APRIL 11, 1943

I greet you all, noble countrymen and countrywomen, with the words: Let Jesus Christ be praised.

Are you familiar with the word "blackout'? Do you have an idea what it is to live in a city or a town which is blacked out? And what kind of effect does a blackout have on people's nerves? I have had personal experience in this quarter. First, I flew in a huge bomber in almost total darkness. The small windows of the bomber were painted with a thick black dye, perhaps tarred. The bomber was just a miniscule light in the heavens. We travelled by night. For two hours we flew at a height of 17,000 feet. We sat next to each other not able to see each other. I travelled in the British Isles in darkened trains and planes. I walked through dark streets in England and Scotland. Going from west to sunrise, darkness envelopes all of England. Two-deck buses and taxis have small headlights which throw faint rays for a short distance. One hears the voices of people. But you don't see the people unless someone pokes you or you get into someone's way. You walk on the street as if going through a gigantic gorge, steel and cement walls on both sides create canyons. All this is oppressive. Especially when you expect at any moment to experience a bomb creating fire and dust and then the darkness does not help. In the summer, thousands of Londoners spend the night in parks or in underground shelters in order to sleep. Even more nervous are the people who because of their work have to spend long hours in bureaus or those who need to clean up after a bomb attack. The government had to enlarge the number of police and guardians. "Home Guard". But no matter what the government does, it does not diminish the attacks. Darkness, in addition, brings out the robbers, thieves and break-ins. This is corroborated by police statistics Darkness has never been the protector of virtue and honesty. I don’t mean to criticize anyone specifically, neither people nor the police nor the courts. I only cite what I have seen or read in the British press. So now to my talk, entitled:

THE BLACKOUT OF THE INTELLECT

In every nation, in every time period, there are people who for whatever reasons and whatever purposes, work in one direction. The have one goal, namely to darken the idea of God in the human soul. They aim to black out faith in the hearts of men, black out religion from the intellect of man. Some are called philosophers. Others claim to be the enlightened. Some simply write. I don’t know whether they do so from some conviction or material gain. No matter. They sow corn cockle. Always, they are able to find naïve and easily persuaded people who instead of searching for the truth in beautiful, high minded and noble things, unluckily like to read about dark things that militate against God or religion. Feeding on these dark ideas they find no food for the soul. Do they find peace for the heart? Do they find direction for the intellect? We meet instead unsettled, dissatisfied, and fearful people. They have to moral or spiritual buttress in difficulties which we daily face. They poison their own lives as well as others. They ask: “Who ever saw God?” Why mutter prayers? What can prayer give me? For those surrounded by darkness or are already in the dark, I’d like to give several happenings of our times. In American writings through the course of several days, there appear articles of the adventures of several members of Eddie Rickenbacker’s team. Their plane ran out of fuel and fell into the Pacific Ocean and floated for three weeks. They spent that time in rafts without food or drink until they were rescued. The story is related by James C Whittaker, co-pilot of the tragic bomber. Present in this plight were two Poles: Sergeant Alexander Kocmarczyk who was returning to his airfield at Guadalcanal where he had yellow fever and was in a hospital in Honolulu Hawaii. The second was a friend of Captain Rickenbacker and all of the passengers of the plane. He had with him a pocket Bible which served them well during the time of their plight hanging between life and death.

In the narrative of the final dramatic scenes of Sergeant Kaczmarczyk afloat on the ocean we hear of the final moments of his life and burial at sea. All the occupants of the rafts prayed to the Creator to give them rain so they could at least have some water to drink…and the rains came. But with the rains came a gale which upturned the rubber raft in which were DeAngelis and Kaczmarczyk. They were able to upright the raft but the navigator, Kaczmarczyk had taken in a lot of the ocean salt water and being already weakened had died.

When they finally lifted Karchmarczyk from the ocean, he started to scram and wave his hands in the air. Captain Rickenbacker spoke to him in a sharp tone, figuring that in that way he will get him out of his delirium to calmness. When they felt that no more could be done for him he brought him to his raft which was more comfortable and went John Bartek to the smaller raft. It was the eleventh day on the waves. The Captain took care of the sick. He gave him some rain water which he had caught in his hat. At light the captain held the young 19 year old sergeant to his chest to keep him warm. The youth lay peacefully through the night. He seemed to be better in the morning. He asked to be transferred to the smaller raft. So he went with John Bartek and DeAngelo came back to the large raft. During the night, Kaczmarczyk fell into a delirium again. About two thirty John cried out: “Hey I think Alek is not alive” When the two rafts came together they checked out Kaczmarczyk and the sergeant had died.

