December 27, 1942

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

As a preface to today’s talk I will read a recent letter sent to us. A Polish-American soldier writes to us. He writes from afar – more than a thousand miles away from home and family. He writes: “Dear Father, I write this letter near an anti-aircraft position. It is Sunday between 5 and 6 pm. I recalled that it was exactly at this time that I always listened to the Rosary Hour program. When the hour approaches 5, we all had to be at home. Today, I recalled all the many things which I had heard on the program, specifically on the situation in “Romania where the Poles sought shelter from the war. Today I realized what it really means to be away from one’s native country. I realize how hard it is for those who are away from parents and home, even though that home was in poor straights. No one can replace a mother and father. There were times that I thought our parents demanded too much of us. Sometimes I looked crossly at my sisters. Now I live with the recognition that I honored neither my parents nor my sisters. If ever the Lord permits me to return to them, I will know how to behave and how not to distress any of my family members. Not a day passes by when I do not think of my parents. It is then that I recall every nook and cranny of the home and I remember many of the events that transpired there. Here all of our soldiers talk for hours of those they left behind. One would think that every soldier has a better father and better mother than anyone in the United States or even in the entire world. When one is far from his own as we are, it is then that one thinks differently than when he was at home and had all the comforts he wanted. If our parents knew how their sons go to Mass on Sunday and how they pray, they would rejoice in having their sons in the American military uniform. All understand that they must be good soldiers. They know that the war is not a sport because we’ve already seen the wounded and the killed and they pray for God’s protection. Service in the military has done much for us, because it has changed our outlook on many things, especially, however, that we do not need than of the things that we had at home. If everyone would understand this, perhaps there would be more harmony among people. Soldiers share everything they get. They rejoice when they hear other say “you have a good mother because she often sends you something”. I must admit that I say my prayers daily, I wear a religious medal, and believe that God will help me return unharmed from the war. But, if anything should happen to me, I believe it is the will of God. I remember, when the year ended, Fr. Justin said that the parents gather with their children and take count. There were less at the table than the previous year because someone is missing. Even though there is yet a month to the end of the year, I think about that. Surely this year someone will be missing in our families. Please, Fr. Justin, tell our parents, brothers and sisters not to worry because their sons and brothers, although physically not present to them, they are close to them in their thoughts.” And so, after reading this letter, I continue with my talk entitled:

LET US TAKE COUNT

There exists one of the wonders of the world, namely Niagara Falls, the mighty falls of the Niagara River. The width of the waterfall is 5,300 feet. Through this gap, the water falls 152 feet, producing a high mist. It boils, weaves and turns. With this breakneck speed, it winds itself within a wide corridor and then flows on. It falls upon the rocks and erodes into walls of stone with a roaring crash. Then it calms and weaves itself until it reaches the shores of Ontario. The edge of the falls slowly erodes, crumbles and falls away to the tune of 2 ½ to 3 feet annually. It is a metaphor for our lives, for the life of every person. The years pass us by, sometimes smoothly, sometimes hectically. At one time man walks amidst the rays of the sun; sometimes amidst lightning and thunder. And so it is, month after month, year after year, until he stands at the edge and is thrown into the depths of eternity. From that place, there is no return. In these last hours of the old year we take our accountability with God, with neighbor and with self. We settle accounts with sincerity, without fakery and without self-love. What have we to gain with dishonesty? What worth or benefit can we obtain by pretending that all is in good order when we not it isn’t so. And so our life as well as the life of every human being ought to be built upon on two biblical foundations, namely, love of God and love of neighbor. Have we built our lives in this manner for the past 12 months? Posing this question, I do not play the role of judge nor jury. I ask the question not only of you but to myself also. And taking an accounting of myself, I must shamefully admit that in this year I have thrown away many of God’s graces, ignored many of God’s gifts, wasted much time and often was abusive of God’s providential care. All of this does not agree with the commandments of our God-Creator. Often I have forgotten the principle of which our Kochanowski sang so beautifully: Unless the man builds the man himself, fruitlessly does the craftsman labor – I also forgot that “with God, every talk is easy and light, every talk is good and powerful, fertile and multiplicative, because God builds, God gives, God supports, God counsels, God leads, God helps!”

I had forgotten that in spite of the good things done for me and so many considerations given me, that I had repaid them with impatient remarks, harsh treatment and sometimes with downright anger – God had forgiven me so much and I had made life difficult for others. In this way, my behavior was not in consonance with the commandment to love others as your very self. And the more I do a recounting of my life, the more I become aware of how little I benefited from the grace of God offered to me in the past year.

