February 7, 1943

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

Upon my return from the British Isles, in October of 1942, where I had spent almost four weeks, among army personnel and civilians, I was often asked: "What kind of spirit pervades those who went through so much in such a short time?" Are they beaten by fist or the boot of the yellow and black shirts?” I can reply to these questions, that in Great Britain as well as in Poland, the people are courageous in the midst of their difficulties. In England and Scotland, these people are admired and honored, and in Poland, shock and fearfulness fill the souls of its inhabitants. You will garner that from today’s talk. But before I get to that, pleas listen to the letter which I received not too long ago. It comes from New York from and unknown person. This is the tenor of the letter: “Why do you, Father Justin, bewail the loss of the Poles since this dark nation such as the Poles don’t merit being leaders. They only can be prisoners. The nation fell because they did not know how to rule themselves. The people prayed a lot, and worked less. They ought to have built schools and move more than it would have been different. Crying for their fate, and instead of remaining where they were born and defend their country, fled beyond its borders, also doesn’t make sense. Should that be the way of the polish soldier? Others battle as well. Praise the Polish government? For what? Father Justin, better for you to speak of heaven and hell, in which no one believes in any more. “There is more bitterness in this letter, but not worth comment. In the eyes of this writer, Poles are a dark people and can only be prisoners. To claim this you can only be an eternal enemy of the polish people or ignorant of Polish history and traditions. To which category can we assign this person? But read history. It will tell you of writers, sculptors, painters, poets, astronomers, and creative individuals. Poles are on the forefront of doctors, professors, linguists, historians, etc. etc. etc. Poland did not fall because it did not know how to rule itself, but because it sought peace, and believed in others too readily and was not prepared. It is true that the people were religious, but did the leaders believe and generally believe; I ask. Were there fewer schools? Did they frustrate education. On the other hand can education hold back bombardiers and submarines? And why did other countries fall; countries such as Belgium and France. Did other countries, in order to save their lives, run away? Why? Because escape was the only solution. By the way, dear writer, why are you not in the country of your birth. Am I permitted to ask? Honor to the Polish soldier, because he merited honor and to this moment the world honors him. Glory and honor to the Polish government, because I personally have met members of this government who work for country and people. Before such people, one must bow his head.

LOOK AT THEM!

On page one of the popular daily in New Orleans and the whole state of Louisiana – “The New Orleans States” – was a biographical sketch of a polish youth, Walter Wiktorczyk, who was arrested by the gestapo for his activity in the underground movement: experiences so shocking, that they make your blood boil. The article bears the title, “Polish Youth kept Pledge though Gestapo Shot Family in His Sight”. It begins like this: “Let the Americans take an example from Walter Wiktorczyk. Let those Americans who bewail the war, bow their heads before this young polish patriot, who when he landed in New Orleans, when they hear from him the atrocities with which the Poles suffered by the Germans. What this young man suffered would move the greatest emotions of human beings. The peaceful, freedom loving nation psychologically and physically tortured, hungry and killed nation for whom death is easier than give up allegiance to their country.” In the words of the youth, “the people of the United States complain of taxes, complain on the shortage of gasoline; if only they would be in my country. In my country they would find out what a true sacrifice or suffering is. Here follows the experiences of this young pole. Terrible circumstances the tall sympathetic youth found himself in. When he told of his painful past sparks shone in his eyes in which one could see the pain and the hidden despondency. After Hitler’s attack, he joined the underground the goal of which was battle with the Germans and the beginnings of sabotage. When his father found out that he had joined the underground, he warned his son: even if they pull out your fingernails – be quiet! If you betray your fellows, you’ll betray you fatherland. The youth, almost 17 year old Walter, remembered those words of his father. Shortly after this, he was sent to a concentration camp. He was housed in the barracks where were held the most dangerous enemies of Hitler.