On the morning of the thirteenth day, they conducted a funeral service for Kaczmarczyk. John Bartek held his bible in his hand. The sun was setting when they started the Lords Prayers. DeAngelis a devout Catholic recited what he remembered from the service asking the Lord to have mercy on his soul.

Lord, give him eternal rest and let perpetual light shin on him for eternity” – these were the words they said in saying good bye. Everyone was reciting the Lord’s Prayer when they lowered him into the sea. He floated on the waves for a while. Everyone remained with the scene in their mind for the rest of the day.

The Captain and Bartek we most moved with the death scene even though all were moved my it. There were a few non-believers as the author mentioned and maybe some were cold in their regard. All wished for rain and perhaps a fish or two for food.”

In the bogs of New Guinea, our men fight. And they fight bravely, being beset by the monkey and exposed to many tropical diseases especially yellow fever and malaria. One of the officers said: “you’re there so far from everything and everybody that soon, regardless of your previous experiences, you start to pray. Another officer said curtly: “there on the front lines there are no unbelievers.” A third commented, “With two companions, I was sent out on a reconnaissance mission. On the edge of a forest we were in wet lands. We were being shot at by “yellow skins.” Bullets whizzed all around us. The two of my companions fell to the ground. One of them started to pray asking God to save them. After a few minutes they survived: “I assign our safety to prayer,” he said. These are stories from the front lines where they faced death in the eye. The participants know the power of prayer. Now, I’d like to read you an interesting letter from one of our chaplains who is now located in far off Africa. In December of last your, I met him in London. He was born in America of Polish parents. He was very dedicated to the soldiers under his care. A true chaplain and a true soldier. He writes:

Northern Africa, January 14th, 1943

Dear Father Justin:

I am keeping my promise that a letter would follow immediately after the holidays. At the offset, I wish to inform Father that I am healthy, reasonably happy and moderately comfortable. As Father well knows by now, that we have left Europe, and are making the continent our new habitat. Africa, was rather appealing to us, with our advent here. Maybe it was that our heart and soul was imbedded, once we landed here, and then again, perhaps, we were jubilant leaving a rainy country. I am sure that Father is well acquainted with our movement here. The papers, as I understand carried the doings very vividly. I am sure that in my humble composition I could scarcely equal their talented666 description. Nevertheless, I do wish to state that we were initiated by the baptism of fire! We are very proud of our successful undertakings and sincerely thank God for his aid. We publicly wish to thank all for their warm and earnest prayers. If any time prayers were answered, that was the time! – Just before leaving our boats I imparted the General Absolution, putting all the soldiers in a peaceful attitude. Many a soldier, meeting me a few days afterwards, claimed that, that was the best thing that happened to them. I can truly say that our boys with sincerity and prayer on their lips, and courage and valor in their hearts, they performed their best for God and Country. I beamed with spiritual pride and satisfaction at their personal accounts. One of the Jewish Boys approached me saying: “Father, I seldom said any prayers before, but now I know what it means to be under the ever protecting eye of the Lord. From now on, I shall pray and learn to pray better than ever before.

From my observations it seems, that it is only natural for man to end to his Creator and God in time of peril. And now it has been proven. To my great surprise, when things quieted, and we were located near one of the most beautiful and largest Cathedrals, I found many soldiers in the edifice, thanking the good Lord for His protection. If ever, the soldiers are putting all their trust in God! The boys are attending Holy Mass and various services magnificently. Take for instance, Christmas Day. I was able to celebrate the Midnight Masses. The church was overcrowded for all the Masses. That means that some of them attended twice. I admit that we surely did miss our churches and customs so heartily and proudly practiced in the States. Nevertheless, we didn’t take a back seat, for during the Masses the solders sang Carols to their hearts content. And they really sang as loud as their strong and young, and well-built lungs permitted them. Naturally, their minds and hearts were singing towards the loved ones back home, still I must admire their courage and bravery. Silently they left the church, in the deep darkness of the night, to rest their weary heads, for they had a busy day ahead.

