiritual sense of the Word, and about the heavenly kingdom. They believed that the Messiah was to come to raise up their kingdom above all the kingdoms of the earth. . . . So it can be seen that it was Divine Truth which was rejected by them, shamefully treated, scourged, and crucified. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2813:2)

A person who has not been spiritually reborn cannot do anything else. A person who remains in the inclinations to evil that he or she inherited from birth will inevitably do the same. It is a wise person who recognizes that the horrific events of Good Friday will occur in the heart and mind of any individual who continues to accept evil loves and false ideas.

As the Lord's actions invited the conflict with the chief priests and Pharisees, so in the Divine Providence, He leads each of us, if we are willing to a similar conflict. This is the only way that He can lead us to true usefulness and true happiness. He doesn't for a moment want us to suffer for the sake of suffering, but He does want us to recognize that evil loves and false ideas must be consciously rejected repeatedly within our motives and within our thoughts.

The following quote from the *Doctrine of Charity* briefly describes what we must do to become spiritually reborn.

The quality of the internal person cannot manifest itself to an individual except by the external person. It manifests itself when there is a conflict with the external; especially it manifests itself when an individual examines himself, sees his evils, and from knowledge confesses them and thinks about repentance, and then resists his evils and sets about living a new life. If an individual does not do these things his internal person is evil; but if he does them his internal person is good. For through the internal person the Lord operates into the external; and as evil is then residing in the external, a conflict arises. For into the external person, which is called the flesh, spirits from hell are admitted, who are called the devil; and the Lord in an individual fights against him. And if, as of himself, the individual also fights, he conquers; and as far as the devil is conquered, so far there is

place for goods from the internal person to enter. Thus he gradually becomes a new human being and is regenerated. (*Doctrine of Charity* 179-180)

The Lord in His Divine Providence works to have His life born within ours. He has seen to it that each of us in our childhood has had times in our lives when we felt loved and cared for. He has seen to it that we have had times when we delighted in seeing what was true. All of these good states from childhood and youth have been stored up and exist as doorways whereby the angels can gently enter our lives and encourage us on pathways that lead to heaven.

But to follow these pathways we have to consciously reject the alternative choices. This rejection will not be peaceful. Powerful parts of our inherited nature receive promptings from hell that insist that happiness, well-being, even safety depend on following their lead. The evil spirits associated with our minds seek to weave a web of lies and misperceptions even more devious than the ones woven by the scribes and Pharisees. They do not want the Lord to reign as King within our minds. They try to draw our mind down and away from any consideration of truth and good. If possible, they will encourage us to see everything on a purely natural and practical level. They will try to magnify our own needs and perspectives and quietly minimize the reality and significance of anything else. The Lord in His Divine Providence works to shed light on their devious twistings. He ensures that a conflict will take place for those who are remotely willing to be led by Him.

As we look ahead in about a month to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and the celebration of Easter, may we reflect on the conflict that the Lord calls each of us to. While we pray not to be led into temptation, such battles of conscience are the only way we can be delivered from the evil that would take hold of our heart and mind. May we pray for open eyes to recognize the truth. May we pray for the presence of angels prompting us to care about what is genuinely good for each of us and for those who our lives touch. May we pray for the strength to face the conflict of good and evil, truth and falsity that can occur within us during temptation. May we face it, fighting in the Lord's name, with the sure knowledge that He has conquered all of hell and that we with His help will also conquer. AMEN.

Lessons: *John* 11 portions, *True Christian Religion* 596

### **John 11:1-46**

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. <sup>3</sup> Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." <sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard *that*, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this He said to *the* disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> *The* disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" . . . He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." <sup>13</sup> However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. . . ."

<sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. <sup>19</sup> And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the

house.<sup>21</sup> Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."<sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.<sup>26</sup> And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>27</sup> She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you."<sup>29</sup> As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to Him.<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.<sup>31</sup> Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."<sup>32</sup> Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.<sup>34</sup> And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days."<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"<sup>41</sup> Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.<sup>42</sup> And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me."<sup>43</sup> Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

<sup>44</sup> And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."<sup>45</sup> Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.<sup>46</sup> But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

*True Christianity 596*

### **Once Our Inner Self Is Reformed, a Battle Develops between It and Our Outer Self; Whichever Self Wins Will Control the Other Self**

A battle develops when our inner self has been reformed through truths. These truths allow us to see what evil and falsity are; but we still have evil and falsity in our outer or earthly self. At first, therefore, a disagreement arises between our new will, which is above, and our old will, which is below. Because these two wills are in disagreement, what they delight in is incompatible as well . . . .

After this disagreement of wills occurs, a battle develops, which is what is known as a crisis of the spirit. This inner conflict, this battle, is not between good and evil [directly], but between truths that defend what is good and falsities that defend what is evil. Goodness cannot do its own fighting; it fights through truths. Evil, too, cannot do its own fighting; it fights through falsities. Likewise, the will is unable to do its own fighting; it fights through its intellect, where its truths are kept.