**December 4, 1932**

Dear fellow countrymen and countrywomen, I greet you with the words: Praised be Jesus Christ!

“Homeless, lacking their own land – on one foot only,

To Europe’s surprise, they still walk victorious paces,

And through them, she whose name had disappeared from the map[[1]](#footnote-1)

Carries for some the specter of revenge, for others – help.”

So sang Cyprian Godebski to the Polish legions, which at the end of 1802 and the beginning of 1803 were forced onto ships and sent under the killer beams of the tropical sun, to fierce and bloody combat with Negroes on the San Domingo Island!

We can apply literally the lines of this song to our great-grandparents, grandparents and fathers, who were thrown onto the welcoming shores of the United States not only by blind fate, but rather by Divine Providence! Three evil potentates attacked the Fatherland, split into two and weakened, and nailed it to the cross, divided her clothes into three parts and finally threw the Fatherland itself into the deep grave of oblivion; the supposed corpse was crushed by a heavy and huge stone; they built a sneering statue, and on it inscribed deeply, in large red letters, the cruel yet erroneous personal sentence: “Passerby, here lies Poland. It is a corpse which will never rise”! For the sake of security and caution, they set up guards to watch the supposed corpse for around a hundred twenty years! Obviously, they did not believe what they themselves declared, yet they demanded that the world believe it!

Everywhere, privately and publicly they suppressed the language – they treated Poles as blackguards and criminals, they falsified Poland’s history – they misrepresented historical facts – they derided the faith, customs and traditions of our forefathers – they took the land which had belonged to Poles for centuries – they forbade Poles to build on their own land – they blocked Poles from access to offices – they forced them to disown their tongue, and even their family surname! Until the time of these sad and painful servile events – Poles, with small exceptions, never thought of abandoning their homeland and emigrating to far-off and unknown lands. There was more than enough bread in the Polish country; Poland was famous the world over for political and religious freedom. Poles loved the fatherland of their forefathers. After the partitions the lack of bread – religious and political persecution – started to chase our compatriots from the country and sent them far away, even across the ocean. It was not easy for those emigrants to leave their fatherland and search for luck among foreigners. Because what did this mean? It meant to leave, as a certain honest Pole wrote: “That land where our fathers had lived, worked and died; this is the land where we had come into the world, where we had spent our childhood and where we were supposed to rest in our graves. Fields, meadows and forests, rivers and lakes, towns and villages, the air and the sky above us – this is all our Fatherland!”

The fatherland – it is our mother tongue, the tongue of our forefathers, the twitter of children, wedding songs and sacred hymns, warm Christmas carols and Bitter Lamentations[[2]](#footnote-2). The fatherland – this is the history of the nation, these are our old laws, customs and traditions, inherited from our ancestors.

The fatherland – these are our achievements, the virtues of our Saint Patrons, the deeds of famous leaders and heroes, Sobieskis and Kościuszkos, the works, books and hymns of our bards.

The fatherland – these are all our earthly treasures; the souvenirs of a happy youth, the cradle, Baptism, motherly care, successes and failures, churches, towers, bells, manor houses and cottages, our crosses and God’s sufferings, cemeteries and thatched houses, surrounded by linden and poplar trees.

The fatherland – it is a country of graves and crosses, tears and misery – sufferings and anguish, and yet in the eyes of a Pole, as Władysław Syrokomla once sang:

“This world is large; it is beautiful,

But there is no land above my land.”

In spite of the fact that the ruthless enemy stole his ancestors’ patches of land – threw him out of the cottage of his forefathers, this Polish peasant, making the sign of the Cross on his forehead, with faith in his heart, bravely turns his steps to a distant country and starts a new life, a life which he had not even dreamed of earlier; looking at these honest faces, Americans are surprised that these hard-working, sober, honest Poles, don’t have their own Fatherland! And they hid memories of former suffering and un-merited persecution somewhere deep in their hearts – and yet they went forward, gaining proper recognition and well-merited praise, and so the title of today’s talk:

**Our Virtues and Faults**

In comparison to immigrants from other countries, we are – children! Before the nineteenth century here in America there was only a handful of our countrymen, today there is a three million strong army! – Polish pioneers in the United States were simple peasants. The reason is clear; the intelligentsia, landowners and government officials had no reason, or regarded it as useless to leave their estates – to resign from their positions and offices and emigrate to a far-away and unknown country. It was otherwise with the peasant. Kicked around by the nobility and lords – universally called “churls” by the intelligentsia, persecuted and oppressed by enemies day and night – in church, in school and in his home life, he wrung his hands in despair and looked with uncertainty to the future. The future did not promise anything better to him or his children. Little daily bread, and still less human kindness! He heard someone talking about distant America, that it is a land flowing with milk and honey, that it is a country of political and religious freedom, that it is a country, where one can breathe, think and talk. This peasant thought that the gates of an earthly heaven were open before him, and the voice of either his conscience, or a good angel whispered to him: “Why do you not go there? Try! Others are successful, why should you not be. Go, if not to better your own lot, then at least for the freedom and happiness of your children!” – This poor man fought with himself, and the battle was long and hard. Finally the decision was made. He would go! I drop a curtain of silence on the sad farewells said to parents, frequently already old people – to siblings, relatives and acquaintances. Sorrow and sadness, hurt and weeping tore his soul.

What these people went through will best be shown to you by the following event which I described in my first radio talk, “Our Parents”, and which I will quote here once again. “Let us go back 30 years in time! There was an event I remember till this day. A large family arrived in our town of McClure, PA. They came from far away, from across the ocean, from Poland. Already back then I admired them; I looked at the strange cut of their motley clothing, their colorful hats and peculiar bootees. I was surprised by their leaden movements, their hesitant gait and shyness of speech. They had come to their relatives, who only a few years earlier had themselves emigrated from Poland to America, and by dint of their toil, saved up enough to buy ship tickets and bring their relatives to America, to this Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. The first Saturday after the arrival of this group in our town, after work, the miners assembled to listen to news from their homeland, to find out how their relatives, friends and acquaintances were faring. I remember how all present almost devoured information from the lips of the newcomers, asking about everybody and everything. It was nearing midnight when the cross-questioning of the Polish immigrant, who spoke with tears of longing and yet pride, was brought to a close. Even I listened with interest and concentration, although I was getting sleepy. Finally the newcomer stood up and unbuttoned his shirt; right next to his scapular, close to his heart was a pouch with Polish soil in it. Each person present took the pouch into his hand and tenderly and reverently kissed it. And again warm, bitter, almost bloody tears flowed down the cheeks of our honest and work-worn fathers, down the cheeks of our God-fearing and virtuous mothers. For them, this handful of Polish soil was sacred, a symbol and a relic. Why? Because it held in itself the years of their childhood and youth; because it was a part of the once extensive and beautiful Polish land, covered with golden fields, which Poles love more than life itself; because this handful of soil reminded them of their family home, of their age-worn father and mother, of their brothers and sisters.

They had before their eyes the village church where they were baptized, received First Communion, and vowed by the Altar of Our Lord to remain faithful to each other until death. They saw the cemetery with the graves of their forefathers, quiet, industrious, devout and God-fearing. They saw the whole country, stained with the tears and blood of their brethren, those who were persecuted, suffered torment and died martyrs’ deaths with the cry: “Everything for God and for our Homeland!” on their lips. All of this they underwent for their faith and their language. At that time, 30 years ago, I failed to understand how a handful of Polish soil could evoke the tears of this group of Polish miners. Today – I understand completely.” - All of this was abandoned by the poor Polish peasant, with tears in his eyes and pain in his heart! Finally he stood on American soil. Practically his whole fortune – what he had on himself! No, a little bit more! Because he had with him his wife, children, and even an old-country eiderdown quilt! Yes, poor in material goods, but rich in good faith and good intentions; believing and trusting that God would help him, and not abandon him! That in time he would guarantee his children an easier and more certain piece of bread!

Our fathers were thrown onto the shores of our adopted Fatherland, they went their separate ways, or more precisely, they were taken to almost every state in America. The agents of various companies and enterprises – waited in the New York port, and by promises and encouragements – voiced by translators, especially our most cordial, those who in Krakow live in a certain district called Kazimierz - urged them to give themselves up to the hands of agents. They were packed into wagons and sent to the hardest work. The deep and dangerous coal mines – suffocating quarries, the steaming and bloody sweat-squeezing steel mines; exhausting coke plants, fire-belching liquids, foul-smelling slaughterhouses, ship hulls, railways, canals, the bays of rivers – all of this brought them employment, hard and arduous, and at the same time badly-paid. Our fathers, not knowing the tongue, or the local customs or traditions were exploited at every step of the way by unscrupulous employers. Their reward was the curses and swearing of foremen, the insults and manhandling of bosses! Yet they did not lose their spirit. The obstacles they encountered formed in them a certain fortitude and character. They went forward boldly! They built churches and schools; they bought their own houses; they organized rallies and celebrations, and in the meantime they did not forget about their parents, siblings and relatives in their mother country! From their modest savings they sent help to their country! – Slowly they became model American citizens, not forgetting their fatherland. Above all, frequently denying themselves comforts, they tried to educate their children, because this was what was most important to them. They wanted to give us more education, so that we could be as equal to others, and so that we would have in our hands the best and most modern arm needed to achieve a higher standard of living – by learning and education. And so our fathers slogged away from morning to night, from month to month and from year to year. Their efforts and endeavors were not in vain.