One sees and learns strange things coming to a different country. The French like us more daily. Things are looking brighter. The people seem to smile more gladly..already better nourished and more content. This country was a real paradise for the enemy, before our arrival. And they certainly took advantage of the people by helping themselves thoroughly to everything. The people thought that we would do likewise. To their amazement we treated them as no one did before. Instead of plundering, murdering and shooting them, we greeted them, explaining that we came to help them. We shared our rations with them. Today they are reaping a full award for their confidence. They have joined us are doing all in their power to conquer our common foe. I had a visit with the Catholic bishop in Oran. He told me that we all were paying for our sins. He excluded no one, and finished, saying: “the sooner we make amends with God, beg His pardon and start leading a life according to His commandments the sooner we shall suffer less and victory will be ours.: - I believe that hidden behind these words lies the true clue to our victory in this strife and for the future happiness of all mankind.

The Arabs are still a puzzle to me! Daily, I see something new in their customs, apparel and behavior. I have read plenty about them prior to my coming here, but I still maintain that seeing is believing. They are a curious kind of mankind. The men walk around all dressed up in various colored robes, having their head covered with a turban. Their womenfolk promenade about, with their children perched somehow on their shoulders, donned in white robes with a white veil covering the entire face, except for exposing their left eye. They are as numerous, and I may say just as pesty, as the flies around here. On the streets, and in the shops. They are everywhere. They buy nothing, all they do is window shopping. In the country, the men do most of the work. Still very much work is done by the women. Unfortunately the kiddies are underfed and poorly clothed. As modest as they are, I often wonder what excepts them from colds and other diseases. It is really pitiful to see some of the mountain dwellers. Into that man-made cave all their possessions go, - sheep, dogs, cats, and children. I am more than sure that if we remain here much longer, something will be done for these poor unfortunate people. The kiddies are learning our language rapidly. I am only sorry that they do not always comprehend the right and proper words. Solders will be soldiers, and their language at times is only to be heard and spoken by them! When we arrived here, the weather was very pleasant, but the unfortunate happened. For some time we have had an abundance of rain. The simple folks here attribute it all to us. They think we can do wonders and perform miracle. In the words of the Brooklyn soldiers: “the Arabs think that every one of us is a little Jesus!” Ask and you shall receive. And they are overjoyed, because usually the get very little rain at this time. We, on the other had despised it for it made the open fields damp, cold and uncomfortable. We are eagerly looking forward to better weather, so that our stay here may be more pleasant.

Frankly speaking the folks back home were very kind to the boys in service. Their morale has arisen above par, while receiving all those letters and packages. Although belated, as most of them were, still they were very much appreciated and welcomed. If I am not singing too many praises your way Father, I wish to thank you for telling your radio audience to remember their boy in the forlorn countries. A letter to a soldier means as much as his square meal!

I ask your further patience, for I have one more letter from a soldier. He is currently somewhere in Northern Africa. His letter id dated December 30, 1942. “Dear Father: I write this letter to inform you that thanks to God I am healthy and intact. And I am satisfied. I wish to thank you for the beautiful medal and letter. I am keeping the letter as a remembrance. I wear the medal around my neck and it will always be there for I believe that it is a protection for me. On Christmas Eve we had two Masses, one at midnight for we are fortunate to have a Catholic chaplain. Among the soldiers there are very many Catholics. All of us went to confession and received Communion. Among us there were those who when at home did not attend Church. The Catholic soldier, who has seen the wounded and the killed, has to go to God. The American Solder goes. The Masses were celebrated in a great hall of our hospital. We had a special choir of officers, nurses and doctors. Afterward the soldiers sang. After the second mass, the soldiers did not wish to go back to the planes. The stood around the Christmas tree which were decorated with sweets and candles. Our chaplain with the help of the officers and nurses attended to everything to make the holy days beautiful. On Christmas we had a party. Everyone is thankful to God that we had a peaceful and enjoyable holiday.

I work in the hospital. I find a great deal of satisfaction working there because I can help our country to be victorious and with this attitude we will achieve victory. Our soldiers know that they need to undergo suffering, but they neither speak nor think of it. The wish to fight and believe that that can win. The area here is about 70 percent French. There is about 15 percent Spanish. The rest are Arabs. All are friendly. I received news from home that Fr. Justin urges his listeners to write to us. May the Lord reward you for that because a letter from home lifts the spirit of the soldier and gives him good judgment on the battle fields on which death is imminent day and night.

On this note, I end today’s talk.