February 14, 1943

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

I always loved our Polish youth. Not only because I come from a large family, raised in certain deprivations, even as this fact drew emotional thoughts, but more significantly for the reason that I saw hidden treasure and riches in them. It does not mean that I look down upon international youth, no. But they had certain superiority over our youth; if that's from right judgment, I will not discuss. Our parents, for the most part, were poor. The other parents occupied themselves with political matters and their children have a better chance than our sons and daughters. When, however, in just concurrence, bragged about their status and others - our youth always won out. In sports, learning, work, and in whatever discipline. Some were frightened, others were very critical and because that youth did not want to go the way of their well-trodden steps of their fathers; they wanted to search for other ways and chose other paths. Those who looked at youth through old glasses, worn out, assigned a stubbornness and toughness when they forged ahead in order not to be outrun by others. Those times are gone, if not wholly gone, when our boys and girls had the impression that all ought to be in hands of God's Son as it was with God the Father. Some journalists in general, whenever the news was bad, assigned the blame to all youth in general. They assigned the whole fault to the system of Catholic Schools, parochial schools, Polish clerics and teaching nuns. Even I when the occasion was that I was put on the carpet, defended youth, before their parents when they were pretentious. I quoted them about Polish youth on the other side of the ocean. I related the suffering and bravery and the courage of the youth during WWI and subsequent years. From 1939 I portrayed the youth which would not let itself be broken, but strengthened itself against adversity. This youth not only listened, but what's more joyously began to feel proud to be a branch of the old Polish oak; and felt that it was no better and no worse because it was a Polish persuasion. It rid itself certain ruinous attitudes and added to the goodness of American culture, the good things of the Polish culture. In order to back up my assertions on Polish youth, my entire talk will be in essence, mail from our soldiers. Listen in, it's worth it.

LETTERS FROM OUR SOLDIERS

Our first letter is written by a Catholic priest, a chaplain in the American army. It bears the date of November 15th 1942. Listen: "Dear Mom:- "If ever you awaited a letter with news of you ever worthless son, it is now. And so, since I could not write because of my travels, I thought that you would not be too discouraged in not receiving a letter from me. To tell you the truth, it was better that I did not write. Sincerely speaking, I was never in my life so occupied as I was in the past month. Do not wonder as I do not wonder because being on a ship for more than a month, it was a good time for the men to find time to make amends with God. I had work up to my ears, but as result, everything worked out so fabulously that God could not give us better blessings. I have the feeling, mother, that you know what I am talking about, don't you? After a difficult but ended journey we find ourselves in North Africa. At last we are about to begin our responsible work. I don't know why the authorities chose us, but we have arrived. Truly, I never thought, that I would see so much of the world. But that's not the end of it. It doesn’t worry us at all, because our force is destined for further journey. You know what. I have to come to Africa to become a pastor. After a few days in Africa, I had the special privilege to celebrate Mass in a large cathedral, located in a big city. The following day, we left this city and drove through several small towns. In one of these there was a huge and beautiful church where I said Mass for the soldiers and some French. I had such satisfaction and pride that I was an American and in an American uniform. When I intoned the Mass, the entire congregation broke out in song. O and I forgot to tell you that that was my first sung Mass from the time when I joined the army. It's a shame that I do not know my French better. But I spoke as best I could in my conversations with them. You may find it laughable, mom, but you can purchase anything you want here. It will take some time because everyone takes their time here. Here in Africa the water is not as it us it is where you live. As a result everyone drinks a mild wine here. We already got accustomed to that. And without any problem whatsoever. Hard as it to believe, for a dollar we can get 45 francs, a Champaign and the best costs only 28 francs. Everyone, even children have gotten accustomed to wine. Yesterday I bought tomatoes and tangerines, (small oranges), it all amounted to two bushes, and I gave the seller a dollar - and the black Arab thought I possessed all the riches of the earth. If I get the chance to get some film to you, you will see the unique way they dress here. Those who do not like to wash would love to live here. The Arabs never wash. They sit around all day long and eat corn bread and drink wine with it. Concerning labor, no one works; only when the French do not satisfy their hunger, then they work. They are not too concerned what happens in the world. Some of them have never heard of a country called America. Now that they have made our acquaintance, they know what it means to know good people. Here as well as in the whole world, Germans taught them that we are half feral and very bad. Today, when you talk to the French and the Arabs they cry from joy, that noon else except the Americans came here. I personally am glad we came here. During the day, it is very hot. The evenings are cool and comfortable. I was in England and Scotland for quite a long time and loved the towns and cities, and never thought that here in Africa there are such delightful cities. Here, because we don't have too many comforts, I like it here better than Europe. The buildings are painted something like in Florida. There are not too many homes here, but in the cities it is pleasant. By the way, what's new at home? Is it rainy? If we are to be here several months, I'll forget what winter is like. How is Mistak? Edmund? Sophie, Peter and the children? Certainly they have written to me. I'll respond to their letters when I get the chance. Please give my regards to everyone and tell them all is ok.