The last day of the year cannot be one of unconcern for a backward glance because, in the first place, 365 calendar days of life has passed by for every human being and so much closer to one’s death. In each life, 365 pages have come and gone. Twelve months were written, not only in ink, but with sweat, tears and blood on the pages of the past year. Misfortunes and sufferings have made their mark. I recall it all. And looking forward to the New Year, there it is hope it will be better, happier and more fortunate than the last. But a curious uncertainty tugs at the heart. Whatever was, was. But it cannot automatically flow into the future. Mercifully, God has covered the knowledge of the future year with a heavy cover. The future as yet does not belong to anyone. And the past has already moved itself away from doing. What belongs to us is today. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is not certain. Countless thousands die this very night. Factually thousands die this very moment as you hear my voice. Turn you thoughts to the fields of battle: in the air, on land, and in the depths of the sea from Norwegian mountains to the sandy deserts of Africa, from the sunny Italian beaches to ice-laden Murmańsk. Turn your thoughts to the Concentration camps – to the camps of the imprisoned – not omitting the camps of those on forced labor, look at the prison walls behind which scenes are occurring from the barbaric ages. Drive through the bombarded towns, the destroyed fields, and the burned ruins. Most of all see the engine of death with the sharpened scythe. See the sacrifices, the weakened bodies falling. They fall because of the cold, the hunger, and the deadly diseases. They die from lack of hope. In this moment, people die. “All well and good”, someone will say, but it is happening thousands of miles away from me.” After all, are not many among us, continue to die at this very moment - on the streets, in factories, and hospitals, and in private homes. How many will today lay down in bed, in good health, and pass into eternity in their dreams. Tomorrow they will not awaken to their former life to undertake their usual obligations.

How many last days of our olden days has we spent in the span of our life? Do we pay attention to the speed in which these years have passed? Above all, do we undergo this heavy burden, which continues to grow, on the shoulders of our life? How many are there who promised themselves that their retirement days would be spent in peace, without fear or about the concerns for daily existence. For how many does this hold true? Very few! How many carry troubles on their minds and are haunted with worries of all kind. There isn’t, nor will there ever be, a worry and trouble free life. Trouble comes with the territory. Our physical life as it is, it is neither eternal nor lasting. Therefore fortune and misfortune pass by like lightning, joy and sorrow soon pops up and soon disappears; beauty and comeliness withers and dies; health progressively wanes and corporal man turns to dust.

Twelve months, in comparison with 50, 75, 100 years is an infinitesimal period of time. However, the amount of events and experiences a person undergoes is staggering, isn’t it? How many fortunate times, how many dangers have we avoided, how many of God’s graces have we benefited from, how much good fortune have we known? God’s providence

sustained us. Perhaps we lost in the past year, some person close and dear to us. The hurt was there in the absence especially at family times we remember in previous years - Mothers and Fathers, sons and daughters. Family ties were broken when death arrived. One of the family members was no longer there. We know well that death spares no one. One cannot protect oneself from it. But why was it that in this year or that, death had to deprive us of the loved one.