All such prisoners in this barracks were shackled to the wall with one hand chained. Interrogations began with promised of freedom, reward – a golden opportunity. “I know nothing, came the response.” Then came the threats with the same response. His father was brought to the camp and placed with his face to the wall. Not far away stood a German with a rifle. “If you keep quiet,” they told the youth, “we will shoot your father in both his eyes. The youth’s eyes dimmed. At that time the words of his father come to his mind: “If you betray your friends, you’ll betray your fatherland.” “I know nothing!” The rifle fired. With a few shots his father died before his very eyes. “Only who can feel the despondency of my soul who experiences such a moment as I did”, remarked the youthful hero, and in his eyes – despondency. A few days after, his mother was brought in.” Again, he was given the choice, “Choose!”. He lost consciousness. He was given water. “I know nothing!” And they killed his mother. Later in similar fashion they shot two sisters and two brothers. The last was hardly ten years old. What terrible soul wrenching as he saw his small brother die. The executioners shot a child. The young hero began to plan a method of escape with a few of his underground buddies. They got hold of a bread knife. At that the Germans decided on physical torture. His arm was twisted. He fainted. He was whipped his arm wetted with benzene and put on fire. Through all these tortures he had only on response: “I know nothing.” Finally the opportunity arose. A guard came with two prisoners. The youth had the knife in his sleeve. He stabbed the guard. Another prisoner came up from behind and put his hand over his mouth. They overpowered the enemy... The youth and his fellows dressed themselves in the guards’ uniforms. A Jewish youth, speaking German, got them through the gates. In a moment they would be free. The night helped them execute their escape. They headed for the border. They hid during the day and continued their escape at night. A consul arranged journey to the next country. Then with the help of the Polish consul, Witorczyk got a job and an English ship. Two years passed. He continued to work on English ships. Finally with the help of American immigration authorities he was transferred to an American Ship. “I am grateful to the American authorities, that they managed my Transfer from English to an American ship. Now I can continue to battle the German barbarians under the American flag. I believe that every American is proud of his country, as I am of mine. The youth finishes his terrible tale. Bend your heads in shame those who complain of the lack of gas, high taxes, or the ration of coffee. Beat your breasts. The editor of the paper added: “Let us bow our heads, those who forgot to sacrifice for helping those in Poland. Let us lower our heads, those who do not give of themselves for this cause because there is no need.” Let us not go the recreation provided by this or the other Circle of help for Poland, because those are not our own people. We have excuses because it’s too cold when there is hardly frost on the ground. How true are those ironic cautions of Wiktorczyk, when he says: “people in America complain.” This country still has not experienced the war on its soil. They have not experienced the German “New Order”. But our brothers and our sons are bloodied in the fight. Should this not awaken us for the need to stop the wars, politics, and hatred and put together all our effort in order to win the war? Shouldn’t we accentuate our effort with renewable energy in the goal of helping the displaced Poles throw to all the corner of the world? Our soldiers live on a piece of hard bread and we do not give because there is no need for it.

All of us are should beat our breasts.

Stanley Szurley writes: “Beyond the waters we sat with beggar’s bread, o holy land, our mother, when will we see you again?” In the autumn of 1939 our loss was spread world-wide but not like the colorful autumn leaves, but like the seed sown by the hand of God, from which a harvest is expected. And it nears. On our journeyed roads we met our people in various lands – emigrants…and we remembered our brotherly bond, which binds us and will continue to ever bind us. You, a long time ago and we understand what it means to leave the country of our families, so our hearts were warmed with brotherly love. Our yearning reminded you of your yearnings for your family and home town which you had to leave, principally for earning money for bread, because the land could not provide it. We need to see to it that we will not let this state of affairs to repeat itself. We need to always remember each other and not forget our families, our land, and our brotherhood. Besides that, our loss at emigration gave us a benefit. We let ourselves be known to the world. Up until now Poland was barely known to the world and the Polish soldier appeared. There is no more Poland – shouted the German foe to the world and with him his servants and slaves. And they still shouted those words when our planes and their pilots with their bombs roared over Germany. When many countries began to believe in the Germans’ words, ships were seen flying the Polish flag, hitting German shores with their torpedoes. And in faraway Africa, on the desert sands, the Arab and the Persons opened their eyes and saw an unknown army with eagles on their caps.

