February 29, 1939

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

Our everlasting Sienkiewicz in his narrative, “Quo Vadis” writes, “The fisherman usually bent over and humble, walked erect now, taller than soldiers and full of noble bearing. Never was there a scene of such majestic character. It seemed that a monarch was moving along surrounded by people and soldiers. Voices were raised from the vicinity, - it is Peter leaving the Lord! Eventually the shouts and bustle of the crowds faded away. They walked in silence. Occasionally there was the clang of arms or the murmur of praying. He felt that his work was finished and he already knew, that the truth, which he spoke of during his lifetime would flood everything as an ocean wave and that nothing would be able to hold it back. Thinking in that manner, he lifted his eyes upwards and said, “Lord, you told me to conquer the castle which rules the earth, and I have done that. You told me to establish a capital and I have done that. It is your city and now, I am going to you because I am work-weary.” The apostle turned toward the city for the last time. At a distance, at a somewhat lower view, one could see the glistening river and further a hill with homes and a great deal of human occupancy and the outskirts of the town vanishing in the misty blue. Peter, however, surrounded by soldiers, looked upon the sight as a ruler or king at his kingdom and spoke: “You are saved and you are mine!” The sun sank further in the west and appeared large and red. The sky began to sparkle with immense brilliance. The soldiers stepped nearer to Peter to undress him for torture fo his beliefs. However, the soldiers hesitated as Peter, praying and in a solemn gesture, lifted his right hand high; bystanders gasped, judging that perhaps he had something else to say. Peter however said nothing, but it seemed that with a loving glance encompassed the whole earth and began to lovingly make the sign of the cross upon the east, the west, the north and the south ---.” This occurrence happened in the 67th year of the Christian Era.

And now, on to our talk, entitled:

THE POPE DIES – THE PAPACY LIVES

A similar scenario played itself out in the eternal city on Friday, February 9 in the current year at 5:30 o’clock, European time and on Thursday at 11:31 according to the Eastern Standard Time in America. About an hour later, the daily newspapers came out with the headlines: “The Pope died” and “St. Pius XI died!” Radio stations suspended their programs and dedicated the time to detailed biographical sketches of the Pope’s life, his achievements, and the loss of one of the most important and most active advocates of the people in the History of Christianity and civilization. It was not only the faithful that looked with admiration of the passing of vicar of Christ but also Protestants, Jews and Mohammedans, because the great Pius XI, truly walked in Christ’s footsteps and worked, taught and defended all without regard to religion, national origin or race. He erased the differences separating people into factions. He was a father to all, a protector of all, and for us Catholics above all, the Holy Father. Go with me for a while to the Vatican. Permit me to be your tour guide for I know the Vatican as well as the City of Rome like the five fingers of my hand. We are in the vast area before the basilica of
St. Peter. It is elliptical in shape, surrounded by a colonnade as if by two extended arms. The arms consist of 372 columns on which stand 372 statues of saints eleven feet high. In the middle of this vast expanse before the basilica are to water fountains throwing out twenty foot high streams of water. Between the fountains is an obelisk of granite 83 feet in height. Pope Sixtus V, who in his youth was a shepherd of pigs, later a religious, erected it. The top of the obelisk houses a piece of the wood of the Holy Cross with the inscription: “Christ is victorious, Christ is King, Christ rules. May Christ protect his people from evil!” – The place on which we stand is holy, for it is the place where the first Christians spilled their blood. Not only hundreds but thousands professing the teachings of Christ lost their lives here and not only men but women as well, and unprotected children bloodied the place and became martyrs. It was here that Pope Pius V, stopped and took a handful of earth and handing it to the Polish ambassador, emotionally said: “Take this earth as a relic since it is reddened with the blood of martyrs.” – Now look up at the building ahead of you, this magnificent Basilica of St. Peter. It is the greatest and most splendid temple on earth. The greatest architects, builders, engineers, painters and sculptors, the masters of masters worked here. This building, built in honor of Peter the fisherman, and prince of the Apostles, announces to the world the historical fact that “ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia Christi” or “Where there is Peter there is the Church of Christ!: On top of the basilica, built by the hand of the inimitable master, Michael Angelo, is the cupola, the size of the Pantheon. It measures 351 feet in height. On a clear day, the port of Ostia and the Adriatic sea are visible through its window! But let us return to the right. Beside the basilica is the Vatican palace! It is there that the Pope lives. Despite the early hour, at 2:45 am, the living quarters of the Pope is lit up. A Swiss guard stands by the door to his room. Vehicles come to the palace with doctors. The Secretary of State informed them that Pope Pius XI, after a long battle with bronchial asthma, had a heart attack! Doctors from Milan, after careful examination, sadly maintain that the heart of the elderly pope beats like the bird in a cage and the he is losing his strength. There are no remedies for his condition. Death is near. The Pope does not totally lose consciousness. His eyes are fixed on a portrait of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, his patroness. He clasps a small crucifix in his left hand. One of the current officials, Msgr. De Romanis, with tears in his eyes, gives the Pope the last rites. Holy Father, St. Pius XI lifts his right hand for the last time, making the sign of the cross and murmuring: “Jesus, Mary, Peace on earth, peace and he fell asleep in peace himself. The Pope of Peace gives peace to a fearful humanity. His right hand falls upon his breast and a few tears on an impoverished earth. They couldn’t finish their prayers. Cardinal Pacelli stood, and took from the cross by table, a small silver hammer and bent toward the remains and delicately touched the forehead of the dead, and called out the Popes baptismal name: “Achileus! Achileus! Achileus ! Afterwards turning to those present, tearfully, called out, “Pius XI, does not live!” - In that moment the confessors at the basilica of St. Peter whose duty it is to take care of the remains of the dead Pope and need to keep guard at the remains until the coffin is sealed are present. By the way, this duty is performed by our Fathers, the Conventual Friars, among whom is the long time rector of our seminary, the Rev. Fr. Idzi Kaczmarek. –Twenty seven minutes after the Pope’s death, the formal declaration was made. The bells of the Roman Churches rang out the fact. They rang sadly for one hour announcing, “The Pope died!” And so did the bells all over the face of the earth. 350 million Catholics answered with one voice, so powerfully, that the echoes rang in the heavens: “Do not be afraid!” It is true: the pope died but the papacy lives and will live until the end of the world. Because that promise was uttered by the Savior Himself, the Lord, Jesus Christ, who was given also to the future, to the caretakers of His Church and no might, not only human but from hell, would take it away.” A saddened world bent over the coffin. All governments with the exception of the Soviet Union lowered their nation’s flag to half-mast as did educational and various social institutions. The archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Anglican Church, put it this way: “Pius XI was a man of great knowledge, who carried the weight of his heavy duties with exceptional strength and courage. His great efforts in the goal of bringing peace to the world will long be remembered”. – If here in the United States, the Protestants, Jews, and other nameless believers said and wrote that “Pius XI left us when we needed him the most!” What are to say, as Catholics? What are my Catholic Poles to say about this Pope, who was the 261 representative of Christ, or as he named himself, “Baptismal God Father” of a resurrected Poland. During his visit to Poland, he was made familiar with the Polish soul and was enamored of our poor and simple people, but without pretense or hypocrisy; that same people who in the defense of the Cross, the faith and the Polish-ness went through its 100-year enslavement and in 1920 rose from the ashes, despite its suffering and weakness, and in a manly fashion thrust out its chest to the Bolshevik hoards and held back the wave of barbaric dictates of the hammer and sickle, pushing them outside its borders and in this way, without the smallest doubt rescued today’s civilization, again reinforcing the idea that the Poles are always faithful to Christ and the Cross.