 From the same wanderer, a son

The next letter is dated December 4th. It is written from Alaska. An opłatek (Christmas wafer) was in the letter. It brought back memories. He writes: "Despite the war, it is quiet here, almost too quiet. The snow falls in huge flakes. How many? Something I can think about. Tall spruce trees look like Christmas trees in the States. Despite the frosts, it does not feel like winter because we wear special uniforms. Currently we are on an island. Up until now I do not pine for my own people, but the holidays are coming, so I am reminded of Wigilia, when our table was prepared by Mom and my sister. It's curious how the soldier, when away from home, thinks back to his family days around the holidays. Mother knew what my sister and I liked the best so she made sure there was no lack of it at the table. We always shared the opłatek. (the Christmas wafer). Dad presided over that. At the breaking of the wafer, Dad gave us a veritable sermon. He spoke as long as he could because usually he broke out in tears. We all attended the “pasterka”, mother put out a dish of “krusciki”. And a large urn of coffee and we sat til 5 or 6 o’clock. - I think of that all now. This year I will not be at the table. They will be sad, like my mother wrote, because they know that they have a son in the armed forces in order that we all might celebrate the holiday traditions with freedom and according to our faith. I attended a polish high school. At the beginning it seemed to me that I had a calling to be a priest. In 1939 that vision changed. After the holidays, I did not return to school but enlisted into the army. My parents disagreed with my choice. Dad however was pleased because he had served in the old country. They write often to change my mind. Mom, Dad and my Sister. There are plenty of Poles here. The officers pride themselves that we are good soldiers. That should cheer all parents who have sons in the American Army. We also have a good chaplain who is mother and father to the troops. Our men are not ashamed of their faith. If someone asks them if they are believers…they show their medal or cross immediately and say: “This is my faith!” – At Christmas we will be able to sing Polish carols in the chapel. Before ending, Father, cheer up our parents because they listen to you on the radio. May they not only pray for us but also that the war may end as quickly as possible”? The effect of this letter will be greater, without my commentary.

The third letter is date November 22nd: “I am on one of the islands of the Pacific Ocean. I am not allowed to tell you exactly which island it is because it is a military secret. It is my first time on this side of the ocean. The journey has interested me to this point. Trips have always interested me because I wanted to see foreign countries. When I was a civilian, I didn’t have the means to travel to foreign ports. I have that opportunity now. Service in the army is good for young men such as me. Young people learn obedience; even if they don’t want to and they could learn from the service. I remember my disobedience to my parents and how I, now and then, saddened them. I didn’t understand how they cared for me and about me. When they reprimanded me, I would be resisting. Now that I am far away from my mother and father, I recognize and am appreciative of what they did for me. Many times and especially in the evenings, when I receive a letter from home, there is food for thought. I think of the trouble I caused them when they did me so much good. If only I had to chance to relive those days. I do not complain that I have to do service in the army because it is my duty, as it is with us all. Our America has given us much and we should be ready to return the good with gratitude. And in my mind we are also doing it for our beloved Poland, for when we win the war, then our Poland will return to us. I am sending a request for masses: one for the intention of parents. The second for blessings for the whole family. Father Justin. Be with God.

