DECEMBER 11, 1938

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

Before me lies an old letter. The paper is yellowed. The color as well as the writing is faded. Long ago it was written by the shaky hand of a young soldier. It was written on the field of battle at Aragon. It bears the date of September 25, 1918. Listen patiently and carefully to the sentences crafted in perilous moments with the shaken hand of a fearful soldier who was barely twenty years old: I write this letter, perhaps the last of my life. Anyway at this point I care about nothing. For several weeks now I lay in the trenches like a badger; my uniform muddied. Bugs crawl on my flesh. During the day shrapnel flies over my heard at night rockets fire. Every now and then, I hear the roar of planes. The drop bombs on us. A couple times already we were subjected to poison gas. A few feet from me lay disfigured bodies of my buddies. Hunger rips through my body and thirst burns my throat. Our contingent moved to far into the front. We are cut off from our forces. We are also cut off from communications. We are dug in. Who knows how long we can last. They told us to fight to the last and so we hold on to our position. Death would be better that surrender and to into captivity. I am very tired; I cannot keep my eyes open but I can’t communicate that. My head buzzes, my eyes bloodied and a roar in my ears. One must look upon this hell and sit here, without hope, tears the nerves apart and some soldiers lose they senses. One does not want to live. To lose an arm or a leg and come back a cripple for life and dependent on others fills one with despair. To lose one’s mind and become a mental case is still worse. Some of our men, seek a rapid death in the open field of battle by bomb or bullet which will insure a quick death.”

The rest of the letter speaks about logistics of a funeral and the burial. I add that my friend came back home at the end of the war. He was however gassed. He carried a breathing apparatus. He walked like a shadow. Weakened, worn out and in pain. He was always nervous and agitated. He was without ambition, without passion, without life. Despite the care of doctors and care at home, he was losing the fight for life and three years after returning from the war, he closed his eyes and gave up. This letter serves as an introduction to today’s talk.

**YOUTH AND LIFE**

In 1924, five years after the First World War, I visited Europe. I had been interested in the fields of battle on Belgian and French soil. Besides the cut-out forests, little was left of the marks of war. Here and there were ruins of churches while others were being built. Near the fields of war there were fields of white crosses on carefully tended cemeteries. As far as the eye could see, cross after cross and grave after grave stretched afar. More than sixty percent of the buried were the young. On the fields of battle themselves grew great fields of grain, wheat and rye, and oats. Flowers of various sorts reached for the sky. I marveled at the beauty of the land. Gone were the barbed wire fences, cement walls, and other products of civilization on hay hills of killing and wounding and death amidst a once hopeless people. Here saunters a lad singing a song and working on a farm, there a horse driven cart taking produce to town. There a dairy farmer with his cows, here a shepherd tending his sheep. The life of man moves slowly along day after day, peacefully and with satisfaction, just as the Creator meant it to be.

Why did I read you this letter of war and its victim? I did have some rationale behind it. And why did I paint this idyllic scene of a peaceful countryside? The youth of our times, looks upon the world and life with the eye of our storied soldier. And it does not see the true goal of life. You understand that today the world is again in war. Today men battle on bloody ground. The economic world is crippled in the last twenty years; joblessness deprived men of income, armies of men without income. Between ten and thirteen million sought work and found none. In the social sector people were separated into classes. This brought about hatred and jealousy; it strengthened mistrust and suspicion. The times of war and post war are known as times of material goods. I add and I put emphasis on material prosperity, which starved the soul of the noble efforts of temperance, self-sacrifice and repentance; it tore the roots out of the heart’s view of the relationship to our neighbor and dimmed the relationship to God. Today, in our times, the field of life is covered with the sacrifices of the good life and the jobless days. It crea ted moral cripples as a result of over-satiety and it future consequences. I t created a sourness, dampened endeavor and produced and atmosphere of despair and solicitude. Today’s youth look at it all with a searching and critical eye. It cannot and does not know how look to the future with an optimistic eye. Like the soldier, youth sees before itself ruin, and fields covered with barriers, fences, and barbed wire. It hears the echo of theories and teachings to this time unknown and not tried and true. While curious and frightful it asks itself: Is it worth living amidst all of this? It cannot tear itself away from a bloody and havoc ridden yesterday in order to conceive of a brighter and happier tomorrow. It conceives of a rendezvous with death, which is a totally fallacious conception. Youth ought to have according to the law of God and natural law, a long life instead of a premature death. The task of youth is to take a distasteful, poisoned and neglected life and according to the law of God and natural law give life a fullness, a usefulness, and a length and not a premature death; youth’s task is to build from the ruins a love of God and neighbor, a new temple; a magnificent temple even greater than that of Solomon’s in which is heard a song of thanksgiving to the Creator for all the graces showered upon man. Youth’s task is to bring to fruition a New Deal, on the economic front, where there is so much suspicion and mistrust. Youth’s task is the creation of a wholly new civilization, which would work hand in hand with God, and not as until now, without God and against God. The task of youth is bring God into our homes and our families. To live our daily lives on God’s principles. Family life should be restored to those principles. They should renew family life. Emphasize the meaning of home, family, marriage to its rightful place; where people would be brought up to live a virtuous and exemplary life and not prisoners of government. There is a great deal of work for youth to undertake. Youth deserves our backing, counseling, and help. Otherwise it is a sad scene for us and for them. A detriment to the Church and to our government.

