

## Item #84 (Lazarus and Jesus)

One of the most illuminating aspects of any culture is its attitude towards death. In John's Gospel the attitude of Jesus towards the death of His friend Lazarus is revealing. But before we review that it would be useful to remind ourselves of the attitude of pagan Greek culture towards death. This I shall now do by reviewing a classic English translation of a famous Greek lyric on the reflections of a Greek gentleman on the reported death of one of his friends named Heraclitus. The gentleman in question is associated with the name Callimachus. Heraclitus dwelt in Caria, a province of southeast Asia Minor. Evidently the author of the poem was much affected on hearing of his friend Heraclitus' death. But the only thing that the author of the lament can count on retaining from their long visits together is the memory of Heraclitus' words. (The original language of the lament was Greek, but the translation into English by William Johnson Cory has justly, in my opinion and the opinion of many others, become a classic example of the use of the English language, although there are those who do not agree with this assessment. True, the translation is a bit free as regards the original Greek, but it manages to encapsulate the decisive finality of death in the friendship between two friends.)

They told me Heraclitus, they told me you were dead.  
They brought me bitter news to hear, and bitter tears to shed.  
I wept as I remember'd how often you and I,  
Had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down the sky.

And now that thou are lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake,  
For death he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

Arthur Quiller Couch, *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1230-1900*.  
Translation by William (Johnson) Cory (1823-1892)

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The account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus is contained in John 11,1-44. It is moving in its portrayal of the friendship that existed between Jesus and Lazarus (and Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus). Note the message of the sisters to Jesus: "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (John 11,3b). Jesus had tarried after hearing of the illness of His friend Lazarus before going to the place where Lazarus lived, doubtless because He was well aware of what would ensue when He arrived. When He did arrive at the place where Lazarus lived and found out that he had died and went to his tomb, standing before it, "He wept" (John 11,35). The Evangelist John was well aware of Who it was Who did the weeping: He Who was divine. Jesus Himself was well aware that He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, but despite this awareness He was moved to tears by what had happened to His friend. This is a moving testimony to the love that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can have for those who love Him. With death, every Christian is aware, the bonds of friendship are broken only temporarily. Reflection should serve to emphasize for Christians the difference between the consciousness of the pagan gentleman as regards Heraclitus his friend and the Christian who has Jesus Christ as a personal friend.

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Some personal reflections are also in order. Is my life as a follower of Jesus such that He would weep when He heard of my demise? Do I realize the place of love in my life—love of God and love of neighbor? Do I ever reflect on the social doctrine of the Church? (Outlined below for the help of those who need to refresh their memory.):

Basic universal starting point: **Respect for the dignity of every human person;**

Basic framework:                   **1) Continual search for the Common Good;**  
   **2) Subsidiarity;**  
   **3) Solidarity.**

Values:                                   **1) Freedom;**  
   **2) Truth;**  
   **3) Justice.**

Goal for each of our actions:       **LOVE.**

Note that disagreements do not of themselves necessarily constitute a lack of love. They may eventually lead to a deepening of love. But the hatred so characteristic of public life in the United States of America today is no way for public life to be conducted if it is to be successful. What is love? Love is the ability to transcend oneself for the sake of another. This ability should be the ultimate guiding principle of every follower of Jesus Christ as regards his/her attitude toward God and toward his/her neighbor. When Jesus Christ wept before the tomb of His friend Lazarus He showed how God Himself honors the Law of Love.

P.S. It would not be out of place to remark in the context of what has been written above that the present campaign of secularists to impose “woke” values on the culture of the United States of America is an example of voluntarism writ large.- Such a campaign ignores the intrinsic order built into reality at the time of creation that cannot be arrived at except by an exercise of the understanding. Reality should “impose” itself on man through his intellect, and not be “imposed” by an arbitrary act of his will. (**James Swetnam, S.J., December 1, 2021**)