I don’t remember ever reading a more beautiful letter in my life. There is so much sincerity in it, as well as humility, so much willingness to amend life, and much gratitude. It is, for me, a delight, since I have always taken the side of our Polish youth. I believe in them. I maintain that there isn’t a healthier youth than ours. They not only are equal to others but surpass them morally, intellectually and physically. Letter such as these second my motion.

The fourth letter is date December 4th: “I have been in the army for six months. I signed up willingly. I read so much harm the Germans did to the Poles and with other ethnic groups that I wept tears of anger. I have two younger sisters and I thought how it would be with them in the Germans or Japanese invaded our land. My mother did not want me to leave home. I told her, that if she does not permit me to go to the army I would go anyway and would not write to her. And she agreed. I was a bit crafty. A have a bit from my pension and send money to my young sisters. I am not sorry that I am here but I yearn for my mother and sisters. But they were happy when I came home for a leave. I have a very good mother. She writes often to me. I ask you Father, to send me two “oplatki”. I would like to share the wafer every vigil of Christmas with my mom and my sisters, and this year, I will not be able to be at home with them.

Don’t think that such a letter is the exception. Absolutely not! What other youth group can write something heart rendering. How much faith and piety is in it! How much joy and pride in the parents and the family in reading it. What lessons we could learn from It.?

The fifth letter is from some small British port. It is written by a Polish sergeant on November 12th: Dear Father Justin: All is well at present, Father, but please tell you listeners, that a prayer is appreciated by all soldiers, both Catholic and non-Catholic. You can tell my parents that I’m feeling well and in high spirits all the time. Do write me a letter, Father Justin, and send me an “Opłatek” for I’ll appreciate it so much. I still carry your medal around with me at all times and I thank you sincerely for it. You don’t know how much I appreciate it. The people over here treat our solders very nicely and so do the soldiers of this country. Best of luck to you Father, and may the Star of Bethlehem guide you in all your tasks and duties. A toast: a cup of tea to your health. Cheerio! P.S. Please say a prayer for all the boys in service of their country all over the world.

Perhaps, after listening to these letters one can understand why I always encourage the writing of letters and remembering our soldiers in our daily prayers. It is the least that our fighting men ask of us and they certainly have a right to that! Do we remember them? More prayers and more letters to them!!

The sixth letter is dated December 1st, from a tiny isle, wild and rugged, but very hot: “We have been here for two months. The place is beautiful, but quite dangerous since not only the people are very dirty but there are wild animals and various bugs, and rattlesnakes. We live on a very tiny island which is surrounded by marshes. I like this kind of living. We rise at 5, and are on alert all day. We go to sleep at 9 in a tent. We have good officers and they care about us. They feed us wells but there is little meat because it is so hot here. Please, father, pray for me and my parents that we might outlast this war in health and that it end soon. Also, if possible, send me a medal of St. Christopher, because I always prayed to him when I was at home.

The seventh letter is from a young air force lieutenant, who had already fought in several battles and is now on island that is strafed by the enemy. On November 29, he wrote: “Dear Father Justin: Tell me, why some people fear death? To a good Catholic, this death is an opening to another life. In our present existence, that which we call life, is not a real life. It is merely a series of pleasant or unpleasant events from birth to death. Look at the existing conditions all over the world. Is that decent human life, when men, woman and even children are being hunted and shot down like beasts? And look at those who are doing the hunting. Are they human? Any soldier who stands up between such brutal hunters and those innocent people, should not fear death, because he’s fighting God’s fight and God will certainly be at his side. When this world’s carnage comes to an end, he good Lord will again come into his own. He will establish His kingdom of peace and love. Then men won’t desire power, or to cheat and lie. And all humanity will be happy again. We American soldiers are instruments in this providential change in world conditions. That is the reason we are ready for any sacrifice, -even death.”

This same lieutenant adds in the Polish language: “I am a Pole, I am proud of my lineage. I am at the same time an officer of the American army and proud of it. Our young men in the American forces, cloth themselves with honor and bring honor to their native country. I am a former student of St. Francis High School in Athol Springs, NY. The lessons I learned there are benefiting me now. Please tell your listeners that my captain praises the Polish soldiers under his command. He is not a Catholic himself but he praises those officers who encourage their men to the practice of religion, because those who do so are good soldiers.