In reading the history of the world, unless we read it carefully, we observe that each era, presents humanity with new problems, new searches, new worries. I doubt however if ever there was one as unique as this age. We do not close our eyes or put our heads in the sand unable to see the reality that unfolds in our eyes. We see the world on the brink of a cliff. The church, school, home and society plays a great roll in the formation of outlooks on life and the goal of Christianity. Daily we live in the midst of this malfunction. I will not go into detail at this time. We are a compass for future generations. The future can only be twofold: either an intelligent freedom, economic justice – noble living, worthy of intelligent humanity, or complete governmental control, in all fields. It is nothing else and the well-known regimentation or cloaked slavery. Man ceases to be a reason and free being; apparently supporters of progress, who are, in fact, apostles of backwardness, put reins on him as the first best calf, take the reins in the left hand and a bat in the right hand and whip and chase him, when and where they wish. Always away from God and the Christian faith. That which occurred in certain overseas countries echoed in our society. Not really. These countries for some years carry on and today also, an extensive propaganda. They spend millions of dollars to spread their own political agenda which is economic and without religion. They have at their beckoning the media of the press, radio, and the theater. They have paid agitators and supporters. They brainwash young and old: Streets, factories, bureaus, schools are sources of this propaganda. They create clubs, circles and similar to verify their undertakings. Meanwhile it is just a cover-up or pretext; in reality it is a sham. They spread the seeds of hatred. They themselves do not fight at the front. Take a good look at their tactics. They are crafty since in the past 20 years they have been able to turn over nations, take over governments, tear God from souls and disturb the economic system, weaken marital bonds and change the whole and healthy outlook at the beginning, the goal and end of human endeavor. In our country up until now they worked under cover. Today, more brazenly, they carry on their nefarious work. Especially among the youth they find the work they can do. Today’s youth has not been taught to stand on its two feet. Many proselytizers dedicated itself to their task. The youth had not come into the world when the earth shook under the boots of armies; when the world sung hymns of love, and cursed in hatred and when every nation begged God to defeat the enemy. Perhaps we can say that our youth was not weaned on milk but with tears and human blood. That was the first scene of the tragedy of life. The world war should have brought back humanity to God; in reality it sent God away. Blame was put on God. However, God did not want war. Conceited, proud, wishing fame, leadership and power, they sought them and received them. God released the reigns of the madmen. Not only did the borders of nations changed, but so did the governments of the nations. Revolution and counter revolutions! New terrors. New bloodshed. And that lasted not only a year, two, or five years but it still goes on after twenty years of struggle. Here in our country, after the war, there was a good time and then the hated prohibition. Money was then not the servant of mankind but its slave. The door was opened for playfulness and abuse of material things. First generally there was the breaking of the law by the minority. Then within a short period of time, there was the breaking of other laws, not only civic, but also church and God’s laws. Authority was considered as unjust, cramping, and unnecessary. Everywhere one heard: “I am an American. I am an American citizen! We live in a free America.” Good! Does being an American imply mean to have a patent on life beyond rules, established for life without laws, and a life without God? Citizenship not only gives us laws but imposes a responsibility and duty in return. We ought to thank God warmly and sincerely that we live in America but we need to remember that America is free, always free, but not a playground. Our nation fails to believe that. When it loosened its belt, it continued to do so and failed the discipline. It lost its sight. There is no border and no end. The chains of the golden years of the excessive freedom broke and break it had to. A reaction took place, a sad, painful and life changing reaction. T threw us into the deep well of stagnation and joblessness. Behavior, teaching and civilized ways stood and stand helplessly. Hands are wrung. A way out is sought. New theories crop up which give different conclusions. Chaos and uncertainty prevails. It the elderly are at wits end, what then of the weak youth who look at live in a false way though not always at fault. Youth stands on the brink of life drinking in the erroneous propaganda that leads them like sheep. The chain of Creator and created is broken.

A couple of months ago in one of the Catholic newspapers I saw an illustration. On the way of the cross stood a group of young people of both sexes. On the road stood a group of false friends and teachers calling out: “Follow me! Follow me! I will make you happy!” Their faces wer mocking and angry. On the side was the figure of the Savior.” With the reminder: “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his life in the process.”

And now listen to some arguments to a young man who comes to me with the complaint.” I am twenty five years old. I finished my higher education and have a good education. I have no reason to live because I don’t understand why I should. Through home and school I have lost the goal of life. Fr. Justin, you will not understand but I have no feeling for my parents. From my youngest years I have only heard arguments at home. My father oft en came home drunk. My mother is angry and didn’t feed him. They cursed each other and fought. I together with my older sister spend the night with our neighbors out of fear. My sister left home. I know not where she is. Our parents went to court. They often separated and don’t talk to each other. Such was my family life. In school, I learned nothing better. As a youngster these things didn’t matter to me. In the last few years, I began to think: If there is a God, why don’t the schools teach about him? If they teach writing, reading and arithmetic, why don’t they teach religion? If I have no soul, death is the end. The grave is the end of all. Why spend my life in poverty in need? Why suffer and have illnesses? I see no sense in it all. Just like at home I had nothing good, so I see no more in life.

With such expressions of a hurt heart and deadened reason, is it not worth to give a hand to our youth, to straighten their thinking and care? To counsel and strengthen them and steer them to a life that is worthy of living, of nobility and good direction? Listen to the verse:

“The earth is beautiful, and life is splendid

And though road is thorny

When I seek where it leads me

And the brightness of its end

I forget the rocky road

For the bright ideal it promises.”