And so today, a father is absent, a mother is missing; here a daughter is missing; there a son. Tears, sadness, loneliness! Before the beginning of this year, we asked ourselves what of interest awaits us in this coming year. It is good that we did not get the answer. A while ago, perhaps, one felt in extremely good health but as time went on, it deteriorated or there was an accident on street, at work, or even at home. Please listen to what a mother recently wrote to me: “Up until July we had harmony in the family and peace in the home. One evening my seventeen year old daughter went for a walk to some friends. From there she left with two girlfriends by car to go to a dance. On the way back the car was in an accident in which it hit a telephone pole. The three young girls were killed. Among them were three other girls, one who was my daughter were laid up in the hospital for three months. Before this accident, my daughter was peaceful and courteous. When she arrived from the hospital, she was broken in spirit and a cripple for life. She cries and complains to the doctor and complains of her sufferings. I try to comfort her but to no avail. She blames God for the heavy cross he has given her in her young life. She never had expected to something like this would happen to her. No one can say “I never expected this to happen; a year ago I was in full health and strength, now I am troubled, miserable, and hurting.” And what will happen next year? I do not speak of those who at this moment put their health in danger on the far away fields of battle. I have in mind those of you who sit at your radio receivers who listen in perfect health and peace to today’s talk. No one can prophecy what is in store for you. No one can unravel the future. Only God knows. Today the sick and weak and those who are will suffer in the future from lack of limbs, I give this advice: do not ask the Creator: “why, o Lord, why are you visiting me so terribly, or so quickly call be back from the earth?” but say with a certain saintly husband, “I ought to be satisfied with what God gives me. With the sickness he gives me, from the guesswork he has left me with; with the doubt he has left me with, with the recuperation from my malady, with the reprieves he gives me. In a word, he gives me, his blind child the will to accept his Will. Patience is needed, a lot of patience in all infirmities, sufferings, and hurts which will befall me in the coming year. Let us look peacefully in the future year and understand that we will encounter sweat and tears. Man, every person, is a curious being and not understandable to others. Everyone knows and sees that the time of our visitation on this earth is short. I repeat: short! I asked a nonagenarian fellow what was the meaning of all of those years he lived through? What was his answer? The years passed like the blink of an eye – like smoke that disappears into the air. The years passed by leaving me silver-haired. The left me with a well wrinkled brow. They lift me with loss of hair and sight. It leaves a man without strength and abilities.” Years ago this same man was preparing to live his life. He dedicated his time, energy and money to this purpose. He chose a certain occupation and drowned himself in it. In his choice he sought peace and satisfaction. He understood that all of his efforts and goals were only for a certain time, since he knew of the uncertainty of life’s offerings. What had he gained from all of this? – A memory of years of life lived. He remembers as he walked perilous roads, how much good he had accomplished in those years. How many graces did he cooperate with, how many did he ignore. Today he stands on the brink of the grave of the future, and circles his own grave. Therefore you will die. What is the implication of that? You will leave all – relatives and friends, home and possessions. The thought occurs to you. You will die; it means you will turn into a corpse. The remains will be placed into the earth – the food of worms. These eyes, these lips, this tongue and these feet and hands – everything will turn to clay. You will die – you know that. But when and where, you know not. You know that people are dying at every age and in every place on earth. You know that every sickness, even the common cold, can end in death. And at times death occurs without prior sickness. In one moment, in one quick moment, you cross the boundary of time and end up in eternity. Listen to the ticking of the clock. Every tick, every movement, reminds you or rather ought to remind you that you are one tic closer to the shores of eternity. The life of man is in the hand of his creator, like clay in the hands of a sculptor. This is something to remember during the last days of the old year. We ought to think in terms of giving thanks to our Creator. In one of the cemeteries in Italy – I think it was in Pisa, I saw a huge granite tombstone, on which chiseled one word was, “He Was.” What may be the meaning of that inscription? Nothing more than an indication that the person lived neither for God nor for his neighbor. He existed for himself –nothing else. Would we wish to have that inscription on our tombstone, would we wish to have that said about us? Our thankfulness to God could be shown by directing out vision to the tablets of God’s commandments and the careful execution of our life to these principles. Do not say; rather do not dare to maintain that you do not have anything to be thankful for to God because this year was one of crosses, suffering and sadness. Or that you had fallen underneath the cross of sickness and pain. We don’t recognize that often these crosses are of benefit to us. We need them like birds need their wings; we need them to rise above the carrion and the rot. Someone rightly said, “Unless the unfortunate and the suffering throw themselves on their knees and cry out, “thank you Lord for all that you have given me.” - These prayerful words create the most wonderful musical symphony on earth. Ask yourself for what you should be thankful to the Creator for in the coming year? For the fact that you are living in America far from the battlefields of the war. For the fact that you can work hard and return to a home that has not been bombed? For the fact that you need not hide yourself night and day in ditches and holes, in hiding places in fear and trembling that a bomb may fall on you and blow you to bits. For the fact that you can sit down to a table that provides you with the food that you wish. For the fact that you can lie down in a clean bed sleep peacefully without worry that it will be destroyed. For the fact that our churches still stand in tact as well as our hospitals and schools. For the fact that you have your family at your side. For the fact that we lack the scaffolding for hanging and concentration camps. For the fact that we have freedom of speech and freedom to use our own language. And not only for these things do we need thankfulness but for all the good things that we have obtained. Let us give deep thanks in order to earn further blessings from our Creator. In these days of the waning year, it is worth thinking of our own demise. We know not when it will be, but have we thought of our preparation for it. Is it not an appropriate time to think about the way we prepare ourselves? We need to remind ourselves that God is always on our side. He is, always one and the same. Perhaps there are those who think that, in the past year, God has somehow changed. We have been witnesses of chaos and atrocities. The basis of a civilized and Christian world seem to have crumbled. It shook but it did not fall down. The only thing that fell was that of human thought, not God. The laws of God did not fail. Mankind either came closer to God or fell further away. In plain words, some got rid of loving emotions. They turned into animals without tears at the cost of human blood. Let us not turn away from our faith in God and his justice. And let us not lose our faith in humanity. Let us not lose faith in our selves nor the need or what we stand for. On the last day of the year, when we turn to our God, let us not forget to maintain our integrity but courageously accept what we need to do. Perhaps the forces of evil will be more quickly subdued. Perhaps we can get rid of hostility and hunger.

Just as the old year approaches to its end, so it is with our lives. What are today’s world and our situation in the eyes of God and the future after the grave which we call eternity. Flesh - today or tomorrow it will die. The soul however which give us breathe is of God and remains. Is it worth to be concerned more with the body than with the soul? Is it worth being more concerned with material need than with things of the spirit? Possessions, knowledge, power and health are but will not survive. Eternity is and will be. You can’t compare the temporary with the eternal. Human life is a serious undertaking. Even more in our times, especially when we see the barbarism and the atrocities. Life needs to be treated with great and responsible and serious thought. This is possible if we listen to Christ’s admonishment: “Fear not those who slay the flesh but who can kill the soul.” On the last evening of the closing year, let us go to our churches, let us fill them. Let us present our thankful prayerfulness to our Creator of the graces received, let us publically proklam our shortcomings and ask for further help for ourselves and our families. With dedication and selflessness let us look with faith at the newly birthing year of 1943!

In closing at the doorstep of the New Year I call out, “What concerns the past and sad memories should be put aside and given to the mercy and goodness of God. What concerns the now and what shall be, let us not worry too much about that and be involved with it. Let God be in charge of that. Then peace and contentment will come with our faith. Then we can be concerned with our dedication and spirit. This kind of attitude is close to God’s liking. That is my last counsel in the old year and the beginning of worthy Christian living in the New Year.