Even though you have read several times biographical items from the life of St. Pius XII, please be patient with these facts: Pius XI was born May 31, 1857 in the town of Desio, close to Milan. He was the third of five children in a family whose father was a weaver named Fracesco Ratti, and mother, Teresa Gallich. His father was known for his diligence at work and his sincerity and was careful and gentle in religiously bringing up the children. Young Achileus attended a private school. Later he entered the seminary of St. Carol in Milan. From there he was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome. In 1879, on the 20th of December, he was ordained a priest. Up until 1888 he was a professor, and later to 1912 as a librarian at the library of St. Ambrose. In the year of 1912 the Holy Father, St. Pius X, called him to Rome as the director of the Vatican Library. In 1918 at the request of the Polish bishops Benedict XV sent him as the representative of the Vatican to Warsaw as the Papal Nuncio. In Warsaw he was made bishop by Cardinal Kakowski. At that time Poland was in bad shape. The nation was engulfed in poverty and misery. The enemy army ruined everything that they couldn’t steal. The Nuncio became a beggar for the Polish nation. He knocked at the Vatican’s doors and held out his hands to foreign countries to rescue the Polish children from hunger. The Poles loved him for this like only the polish heart knows how to love. When in 1920 the Red hoards at Warsaw, Nunco Ratti, consoled the people and assured them of the love of God and imbued them with hope. After the victory over the Bolsheviks, which I repeat, held back the advance of the bloodthirsty subversives, the Nuncio, after the public singing of the “Te Deum” in the presence of Marshall Piłsudzki and the army authorities added: „We have not perished because of the mercy of God”. In 1981 he was called from Poland and was created Cardinal and Archbishop of Milan. He did not stay there long because on February 6, 1922, he was chosen to the Apostolic See. When asked what name he chose as Pope, he answered, “The name of Pius.” “Why? Because at the installation of Pius IX, I began to attend the seminary. Pius X called me to Rome, the same Pius who strove to end the war and bring about world peace. That’s why I chose the name, “Pius” and so I wish to restore peace to the world.” Pius XI devoted all of his ability, knowledge and talents toward that goal and shortly before his death, he uttered: “Jesus – Mary –Peace to the world – peace.” For 17 years of his pontificate, the Holy Father he urged the leaders of countries toward peace. He wrote: “The best guarantee for peace is not bayonets but mutual hope and sincere friendship.” In another place he wrote: “If above all there is no attention paid to natural law and God’s law, peace treaties will be of no avail. Nor will conferences and the coming together of leaders, the chiefs of state.” When at the end of the year there was at important conference in Monacco, Pius XI ended his radio appeal, he prayerfully addressed the assembly and moved the soul of every listener. With a voice filled with emotion he took the microphone: “We are the life which the Lord has given us thanks to a prayerful world; he renewed the world and protected it.” The Pope was emotionally bound; every sincere person cried with him. The powers that be withheld the iron and armed right hand, at least temporarily, but the apostle of peace closed his eyes. Through 17 years of his pontificate, this pilot of the Peter’s ship was after the movers and the shakers of this world and chased them in defending the small, the defenseless and the persecuted. He paid no intention to personality of status. He alone was not afraid to tell the dictators to shape up. He did not give obeisance to thrones. He didn’t bend his knees before the senators. “The peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ” was the motto to which he directed all his doings. Carefully and incredible care he simply incredible care, he surrounded his flock. He cared about the young friars and for youth generally; he protected the holiness of marriage and the meaning of family; he called for justice for laborers and the principles of justice in the spirit of love of neighbor; followed the churches principles of caring for the youth; cared for the missions; worked for the conversions of pagans; against the persecution of the Jews and more. He received the name: “Pope of Peace – Pope of the Missions – Pope of Tolerance – Pope of Social Justice –Pope of Concordance. In these latter, the most important was the Lateran Council, held between the Church and the Fascist army in 1929, on the strength of which was formed Vatican City. Let us pray for eternal peace of the Pope and ask providence to give us a similar Pope and remember that though the Pope has died – the Papacy will live on.

(Note: Additional handwritten paragraph after the end of radio talk)