Nikola Tesla: Eulogy by Mayor LaGuardia, 10 January 1943

Announcer:

And now, the Mayor of the City of New York, The Honorable F. H. La Guardia.

Mayor La Guardia:

I have been honored to be asked to read a tribute to a great American, Nikola Tesla, written by another great American, Louis Adamic, both natives of what we know as Yugoslavia, but coming from different parts; they were friends.

On last Thursday night, here in our city of New York, a man who was 87 years of age died in his humble hotel room. His name was Nikola Tesla. He died in poverty, but he was one of the most useful and successful men who ever lived. His achievements were great and are becoming greater as time goes on. Nikola Tesla could have amassed hundreds of millions of dollars, could have become the richest man in the country, in the world, if he wished for riches; he didn't. He did not care for anything, did not have time for anything that spells success for too many people.

Nikola Tesla was a great humanitarian, a pure scientific genius, a poet in science. He did extraordinary, amazing, miraculous things during his life among us. He did them simply to serve mankind, and for his services, he did not want anything. Money? He didn't care for it. Honor? Who was anybody to honor anybody else? That was his attitude. Gratitude? He did not expect or demand. Nikola Tesla did not care to be paid for anything he did for the human race. He simply functioned according to his natural genius, which came to him in the land of his birth, Yugoslavia, as a son of his mother.

Now, this extraordinary man is dead, or so they say. The papers on Friday told he died. His body was found still on the bed in his little hotel room in this city, and the newspapers published obituaries and editorials summarizing his life and work, and they told of his personal habits and eccentricities. Tesla, they say, is dead. In a funeral parlor in this city, there is all that is left of his person. Funeral services will be held on next Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock in the Cathedral of Saint John. People will come, yes, many people, people from all walks of life, humble, unknown people, and people who are famous, scientists and industrialists, and others, and then, will be all right, as it is the customary thing to do.

But Tesla is not dead; Tesla is not really dead, only his poor, wasted body has been stilled. The real, the important part of Tesla lives in his achievement, which is great, almost beyond calculation, an integral part of our civilization, of our daily lives, of our current war effort. Today, we on this program do not mourn Tesla. We do not honor him, for we know that Nikola Tesla would not care for that. Why mourn Tesla? His life is a triumph! We are in this studio today, just thinking of Tesla, talking of him among ourselves, and to you who are listening to us, and we are playing some music and singing a few songs which we would think Nikola Tesla would have liked.
We celebrate his achievement on earth, his great triumph, which is our triumph, the triumph of all the people of the world! We celebrate his contributions to our life, to the sum total of civilization, and human potentialities in America and everywhere, which will be as permanent as man himself. We are talking about Nikola Tesla, celebrating the fact that we belong to the same species to which he belonged while he was among us. He is a feather in the cap of the whole human race, and Yugoslavia and America can be proud of him.

A few years ago, a fellow scientist of Tesla, Dr. B. A. Behrend, also an American, wrote about him in his book on the induction motor, the motor which owes its existence to Tesla, and which now is in the very center of nearly everything that moves on wheels in this country. Mr. Behrend said, "...were we...to eliminate from our industrial world the results of Tesla's work, the wheels of industry would cease to turn, our electric cars and trains would stop, our towns would be dark, our mills would be dead and idle....so far reaching is this work, that it has become the warp and woof of industry." Should Tesla's work be suddenly withdrawn, darkness would prevail, and we would slump into barbarism.

So it is true: Tesla is not dead! He is very much alive among us. Among us is the triumph of his life, his achievement, which we celebrate here. We do not honor him. We are gathered here to feel this triumph of one human life, and to share our feeling with you all.