February 17, 1946

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

From a letter written in Przemyków, Poland, on the 15th of March, 1945, I read the following excerpt: “just now, after the terrible war experiences can we write to you, because we want to share with you what we had undergone for five years. Thank Heaven, we have survived that personal turmoil even though constantly threatened by the German thugs. Just in the middle of January we were liberated by the Russians from the jaws of the Germans. We all survived with the help of God all that turmoil. Our mother still lives although confined to bed and our sisters live with the family. Now we are in a state of nervous exhaustion. There is misery and hunger in the cities. In the small towns we are saved from hunger. We lack clothing because the factories do not have the resources and if there was something it was taken by the Germans. If one finds some clothing, it is very expensive; there is a lack of means to buy it. It has come down to the fact that all our resources have gone into the war and all our pay is used for the war effort. I lost all my domestic possessions. We need to start from scratch. The war has cost us immensely. At the beginning of 1939 the German’s attacked Poland and we were forced to hide in order the escape persecution from the gestapo who killed masses of our people and place many in concentration camps. Furthermore, our people had to give away the grain and the cattle we raised and dig trenches while starving. In January of 1945 we lived through the retreat of the Germans. For forty days we had undergone artillery and bombing our towns. Soldiers died and even civilians. Thievery and robbery reigned. In our area, an entire hamlet disappeared and no church stands. There are ruins everywhere, hardship and tears for dear ones lost in the concentration camps. But the Creator permitted us to live through those horrific moments. The war is still not over; we still see suffering everywhere, but death does not stare us in the eye because the butchering has stopped.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

I left you at the fire ovens of Dachau. As one prisoner of the concentration camp said, “Enough of this. Let us lose the sight of these iron ovens. This is the funeral of the heroic martyrs. Incensed smoke - disgusting, sickening sweet smell of burning bodies; mourning a "Requiem" amidst the screeching and clanking of iron and slamming every moment of the heavy door of the furnace; "Salve" sings the wind whistling in the field; the victims are passionately kissed by tongues of flame from the fire. The last prayer is said in the swaying of the pine trees and whispering to the unsung hero martyrs. Alongside the crematory with the dust, the ashes and unburned coke thrown are the unburned bones of one of our countrymen. Before leaving this place, I ask for one thing. Perhaps it will be heroism on your part, maybe you haven’t ever done this, but do it here. We will kneel and kiss the land, because this stretch of land is a relic – it is holy. We are in the third day in the life of a concentration camp. Today is Sunday. They ask who would wish to go to Mass – although we know that there is no chapel here. Anyone to confession? We are Polish Catholics and wish to pray, to pray for ourselves that God snatch us from this hell in which we sit and protect our country’s freedom. Considering this all are willing to pray and a certain group asks about the possibility of receiving Communion. The asking for prayer was only provocative. Instead there are criminal exercises of 8EJ to 12ej without interruption is: "Get down, rise, over, drop, rise, wallow in uprisings over, get down, wallow in uprisings, squat in the sukkah, uprisings, drop, wallow out ....." A few communist Germans beats all with the club, while shouting. More training in the afternoon. Again the command: down, get up, hurry it up. A sixth week passes with no change. All are swollen. People’s legs are like beams, emaciated faces and the heart, liver and kidneys cannot operate properly and so water remains in the organisms. All have skin outbreaks, wounds do not heal, flesh rots and separates from the bones which deteriorate. – It is in such a manner that Fr. Sejduk dies. They took him with 69 other Polish priests for flagellation. After several weeks thirty six of them died. Fr. Kaninski came out of all of this and works in Westfall. – Despairing people lose their minds, others commit suicide, others are commanded to commit suicide or they will be tortured to death. An elderly man refused and they choked him to death. They pumped water into his stomach through the mouth and pressed it out of him. After a few minutes he was “ready”. He “fell” on the First Sunday asking to go to Communion. A teacher hung himself with his belt in the window frame. The chef of the bloc…? Bishop Koral received 50 lashes tied to a goat. Hundreds of other priests 50 lash. In the Schtuhoff camp priests were whipped daily. Bishop Koral, left us for the Heavenly Father in Dachau! Bells did not mournfully ring for him; no requiem was sung. His dust remains were blown to the winds. The elderly Bishop Fulman sat with Bishop Koral in the Sachsenhausen camp from December 3rd, 1939. Both were sentenced to death. Then came death by the grace of God but not in the camp. Father Felczak was hit with hammers on the head because he was asked about the Immaculate Conception of Mary because he maintained that she was Immaculate. Father Bednarski, on Good Friday, was hung by a chain with his wrists up so he couldn’t touch the ground. Twice a week, they hung 50 to 75 people in this manner. Some dies right away others later. Sometimes one died beside another. When entering a bathroom, there would be corpses lying on the floor. They were those who had kidney problems and who would not? They slept, sometimes they slept into eternity. Lips uttered for the last time, “God, accept the offering of my life for a free Poland. It seems that it was just yesterday that one of the Canons from Poznań, rising from his dirty pallet, sat at his stool and whispered his prayers; he froze temporarily. I saw how they took Father Sledzinski from his diocese to the crematory. They took him in a blanket to the crematory and shook him so he revived. That he continued to live did not help him. He was slated for the dead. He already was listed in those who do not live. He is slated to die the next day so a night of waiting was his lot. It is night and everything is planned out and the poor man has the whole night to die in. The chief of his bloc places him in cold water and hold him there for almost an hour and then pulls him to the floor and leaves him there for the night. In the morning it was necessary only to burn in his date of birth on his chest. The smoke of the crematory gave forth the unpleasant smell of burnt flesh for morning to evening and evening to morning in the air of the crematory. Food for the insatiable demon never ran out and the bright flame fueled by the remnants of the fatty tissue rose two meters above the chimney of the crematory. All are prey to the flames, but what particularly stands out are the Polish intellectuals. “Who were you?” – they ask. Owner, teacher, doctor, lawyer, judge, professor, officer, priest? These are the people lending themselves to the ovens. Here was a group of people of about 300 people mostly priests and Jews. Their naval jackets are reversed back to the breast, - here they throw two shovels of sand into the jacket and carry the sand to a place come back and carry more sand to the place. They repeat this procedure. They travel about 200 meters back and forth. The sun bears down on they uncovered heads. More and more of them lose their minds. They do this to the sick. Their faces swell up. They give benzene to them. This was related by Father Felczak who was starving. They injected him on his names day in 1942 and he went to the Father.