The present generation of American citizens of Polish descent is living testimony to the efforts of those Polish pioneers. It is equal to, and even ahead of the famous and self-proclaimed one-hundred percent [citizens]! This is not so much our merit, but that of our fathers, who maybe even left this world prematurely, because they thought too much about our future, and cared too little for the needs of their own life; who did not spare themselves in anything, so that we would have more and better! Who shortened their own lives in many cases, so that we would live longer, more comfortably and more happily. When I speak to you, I have before my eyes the figure of my noble father, today already an old man of eighty; the model of a true pioneer and old campaigner! A strict yet loving father. He led us according to a military regime; for disobedience he punished justly, and for obedience, efforts and industriousness, he rewarded generously! Every day he walked on foot to work in the coke plants. The road was long, five miles. In cold and sleet; at day and at night, and for the cents he saved in this manner he bought us – candy! How many times I saw him, when his feet refused to carry him any further, and so exhausted, almost fainting, he sat by the road and rested; how many times have I heard the boss, of a different nationality, on every occasion call him “polack”, without reason, and he stood calmly and with tears in his eyes patiently listened to unjust accusations. How many times have I heard him pray for the intentions of his children.

He dreamed – he thought ahead – he spoke of our happiness! The children looked forward eagerly to his return from work. When he appeared on the hilltop, half a mile from him, the children raced towards him. Why? Because they knew that Dad would deprive himself of the choicest morsel and bring it in his breadbox as a reward for the child who reached him first. Pious – reliable – hard-working – thrifty and sober. This is the image of almost all of our fathers! And what can I say about the mothers? No pen, even the most fluent - no word though the most laudatory can appropriately and justly describe or depict the love, the dedication and the care of our mothers! The Polish mother is the martyr of her calling, who has spread her protective, visible and earthly wings of a Guardian Angel! She knew no rest, whether in day or at night. She laughed with us and cried with us! She rejoiced with us and worried with us! Our beloved and golden Polish mothers! May the Good Lord give them long, peaceful and happy years of old age, as a reward for their efforts and sacrificing endeavors for us!

I will allow myself to quote here the way of thinking of the Polish peasant ‘in the words of our Bolesław Prus: “So be it”, sighed the peasant, “I can see that they have more reason then I do; but when it comes to holding out, they can’t beat me, that’s for sure! Look”, he added after a moment, “how many woodpeckers sit on one tree, and every single one pecks at it. So what? The woodpecker finally leaves, and the tree remains a tree. It’s the same thing with the peasant. His master sits on him … and pecks; his local government sits on him… and pecks; a Jew sits on him... and pecks; a German will sit on him and peck, but no one will manage to win.” Is that not what heartless employers, unjust supervisors and wicked exploiters tried to do with our fathers… but they didn’t manage to win either! Why? Because with faith in their hearts, trust in their souls and prayer on their lips our fathers steadily rallied around the lofty battle cry: “God and our Homeland!”.’ Let this be a model for us!

In recent years especially, or more exactly since the world war we constantly hear and read about some “foreigners”. For me it is an incomprehensible word! Because they count us also as “foreigners”! The son of the emerald isle comes to America, barely does his foot touch the American shore, he regards himself as a full-bodied American; the descendant of the Vaterland wanders here, before the beer foam dries on his beard, he is already – an American! Here comes the son of Vikings, before he has taken six pinches of snuff – already he regards himself as an American! And us Poles, although we have been living here for decades – although our documents of citizenship have already yellowed – although we have even been born here – they still have the nerve to call “foreigners”! Does fulfilling in an exemplary manner the duties of American citizens, and at the same combining an attachment to the land of our forefathers and keeping the customs of our ancestors, maybe this is the reason? Why then from those self-proclaimed Americans do we hear: “I am Irish!” or “I am German!” or “I am an Englishman”? Yes, this is hypocrisy! And this is the honesty and openness as that which shows from the Republican platform concerning the eighteenth amendment! – Let me remind you also that the famous president Roosevelt, on a certain occasion, said in public: “I am proud of my Dutch descent!” Not long ago in New York, there died a widely-known American philanthropist of Jewish descent. Almost all of the New York dailies wrote in posthumous tributes: “He was a good American citizen, and a good Jew.” – We and only we are not allowed to be good citizens under the Star-Spangled Banner, and at the same time remember about the White Eagle? Are we not allowed to be good Americans and to pride ourselves on our Polish descent? Are the United States not “My Country”, for me just as well as for those who came on the “Mayflower”? Who knows the history of this country knows well that the English government sent to the colonies the same kind of citizens that today France sends to “Devil’s Island”! Let that suffice. However, our forefathers came here of their own free will, with the best intentions.

