February 12, 1950

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

After being ordained in 1910, by Cardinal Merry Del Val in Rome, I returned to the United States and the authorities of the Order sent me to St. Josephat Parish, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to serve as vicar, or as we say as an assistant. Those three years of my priesthood spent among noted ones, despite various difficulties and criticisms, I look upon the experience as happy and profitable for it was there that a encountered many of life's lessons. Above all I came to know the noble Cashubian heart. Shortly after arriving at the Parish, I was told to take the difficult task of a parish retreat. I was shocked and was ill from the fear of it. I took to preparing for the retreat. On the second day of the Recollections, at six in the morning, I wanted to prepare the people for confession so I spoke on the theme of death. I spoke in an even peaceful tone, but heart-felt and sincere. As I neared the end of my talk, suddenly a young woman, thirty or so years old, burst into tears and spoke repeatedly: "I don't want to die. I don't want to die." She fainted and fell. She was taken to the sacristy. And before the doctor could arrive, she died there. The happening worked a deep impression upon me, so much so that through the years, I have not given a homily on death. Another event the left an impression on me happened to me here in Buffalo, New York. It gave me a lot of serious thought about death, about its majesty and its meaning in our lives. You elderly folks might have remembered the years from 1919 to 1920, when America was experiencing the influenza which took thousands upon thousands of deaths. It occurred during the First World War - prohibition - influenza. Three causes of many deaths. Influenza took so many lives that graveyard workers couldn't keep up with digging graves. Many coffins stood in cemeteries waiting to be put to rest. I had been a witness of this blood curdling event. From the many sad, sad stories I make mention. There were cases where entire families were wiped out. After a short illness a young mother, an honest woman, had died. She left three children behind. The youngest was just about a year old. I stand by the coffin, praying. Beside me, stands a weeping father holding the youngest of the three. The other two children stand in silence. When the undertaker started lowering the coffin into the ground, the youngest lifted both arms into the air and wept crying out: "Mama, Mama!" My vision dimmed. When we stood before the church (The coffins were not allowed in the church.) The children stood quietly. When the coffin was being lowered the children broke out in tears and the little one cried out again, "Mama, Mama". So much sadness, so much hurt in those words at the passing of the mother. The children already understood deeply the meaning of death and its consequences. Now, to out talk, entitled:

Wanting to Die Well? –Then, Want to Live Well !!!

The person who wishes to die well, who wishes to die at peace has to prepare for the crossing over, for meeting with death, which daily knocks on the gates to the cemetery. At that time, the gates intend no harm for the passer. That was the view of wise men in days of yore. And so especially on happy days, victorious days, and public celebrations, and banquets, before the toast was given, they had the custom of throwing into the drinking glasses of tankards a bit of ashes, in order to bring to mind the last rites, a peaceful death. A black shirt had a similar designation worn by the rulers of Palestine and in offering they put forth a marble resting place. Same with the skeleton which was brought into the hall on the occasion of Egyptian Pharaohs. The skeleton seemed to utter to one and all...you....and you....and you...have to die; don't look at anyone else because the skeleton the speaks to all. Similarly on the occasion of the Holy Fathers election the papacy three pinches of cannabis are lit while singing: "Holy Father, so goes forth the glory of the world." These and similar things forcefully remind us soberly for a beneficial meditation. He will not want to be too beaten, or filled with joy, be too proud or vengeful and who from time to time and seriously considering, sooner or later, maybe not for long he had to rest in a coffin, to live in the grave, his body in a state of being a prey to vermin, and that his soul be that the man has done over the years, living well following dignified and noble, or behaving in a worldly manner. When takes this sober approach to his idea of death then one must extinguish the cravings, wicked tendencies, low instincts, lust for fame and honor, and the accumulation of wealth and money. Add to that an often taken meditation and firm conviction heals a person if he or she is not broken and will take the idea of death not only to be endured but friendly and safe! Becoming accustomed with the thought of death, to meditate on it will contribute this.