I just about am able to stand. We unload twenty tons of coke from a barge on the canal from Odrę and Labą. The barge was five meters from the shore. There is a gang plank from shore to ship. Wheelbarrows are used to transfer the coke from barge to shore. The plank is very narrow. Sixty people work at the transfer; they work with their bare hands whose fingers become cut up from handling the coke. It rains, and the plank gets slippery and it moves precariously from side to side sometimes dunking barrow and person into the water below. A guard stands by and whips the carriers till the skin breaks. For several days we carry chopped down trees from the woods to the concentration camp. WE walk about two kilometers. One person cannot manage one bundle of wood. He cannot drop it because if he drops it, he will be severely punished. On the spot, they blacken the eyes, face, head, and shins. It is horribly painful. We need to carry 120 centimeter wide poplar branches. There are not easy paths through the dense forest. Civilians make brick. They hurry them with wheelbarrows full of clay. Coming back from work each day, they bring in from one or two dead workers. We build another wall around the camp, so that we would not escape. We are already barred by escape in three ways with a high electrical wire, a barbed wire, and a wall and another barbed wire beyond the wall.

Every hundred feet there are two story parapets with machine gunners. There are security police and they warn us so that nothing “bad” would happen to us. An electrician escaped during the night during a storm through all these protections. We paid for that. We stayed up all night without sleep or food. It happened often because people did not stop trying to escape. We all had to pay for any attempt to escape.

It’s December. It rains with a mixture of snow. We carry “willingly” because we work here “willingly” – we carry clumps of turf from the swamp to the camp to arrange a chicken coop for the Commandant. The priests are able to do that best. We wear rags on our legs covered with wooden slippers, bare feet. We wear jeans on ourselves. The clumps are heavy and wet, so the wet mud is all over us. Some with mud on their arms, others on their bellies because it runs. We walk four days two and a half kilometers.

It is winter, that terrible winter. We are three hours in the mud, in the frost singing to the commandant and going to the barracks w parade in the commandant’s presence by the blare of the orchestra. - Snow falls. It falls for three days. We remove the snow from the camp with wheelbarrows and clean in between the enemy barracks. People freeze. I witnessed them bringing in a frozen priest on a wheelbarrow. Despite everything too few people die in the camp, only 60 daily. To hurry up the process they group 1300 people who have the mange, or skin rashes. Cure is undertaken. The skin needs a lot of air so the windows of the barracks are open. People have no clothes only jeans and they lay on floors. They only receive 250 grams of bread and coffee. They go from warmth to freezing temperatures. One after the other, they die of pneumonia. In the span of five years 1700 people pass by coming from twenty three nations. 48 thousand Poles. Priests from Dachau number 2540 in five years. After the freeing of the concentration camp by the 7th American army 32 thousand were left in the camp. With 10 thousand Poles, and among the Polish priests there were 888. 25 Jesuits perished, 43 survived. Those who died and those who suffered and you all, who prayed for us – we offered God our bad days for freedom of our Fatherland. We hope and believe in God’s mercy, justice, victory and Truth.”

