

Lazarus died and many came to comfort Martha and Mary. Jesus arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> day after death and performed the miraculous sign that called him back to life. “The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, ‘Untie him and let him go’” (Jn 11:44). Many Jews came to believe as a result of this sign. They recognized Jesus’ divine power over life and death, and they were duly impressed. “But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done” (11:46).

This report prompts a meeting of the Jerusalem religious authorities. The Pharisees gathered a special council of high-ranking priests, aristocrats, and religious experts to deliberate how they would respond to the threat Jesus posed to their authority. The Sanhedrin held religious and political authority in Jerusalem, and they were envious of anyone who challenged that authority. Led by the chief priest Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin decides to seek the death of Jesus. “The irony is striking: Jesus’ giving life to Lazarus leads to his own death. This is the dynamic that Jesus expressed in speaking about himself as the good shepherd: the good shepherd freely sacrifices his life so that his sheep may receive life.”<sup>i</sup>

The people of Jerusalem lived under the military occupation of the Romans. Many Jews looked forward to the coming of the Messiah because they wanted to forcefully expel the Roman occupiers. When they felt threatened by a potential military uprising, the Romans responded swiftly and violently to suppress any such threat. As the Sanhedrin under Caiaphas plots to kill Jesus, they feel justified in doing so in order to protect their temple, their land, and their nation. Caiaphas in particular will benefit by staying in power if he finds a way to silence Jesus. So blinded by his own pride, he fails to realize that he is plotting the death of the true Messiah who comes not to liberate from the Romans but to liberate humanity from sin and death.

As a high priest calculating his decisions based on the political outcome that is most favorable to him, he is a complete failure as a religious leader. “Caiaphas’s moral reasoning resembles trends in contemporary moral theology known as consequentialism or proportionalism, in which the morality of an action is determined by the agent’s intentions and the outcomes of the action, but not by the action itself. Pope St. John Paul II strongly criticized these trends in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*” (VS 75–82).<sup>ii</sup>

When John wrote his Gospel, the worst fears of Caiaphas had been realized. Within two generations of the crucifixion of Jesus, “the Romans violently suppressed an armed Jewish rebellion in Palestine and destroyed the temple, putting an end to the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem.”<sup>iii</sup> As we encounter difficult decisions in our own lives, we too may be tempted to make choices that favor ourselves. That which we do in selfishness may have some short-term benefit to ourselves, but ultimately a flawed decision will cause more harm than good. We need to choose to do the right thing for the greater good of all.

We often say that God writes straight lines with the crookedness of our lives. God’s plans cannot be defeated or overcome. Jesus’ death is the great saving action of God through which he gathers all nations to himself: “There will be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16). Jesus will offer his life for our salvation.

Throughout Lent, we have been called to make sacrifices on a daily basis. Our Lenten practices are designed to build our virtue so we will not fear to do the right thing. And with love, we will choose to make sacrifices like Jesus for the greater good of others.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin, Francis; Wright, William. *The Gospel of John* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture) pgs 211-12.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*, 214.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, 214.