We would wish that the queen of horror will lose much of her ugliness, come to us without this costume of terror and as we are ready for the grave, it will be as we fall into our daily sleep peacefully and with a prayer on our lips. Whoever wished to die peacefully and die happily, he must every day of life gather for the day of death the liberating good deeds of a virtuous life. Note what a viewer of life has to say: Throughout the course of their life, people walk lazily and without any interest and when they come to die, as if they had both feet in one shoe, and then do not have the resources set aside any mercy, and no patience, no faith, no love for God or neighbor, nor any contempt for the world. They have no appetite for heaven, which was purchased for us by Christ, the Lord at the cost of suffering and death on the cross. When a person nears the moment of death, it is then that one need to support oneself or firmly on two legs – and these legs are: a deep faith and a sincere love of God and neighbor! Actually the preparation for dying is a life-long task and cannot be accomplished in a moment but entails the amount of time that God gives us: day after day, week after week, year after year! Our general observation of this one fact remains unchanged – that the God who gifts all his creation with graces which are generally unearned; that this God on the vaults of heaven sowed countless numbers of stars, just as the farmer sow the land with the seeds of wheat: God who beautified the land with trees, plants and flowers; a God who cave us animals of every kind of variety, birds and fish; a God who is so liberal, generous, so lavish in the distribution of time is very restrained and gives the time of our life a drop at a time, second by second, hour after hour, day after day and it passes never to return. God takes away one while he gives us another, always new, always fresh always ours to use. That ought to convince us about the value of our time. It ought to teach us how to give time its worth to us for God gives time a great worth and through such an infinitesimal distribution teaches us that time is a great treasure. We should remember that the passage of a second, brings us the realization that the passage brings us ever closer to our death. – Whoever wishes to die well, who desires to die peacefully, that one must above all, be careful not to live a soft, easy and passionate life, but a sober life, judicious, hard-working and with awareness. Let not success not easily lead him into arrogance and pride; let not the difficulties and troubles not end up if excessive sadness and despair. Let him bear his crosses patiently, and all persecution, nobly. The Savior used to say: “Woe to you who now who laugh, for you will complain and weep. But also frequently remarked, “Blessed are you if you now weep for you will be comforted. This does not mean that you should walk around with a long face, pouting, cloudy and stony. Forget it! It does not mean that it is not permitted to use the numerous gifts that are necessary to maintain strength and good health. Nothing like that. Why did God give us a reason and conscience? We ought to remember that every person either here on earth or beyond the grave has to have his share of worry. Every man cannot change this decree or judgement for it is the savior’s. Going Christ’s way paved with troubles, worry, empathy, forgiveness, humility, accepting the vicissitudes of life makes for a freedom to accept death which is inevitable for us all. – The Roman writer Seneca put it well when he wrote, “There is no written record about how one is to live, so that one dies well.” Remember, however, this writer was a pagan. I would add that anyone who knows this art and this principle and is alive, he truly prepares for a happy eternity. Every discerning person cares and has to care about the way he or she lives a daily life and has to care about the most important things. Every well reasoning mature person listens to reason and leans toward the better. No one will hire a tailor who sews clothes, to do the job of shoeing a horse. No one hires a peasant from the shovel to work as a professor of medicine, nor go to an auto mechanic for tips when you need to remove a kidney, bile or almonds in the throat. Should a person act likewise in the matters of the soul and eternal happiness? Or he will use his soul and his other abilities to collect chaff and indigestible Lupine? Our faith teaches us that heaven is a glorious state, past human understanding and a state prepared for human beings. Isn’t it worthwhile to strive to use our capability to arrive there when even one minute of it will supplant all the suffering and troubles of our earthly lives? And if we fail to meet our goal and don’t get to that blissful state, we will receive a reward worthy of blind men, who did not care to see the goal of our lives, or the means of help to attain it; they failed to use reason and their capabilities to attain it. They did not understand the meaning of time and wasted its giftedness. The passing and death of man is an important event – sad – heart breaking and dangerous. Understanding this moment is helpful to keep on the narrow road of Christian life, and striving to get others to the understanding of the value of its truths. May we stand at the head of the bed whose time has been appointed God and think of the three historical words of great meaning: “Mane – Tekel – Farez!” In our case they have such a meaning: Man! In a While! Death Will come to you!” It will deprive you of you kingdom, over which you ruled for twenty – forty – fifty years. In that time you have accumulated a material treasure. You had no time for anything else. From all you accumulated nothing is left for you. You will leave all your things here, and you will go there. The heirs will come more or less entitled by law to the things you left behind. They will take what it took years for you to accumulate with blood, sweat and tears.All your plans, all treatments, all the efforts of the work will fall and disintegrate under the nod of the scythe of God and will be ruins, rubble and - ash! Judgement has decided and its execution is waiting to be fulfilled. The judged one lies dying on the bed. The family kneels around the bed as well as some of the other relatives and close friends. From the lips of the dying comes a heavy wheezing. The flesh is in mortal battle with the soul. Turn not your attention from the visage for the same will be my fate, yours, each persons, all of us. Let us rivet our eyes on the dying because death is the best, the wisest, most effective teacher in the world. So the forehead of the dying was washed with a new and strange baptism - smeared with cold, clammy, nostril