A note of a polish prisoner from the concentration camp at Schsenhausen, I read: “We came to Sachsenhausen on a sunny morning on the 20th of June, 1940. At that time the prisoners were coming out to go to work, at attention like soldiers on parade, marching through the gate. Their eyes were cast to the right, in step and at a common gait, easy on the eyes. One could feel the discipline and training. They were similarly dressed, in silence, and not easy to guess their nationality because the groups consisted of people from the 24 nations of the world. Finally they all passed by and we started to go into the camp. Above the gate a metal sign reading: “Arbeit macht frei” From experience I can say that meant eternal freedom: delivery through the chimney of the crematorium. We were led to a place and immediately, several “angels,” SS soldiers, with whom there was a conversation. Slowly they began a roll call and there began the end of a normal life. Everyone undressed – disinfection – and all personal effects were taken from us. My glasses are the only thing that remained with me. What good is a hankie or a belt in a concentration camp? They dressed us in jail-wear and everyone received a number which had to be committed to memory, and be ready to say it when necessary. The commandant stood at the head. Two or three officers were at his service. They were called “Lager-fuerhrer” and three so-called “Block-fuehrer”. Then there were the lesser gods, namely the reps of the elder prisoners. At the head of the barracks was the “blockaeltester” and his aide “Stubenaeltester”. Head over the work-gangs were the “capo” which was written in yellow on arm bands. It would be difficult to determine the competency of these men. It is sufficient to say that they killed unsentenced prisoners. At the beginning we had to pass a quarantine or the time to learn what is expected of the prisoners in the concentration camp. Here I began to understand how the German “Gestapo” had to determine how to torture people. First, no one could criticize any activity. Any accused of that would be murdered in the most terrible way. The means of radical treatment was to occupy prisoners so they were limited to think about anything else. The work lasted for twelve hours, and it was work that was incomprehensible. Sand could be carried by wagon or truck back and forth many times but in the camp we carried sand in the following fashion. Our jackets were turned backwards and then we would fill it with a pile of sand. Everyone received a pile of sand and we had to run twenty meters back and forth. It was an eternal circle and with whippings and the work flowed like clockwork. After twelve hours of this work, one could hardly stand up on two feet and with hardly any food one had to die. The work was planned for the death of the prisoners. At the beginning one worked feverishly but and began to think of the stupidity of it. Whoever did not want to work, had to stand all day, from morning tile night, and had to contend with swollen feet. One could not lean on anything or sit. Then, positioned as half-way seated, one had to stand in that half-seated position for hours sometimes holding a dish of water. Objection to do this ended in death. And so people were beaten in the face daily and indiscriminately of who or what they were. It was hell in life. Night was a break in which we thought of our families, our home and mothers. But “aufstehen” – rising – broke our reverie and reminded us where we are. As I mentioned before differences between inmates disappeared. An engineer, a worker, a professor whether teacher, priest, ordinary man: all wore a number. However there were differences.

On our bloc, there was a German thief from Berlin who came into the camp in 1933. There were about six thousand imprisoned up to 1940; they were terrible people who bullied someone they did not like on their bloc. They made sport of him in various seemingly innocent ways which actually were tortures, for example jumping around like a frog. Pain persisted after hours of the sport. It happened day after day. The young could cope with it but the elderly were expected to perform with no difference between them. The idea was that the death of the elderly did not matter. There was no consideration given to the elderly. The elderly die shortly after the torturous exercises. One can see the validity in the aphorism: “There is no greater hatred than ignorance in relationship with knowledge. That mass of various thieves, who approached their fellow intelligent neighbor with furry. Hence their glory in the power to inflict pain on the other. And what can be said of their hatred of the clergy? It is beyond comprehension. There was one bloc of the concentration camp which killed people in this manner that demanded that a healthy per was told to kneel on the flow and a foot was put on his neck and suffocated him to death. Others were tortured “better” because a hose was placed in the victim’s mouth and water pumped into him and then forced it out, again repeating the process. This was the scenario that we looked upon daily. One might say, “Why did the administration allow this horrible act of torture?” But what administration was there to forbid it? The SS was schooled in how to kill people. These torturers were 18 year olds and were feared as satanic. The had freedom to do as they wished. The victims were beaten so that that had to sleep on their stomachs to free themselves of the pain of trying to sleep on their backs. It was barbarism that the world had not seen for the victims were totally innocent of any crime. If one had no sort of faith or belief, they would throw themselves on the electric wires protecting escape so that they could end their lives.

The above write-ups from the lips of those who were witnesses reached the newspapers and were written up in Chicago papers. They recalled bestial tortures and inhuman sufferings without end. You can read of the processing of victims by the guards and the German commandants of the concentration camp at Dachau. The trial of them at Nuremburg was public. One can read about these animal-men who wanted to Germanize the entire world for a thousand years.