Noble children are not ashamed of noble parents, and an honest citizen should not be ashamed of honest descent! Or maybe our fellow citizens did not shed their sweat and even their blood for the well-being and in defense of their country? Already in the Independence War, from 1775 to 1782, among others we find especially two surnames: Pułaski and Kościuszko! Listen to what Franklin wrote: “Count Pulaski of Poland, an officer famous throughout Europe for his bravery and conduct in defense of the liberties of his country against the three great invading powers of Russia, Austria and Prussia”[[3]](#footnote-3), “Pulaski is respected as one of the greatest military men in Europe.” And George Washington wrote: “This man (Pułaski) defended his country like we defend it, hence he merits our respect, which we should render him, as long as the duty allows.” In the diploma with which Washington appointed Kościuszko Brigadier General, we read as follows: acknowledging ‘its high sense of long, faithful and meritorious services”[[4]](#footnote-4), the National Congress of the United States of North America names Colonel Kościuszko from Poland Brigadier General etc. In 1863 the number of Poles was around 30 thousand! In the Civil War, according to government statistics, more than 5, 000 Polish soldiers served on both sides! Around 16 percent; in comparison, much more than so-called native Americans!

With pride also we should point out that, according to government documents, the first who died in the civil war was a “foreigner”, 18-year old Tadeusz Strawinski, who died peacefully with the Lord’s Prayer on his lips! According to the newspaper “Mercury” from January 28, 1861, we read: “The soothing influence of his mother sweetened his last moments. His father accepted the heavy blow, and gave up his son to God!” And we, the descendants of such “foreigners” - yet today we are called “foreigners”. In the year 1850, the Silesian-Polish colonies were founded in the Texan wilderness, and from 1865 until the World War, that is, until July 1914, we grew through immigration and through the birth rate to more than three million!

This proves that we are alive and thriving! This is not only a bunch of people, but an army, and in it fitness and strength. Through all these years, our emigrants always showed love of the Star-Spangled Banner, and loyalty to the American government. “A few years ago, Congressman Johnson publicly voiced his opinion of the Buffalo settlement: ‘Remove these 200,000 Buffalonian Poles, along with their bank savings, with their real property, with their publishers, and most of all with their incredible ability to work and save, with their power of purchase and what would remain of Buffalo itself? Poles are part of the city of Buffalo, although their settlement is remarkably Polish, just like Warsaw itself. But this does not mean that Buffalo Poles are not Americans! On the contrary, their settlement is remarkably American in every respect, the only difference being that the language universally used is Polish, not English.’ ”

In the year 1898, on October 25, in the parish hall of Saint Stanislaus Church, the then candidate for N.Y. State governor and later famous US president Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech. Praising the Poles, he said as follows: “I am convinced that I can speak freely to you, because I know that Poles always esteemed courage and sincerity, and from the times of Pułaski Poles were always the great patriots of this country”.

“Archbishop Jan Cieplak, who died on February 17th, 1925 in Passaic, NJ, in his last appeal to Poles in America, wrote as follows: ‘A characteristic of the American people is their hard work. This beautiful trait is especially prominent in Poles. President Coolidge openly and honestly brought this up himself when I visited him in Washington, saying that Poles are industrious, thrifty and loyal. The Poles in America by their constant work, their model dedication and thriftiness (otherwise unknown) have accomplished much in the religious, social and economic fields.’ ”