irritating sweat. The nose no longer differentiates smell, since it has been dullened; it does not feel neither pleasant nor egregious odor; the hands are cold, stiff; - the eyes dimmed, like a cloud-covered sky, legs cooled and partly paralyzed. Physicians long gave up the battle to save him, friends weep, family despairs…. The bedroom has the aura of sadness like a cemetery chapel; the inner vision of the soul gives up the battle with the flesh. That most noble part of man – the soul – the lord of the fleshy dwelling is attacked by brutal external force, and slowly but surely sometimes expelled, choked by the fortress of the body. Finally, weakened and pained with a short, more frequent breath, punctuated with a long, raspy the dying gives up - and from the eyes come two large tears as a farewell. The mourners cry, as they should, for it is required. Either because they needed you and will need you perhaps maybe they fear you. But did any of the present suffer such compassion as you did before you left? Whoever led an easy life, careless, wicked, in the moment when in such a moment of self-examination impelled the soul to respond, to accuse him, to hit him like lightning that he has to have died abandoned and forgotten by God if his conscience began to remind him of his crooked ways, if judgement called for atonement for his wrongs which he ought to have expected, what kind of wounds, what kind of fear, what kind of reaction to his wasted life, the worthless years! And just a glum, glaring picture moves slowly through the imagination of a man who in life disregarded the orders of the Creator. Every man who in his life time amassed and cared for material goods, and ignored amassing Spiritual wealth – there is no wonder that such a man at the last moment of life hears a sour voice calling his soul to judgement send his body to the grave. A harsh and unyielding voice which presents a tableau of numerical accountability to God, to neighbor and to self. It is an overpowering voice which that fearful moment wakens the conscience and brings forth despair. The voice was beyond appeasement, and spurned all the excuses and hopes. Then the sudden explosion of faith is useless, because the malice of life was too great, and love for God, for the things of God was negligible or non-existent. At that moment the person seeks someone, something which would have mercy on him but it is futile and without effect. No one and nothing is available to give him a hand or give him cautionary advice. At that moment he trembled, he felt something, something that he had never felt before, something that he never before had feared. Before that, a fever, a trembling and pain. These reminders of chills, carelessness, transgressions… a feeling of God’s wrath… that eternity, where there are eternal tears and complaints. Ah yes! At that moment he would have liked an angel for protection and a good conscience as witness and a good conscience to testify. He is leaving this earth with such sadness, without any help from the world, for which he had lived, which he loved, which he served, honored, and praised. As a reward at this most urgent time when he needed help above all, he had to undergo, the world abandoned him and forgot about him. The world is merciless, it does not have any considerations. A very different outlook is present at the death of a just man, a man who throughout his life walked the path of faith, love of God and neighbor, who executed his obligations conscientiously, who, although he care about material things, he did not forget of the needs and spiritual necessities; who was not well-known in the world but well-known by God. An angel hovers above his death bed with the book of good works. In this tome are noted ihis works of piety, his sacrificial acts as well as his dedication. As this man stood before the angel in his lifetime so now he stands by his angel at death. His conscience stands in his defence. The angel strengthens him and consoles him, translating his thoughts, words and deeds, as well as begging forgiveness for his weaknesses and errors which were perpetrated not from any ill will or obstinacy but as a result of his human nature. It is then that his illnesses, heat of fever, bodily weakness, frees the soul of the burdened flesh; that poor, weakened flesh is left by the soul and heads for its reward to the eternal glory. It was just for a moment that the sky was clouded and there were heard the peels of thunderous storm after which the clouds disappeared and the sun came out of the clouds and a rainbow appeared at the death bed and brightened the atmosphere with rainbow as a sign of mercy, forgiveness and reward. Then how joyfully the good man, with satisfaction, reminds himself of his prayers, his good deeds, which stand before him and will accompany him beyond the grace witnessing his goodness. This just man dies with hope, peacefully and joyfully. He has nothing to fear, because he lived as every child of God lives and comes from God in order to return to him as His child. He conquered all his evil inclinations and ends victoriously. He suffered through his life and now goes to his well-deserved rest. I imagine that some who are listening to this talk. I imagine that someone listening to this talk, thinks that it is unnecessary to talk about something like death. I am not in the business of life to frighten folks. I say this be way of reminder of Ecclesiasticus: “Remember that death does not tarry; this world’s law is: one has to die. Before death, do good to your neighbor, and according to your ability, give to the poor. Do not miss a good day…Before your death, fulfill justice…because the body is as limp as hay or leaves growing on a green tree. Some grow and some die; that is the destiny of flesh and blood. One comes in; another goes out. Every corruptible body stops and who uses it will go with it and be taught by it. “Don’t let you heart be set in sadness but let the sadness drift away from you and remember the end things. Do not forget for you shall not return. Remember your evaluation of things. “Yours yesterday; mine today. It is the reason that I speak about death. Not to frighten but to awaken people’s minds, so that some may be awakened from their lethargy to a consciousness of the workings of ultimate salvation. “Be vigilant, because you know not the day nor the hour.” and “If the household knew when the thief would come, he would not let him come in.” People often sing, or not so often sing: “From a sudden and unexpected death, deliver us Lord.” People live as if they were eternal and would not face death; in other words, when the time comes, we will not be able to die as God would have us die. We all wish to die well, Let us all wish to live well!”