**February 19, 1939**

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

There is not greater potentate than is the press. I mean various literature, dailies, books and various forms of publications. Everyone reads them, since human beings have within their makeup a certain curiosity. Some read to learn, good things or bad. Others read to kill time. Or so they say. Despite that, reading has its own effects, salutary or harmful. The greater part of the readership is too lazy to think. Such readers wish that the editors and authors think for them. And so we hear such phrases as: “this must be the truth, because the paper said so. The opinion of the editors becomes the opinion of the readers. This is a perilous condition. Why? There is a lack of truthfulness and honesty. The best example is in the unfortunate condition of French publications. There, for a long period of time, the enemies of God and faith coved the country in the written word with one aim, to tear away the nation from God. In their dailies and books the repeated the same theme: the church is the biggest enemy of the people; that the church never really cared about man; that the church held the people in darkness and so forth. But even here among us, we have similar writers, who in this same manner clue in our people. The less critical person and one lacking a firm faith are led into error, from which it is difficult to extricate the affected person. Among today's literature, dominated by two qualities, sentimentality or romance and reality under the pretext of enlightenment breaks the veil of the so-called secrets of life. In the sentimental literature in which the youth usually bathe themselves, in mindless giggling, boring infatuations etc. In the literature which deals with the so called truth about the facts of life, it is an information quest of erotic and sensual customs, which lead to overuse and loosening of tradition. And so, today’s theme, entitled:

 READING IS FIRE

“I don’t understand why someone can forbid me to read what I want to read? I am twenty years old and so reading will do me no harm. Besides I want to know the details of life. I can educate myself by reading everything” – these are words a young Polish lad told me last year. Listen my young brother: Are you able to drink everything without being careful and remain healthy? Are you able to eat everything without debilitating effects on your health? How then can you read everything with being affected morally in mind, heart and soul? Surely, reading is food for the human soul. Here again, it depends. And so we distinguish between good and bad reading. Your argument is old hat. People always argued over everything even faith. They take what they like, what appeals to them, what is pleasant. They reject what they don’t like which seems to them repugnant or unpleasant. This is the way a certain lawyer arguing with his friend”: Today you have to personally be judicious and read everything to make up your mind.” Then the door opened and a peasant woman entered with a basket of mushrooms. Incidentally the lawyer was fond of mushrooms. This was known in the locality and everyone would bring mushrooms to him realizing that they were sure of payment for them. The lawyer hesitated and looked worried. Inspection began. The lawyer said to his friend, “What do think about these mushrooms, are they good to eat? They look suspect to me.” “I don’t know about mushrooms; I cannot judge them. Ask the cook, the friend said. – What do you say, John, I think these mushroom are suspect. I wouldn’t buy them, said the cook. The matter was settled. When they were alone, the friend of the lawyer was surprised and asked the friend. “How could you do that? Why didn’t you try the mushrooms first to see if they were poisonous? How did you know they were inedible? Because the cook said they were and he should be knowledgeable. Sure, but shouldn’t you as a thinking person convince yourself? Prove to yourself that it is so – Are you kidding yourself? “Would you want me to expose myself to death from poisonous mushrooms? – I thought... as you wished to expose my soul and heart on a worse death, because spiritual death for this man was like the author and his bad book” – truly certain books and various pamphlets are but poisonous mushrooms. Are we free to use poison in order the loose our lives? Are be permitted to feed our soul with moral trash, in order to commit spiritual suicide? The educated lawyer believed the cook’s evaluation that the mushrooms were poisonous? Why did he believe? Because the cook was familiar with mushrooms; because the cooks duty it is to know foods that are beneficial and as well know those which are poisonous. It is the same with reading. There is a Church which on the strength of Christ says: there is an imprimatur if it is acceptable reading. We shouldn’t think that our mind, our education, our experiences should be enough to avoid the poisoning. I am careful myself not to be to be so sure of my personal protections is enough. Here is an occurrence written about by Jolana Gerely. There are certain parts that I have decided to omit from the narrative. I begin: “One dark night she hurried home saddened. She hurried home with downcast look, red faced, shaking as though with a fever. She travelled through side streets to avoid those she knew. She even was shying away from strangers because she judged that her countenance would betray what she had lost. She lost something that was darker than she had thought before. When she arrived home, she told her mother that she was not hungry and thanked her for making dinner, told her that she ate with her girlfriends and went to her room. She took of coat and hat and threw herself on the bed and buried her face in the pillows. She didn’t cry but troubling thoughts ran through her mind. She had the impression that after months she had suddenly come to a realization. How impacted her word-thought was to her: “I have finally fallen! Now what? Those words were repeated to her by the sound of the passing trolley, the words were echoed by the neighbor’s radio, and repeated by the closing of a door and ultimately stealing themselves into her soul. But wait, she had not fallen! – She meditated – that which she had done, was in accordance with her ethic and with her full freedom of action. She had just ended her twenty second year of her life, and certainly she was in maturity for her action. Why couldn’t she quell that voice with her inner call: “At last, you have fallen?” Now what? Where was the assertive self-sureness, which she awaited? She was convinced that she will from a peaceful height, convincing them that she had the gumption to do that which she thought was daring. She was convinced that the lines on her face would show that womanly character which girls look upon their married friends with envy. If she wished to be honest with herself, she had to admit that that which she had lived through gave her only dejection and disappointment. Above all, she wanted to prove her equality with the man. At the present time she felt that she only proved to be an entertainment. How dirty is the role of a woman? In her embattled mind something revealing: that which she had been told in school or in church; when she would attend services: that “Christianity brought woman out of her lowliness.” The issue: how that came to “that” inside of her because it was just a year ago that she would not have dreamed of what she was going through. She had been considered the most dutiful of workers. Her peace and discretion forced her male colleagues to respect. Her girlfriends liked her because she willingly helped them at work. Until one day – she remembered – she happened to come across several books. The librarian announced a sale. She likes to read so she went and bought several volumes. It was a mixed bag of titles written by lesser and more popular writers. They had interesting titles: “What every girl should know” – “Equality and contentment in love”, and “Cohabitation” as a proof of compatibility. She remembers now how she was absorbed in these books. The somewhat dialectic nature of the books convinced her totally.
The words of St. Blase were demonstrative of her actions: “To open a book is to give one’s heart to the author.” The poor women had the impression that the words of the book were hers; the only thing was that she was unfamiliar of the books before she read them. Her life, it seemed, was turned around completely. Willingly she was condemned to the role of Cinderella. Even though for some time she had the power to live life to the fullest. She is twenty two years old and she has no inkling of some kind of change. What is she in store for? Her girlfriends have friends with who they go to the coffee shop, to the movies or the theatre. She has no one. Her parents go with her occasionally to the theater but she sits with them as if she were a grammar school teacher. Evening recreations are not on her agenda. She no longer bought books that were on sale but read various illustrated publications but she took notes from them and paid special attention to the phrase, “for adults only”. In her fertile imagination she wove passionate portraits and her soul was lost in passionate desires. And what can one say further of the warm nights which she spent at lectures of modern romantics. This was no actual pornography. No, the mature woman would not lower herself to that. One can equate the literature to literary status. In our times, even known authors waste their abilities which are of noble worth on animal instincts. And when this modern Millie looked back she recognized more than ever and more clearly that men from that time looked at her differently. Men, who sought adventures, saw in the woman something of a possibility of more intimacy with her. Her facial expression gave birth to that kind of approach. And, having gone alone before, not found a companion. The behavior of her friends at work also changed toward her. At first it was just a hasty glance but more brazen as time went by. The protective wall that used to be there fell. Then the usual road took on a different character. The road of sin is an easy route and many walk it and rarely come back from it. This is a downhill road. It is habitual and difficult to come back from. The woman leapt from the couch. She lifted her head proudly. What had happened cannot be undone. Now all is one. Besides one has nothing to lose. Is there anything worse than the boring desk job? But things got worse. She joined the countless women who took the road that she took. The street and then the hospital. The poor modern Millie! There was no one by her to take away the first bad book, to save her from her first mistake. God’s mercy and grace was fruitless. She could not benefit from the grace for she had no faith. And her companion, the book she read, still circulates from hand to hand among the modern Millie’s poisoning their souls. A book? - the spark of God’s gift, a treasury of the most wondrous thoughts. No. Not this book; the other one. - Here ends the modern woman’s tale, which first burns to its touch and later burns the soul’s flesh. The story is not poetic and is typical of modern life. If at least on being was saved from that road. My dear youth, learn life from a Catechism, not from modern literature that causes lack of faith.