A few among you will think: Well, it’s only a bare statement, nothing more, not supported by facts. Very well then, let us go again into statistics. Let the numbers speak, not us! Let us take the last world war! Where were those, who today wish to be seen as a hundred-percent [citizens] and themselves claim the sole right to American citizenship? They hid not only behind the skirts of mothers and wives, but shielded themselves with the dresses of sisters, grandmothers and cousins! And what did the American citizens of Polish descent do? They went to the closest recruitment offices and of their own free will enlisted in the American army. They left everything – father and mother, brothers and sisters, frequently a young wife and a few children. Remembering the harm done to their forefathers, before their eyes they saw Kulturkampf, the Warsaw citadel and the Russian Siberia. They fought bravely! There was no official list of lost, wounded or killed without numerous last names of American citizens ending in “ski”! And our Macieks – Anteks – Kubas – Jędreks – Stachs – and Pietreks – out of the general number of American soldiers, dead on the battlefields of the World War, around twelve percent, in spite of the fact that we constitute only three percent of the population here. Statistics not only claim, but cry out, that Poles are not only one-hundred percent, but three times more than a hundred percent citizens!

When it came to buying the bonds of various liberty loans? Our parish bought $150, 000 worth of bonds, only from the third loan! The Polish miners of a certain part of Pennsylvania bought bonds for eleven million dollars! In Chicago, one bank sold Poles the bonds of a certain issue for $1, 500, 000! Apart from that, even school children bought Thrift Stamps. Poles gave donations generously to the American Red Cross; they gave to various Relief Committees! Every charity found support among our people. In spite of this, up to this day they call us and regard us as “foreigners”! Let others learn from us how to fulfill the duties of an American citizen, we do not need their teachings in this matter, and openly protest against them sticking their nose into us and our affairs!

Fulfilling in an exemplary way the duties of American citizens, our compatriots did not forget about Poland and her needs. Who does not remember those teary moments, on the shores of Lake Ontario in Canada, where the Polish Army formed in Niagara-on-the-Lake! Around 30 000 Polish volunteers from America went to France to fight the enemy of the world, and Poland’s foe! Who will count the millions of dollars sent by our organizations and by individual families to save those dying of hunger in Poland? After the war around 40, 000 families left the United States to return to Poland, taking with them more than 120 million dollars, or around five times more than the dollar loan that is, Polish Bonds, which where also in great part bought by Poles!

How many million dollars the Emigrants bought of Polish marks, how many millions of dollars poured into the National Savings Association in Warsaw, how many millions were taken by various corporations, how many millions were gathered from the Emigrants by various emissaries and con men, this will remain a secret not only until Judgment day, but even the heavenly angels will not have enough time to count it up and will surely be at least 24 hours late with the calculation!

“And once again I return to Archbishop Cieplak who said: ‘You ask me, what impressions do I bring with me? I am heartened, surprised and enthusiastic about everything that I saw here. Once I asked a Polish boy in a Wisconsin parochial school: “Where is Poland?” Without a moment’s hesitation he replied: “In America”. Naïve yet typical. Children instinctively know how to touch upon the truth. The Polish community in America has been very active in building – many churches, schools, institutions, organizations – are these not momentous achievements? And all of this within a comparatively short period. I will tell everyone when I go back to Poland how the Poles in America work, how they make fortunes through work and thriftiness.’”

From what I have said until now, you will easily recognize the virtues of our Emigrants! Among all of them, however, stands out the love of the adopted Fatherland combined with tenderness to the far-away land of our forefathers. This is not strange. We will always love America, and with a love that is honest and Polish right through, because we cannot forget, that our fathers found not only material, but also spiritual bread here; that here they found the liberty to praise God in the language of their forefathers; because here in this adopted fatherland, after battles, difficulties and efforts, our tired and worn-out bones will rest until the day when the Judge will call us before His Highest throne! And our beloved Poland, the land of heroes and martyrs, we cannot forget, but we should say with the prophet: “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand wither. May my tongue stick to my palate if I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem beyond all my delights.” [[5]](#footnote-5)

1. ‘She who had disappeared from the map’ refers to Poland, which had been partitioned at the end of the 18th century. Annotation by UAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gorzkie żale is a Polish devotion taking place weekly during Lent. The name comes from the first words of the service “Gorzkie żale przybywajcie” (Come to us, bitter lamentations.) Explanation added by UAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quote found in the original at <http://www.pulaskilegion.org/quotes.htm> Annotation by UAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Quote from “U.S. Continental Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 25, edited by Gaillard Hunt, et al. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 673”, quoted after <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/artifact/Sculpture_21_00012.htm>, accessed on Aug 29, 2007. Annotation added by UAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Psalm 137: 5-6. New American Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)