He ends his letter this way: “please Father write to me, because I enjoy hearing from you. If you wish to use this letter, or any part of it on your broadcast, us it. But do not mention my name. The Catholic higher education has undoubtedly helped many to achieve a high rank. I toss this fact to the parents of the youth for pondering.

From the eighth letter dated November 28 I quote portions: “When I was at home, I listened regularly to your wonderful radio program “The Rosary Hour” – Your sincerity in speaking to us and telling us the truth whether we liked it or not, made a deep impression not only on me, but on the youngsters who listened to your broadcasts. I know this to be a fact, because we used to discuss your broadcasts, not only at our supper-tables but in our high schools. You kept on pounding into us the idea that we should always we true and loyal American citizens, staunch Catholics, and at the same time never forget the mother-country of our fathers with her rich culture and beautiful traditions, or as you once put it, in one short sentence: “We should love these United Sates as our mother, and love Poland as our grand-ma!” – Well after one of your broadcasts in 1940, about the conditions abroad – I decided there and then to join the army. I enlisted in the Marines and I do love this “Marine life!” The officers and the fellows are just swell! The food although never over-plentiful is sufficient and nourishing. I have been places and seen things. Our boys are at present well-equipped and they are no “softies”. They are both fit and able to take care of themselves anywhere. And this is only the beginning. I have always tried my best to be a good “Marine” and so far God has been so kind to me. Please Father, pray not only for me, but for all the boys in service, so we may return home victorious and safe. Today, with many others, I was to confession, and early tomorrow we will receive Communion. We always do this before any dangerous task ahead. Tomorrow we will push on with confidence. I am glad to be a Catholic. And, Father, I am trying to live up to my – religion.”

The ninth letter is from a soldier who still is state side but already equipped with a new warm uniform, which is a sign that he will soon go overseas. “I have received your military medal from my family the other day. And I was happy to receive it. My family has great pride in me and they are doing everything possible to make me feel happy, ever since I have been in the Armed Forces. I want to thank you for your medal. I always wear it, and I will wherever I go. I have been home two weeks on a furlough for the first time since I had been inducted in the army in June 1942. I was overjoyed to see the family especially Dad and Ma, and they too were pleased to see me home. Father please tell the folks at home not to fret too much over their soldier sons. We are being taken care of by Uncle Sam and what a good old man he is. We know that our duty is to fight and fight we will, until victory is ours. But what we need is our folk’s prayers. We sincerely ask for them.

The tenth letter is dated December 2nd: “A while back, I lived in Chicago. I am a Catholic and always will be. I came from Poland in 1938. My parents, brothers and sisters, - all of them stayed in Poland. And that worries me the most since I don’t know whether they are alive in war torn Poland. I was gravely ill but with God’s help, I am coming back to my former self with a cane. I don’t know why my relatives forgot about me. Other solders in the hospital get letters and I didn’t even get one from my relatives. I like life in the army. Dear Father, please send me some polish books, they will cheer me up. And please send me an “opłatek” for Christmas. It will remind me of the traditions from better times.

The eleventh and last letter even though written originally in the English language, I’ll translate it. It was written somewhere, in a hospital, on Monday, November 30th: Dear Father Justin, I write somewhat illegibly since the doctors just took off bandages from my eyes... In January of 1942, they brought me to America. That time I couldn’t see at all. I went through several operations by doctors. I was in the darkness for many months. I suffered greatly, but never despaired. I prayed for myself and for my buddies who suffered as I did. I can tell you that we swam for three hours in burning oil which was spread out in the burning ocean. I see very hazily now and perhaps I will lose my sight altogether. However I am prepared for anything, because I am a believing Catholic. At home I went to church and said my prayers. I am in the hands of God and in agreement with whatever God hands me. Please give my fiancée the message not to visit me too quickly so that I could see her, maybe for the last time before I lose my sight totally. And pray for me so that I wouldn’t be blind. The censor added this to the letter: “Please, Reverend do this favor for the boy, because his one of our real fighting heroes.”

Perhaps after hearing these letters, the parents especially the mothers of these sons will be relieved somewhat and even thank God that they have sons who are models of the American soldiers to others. And all of us let us ask God for a victory in the war and a successful return home for our boys.