And the daunted nations had to say to themselves - the Germans lie. Poland lives – Poland was not lost. The enemy thought they had broken the Polish nation, but they united and brought together as never before in Poland’s history. The blood of hundreds of slain or burned alive, hundreds of executed workers, bloody sacrifices of the inhabitants of towns, priests from Poznan – covered the Polish land with one stream and you cannot distinguish between the peasant blood and the workers and the common man because the blood of all flowed in order that Poland would be for all. The blood of the polish soldier and the blood of the wearied nation flowed. Willingly the polish soldier shed his blood because he looks upon his country and it accomplishments and expects its liberation. Willingly the country bears the unmentionable suffering when it sees that the Polish soldier fight on without stopping. We spread the name of Poland to all parts of the world with our uncompromising manliness, and we all at the inspiration of our country and soldier will stand united as one camp, fighting for all, for freedom and the better future of Poland!”

How many are the lessons for us from this statement and this appeal? Each sentence could be convinced of and convince ourselves of in order to have them be vital part of our lives and loves. Thus we will help America and Poland and carve out our rightful place among the community of nations.

Andrew Płodowski writes in the official organ of the polish Airforce, “Skrzydłach”: I remember, as if it were today, on a Sunday morning on the 24th of May, 1936 in Chęstochowa. At the railroad station, every several minutes, trains with arrive, spilling out crowds of academic youth. White, bronze and grey hats mix with many colored corporation designations. They all came to Częstochowa. They head for “Jasna Góra”. Among the crowds, Warsaw, Polytechnic, Diplomatic Corps, Wawelberg – everyone composed and serious. Coming from Cracow, Poznan, Wilno, Lublin and Gdańsk. A great crowd of Polish students came from Gdańsk. Meanwhile many thousands academic youth gather before the walls of Jasna Góra. On the banks of the cloisters, began a festive procession. The peal of bells announces the procession. The murmur of thousands of young hearts ensued. Everyone fell on their knees when the portrait of our Lady of Czestochowa was brought out, from this day on the Patroness of Polish academic youth. The moment of the pledge has begun. For four hundred years the portrait rested above the chapel altar not moves from its placed and never moved in procession. Today, for the first time the miraculous painting is moved and placed on the cloister’s altar. Thus the festive Mass offered by the academic Bishop ended. The students moved from their kneeling position. They raised their hands as if for an oath and their youthful mouths repeated the Bishop’s pledge: “O great Mother of the God-Man, holiest maiden! We, the academic youth, gathered from all parts of Poland, faithful heirs of the immemorial forefathers of our spirituality, falling before your most holy feet, elect you Mother of God and Queen of the crown of Poland choose for eternal days as Mother and Patroness of the Polish academic youth and give to your ever-loving protection all higher education and the entire nation. Listening intently to the strong voices of our past, seeing the bright portraits of the glory of our nation in which se so firmly believe, that our living Fatherland, will we powerful and fortunate when we will stand by you through the ages….

The words of the pledge, chorally spoken be so many thousands of academics poured themselves into the national melody, Boże coś Polskie!” The evening of the 24th of May 1936, Jasna Góra was emptied. The students returned to the towns of their families, to their daily activities, remembering the pledge that they had made.

The Polish academic keeps the pledge to this day, today dressed in the uniform of a soldier, an airman, or a marine. He observes the pledge of a polish academic – quiet, sacrificing, a faithful fighting man for his faith and his fatherland. He went willingly to battle for the righteous truth in September of 1939, generously spreading the earth with his sacrificial blood, and willingly battling in the air as of yore he went to fight in the desert of Libya day after day stemming the tide of the enemy which occupied his land. He fulfills what he pledged at the feet of Our Lady at Jasna Góra.

A few weeks ago at the Catholic University the noted Army General Sikorski received the honor of Doctor of the Law – Honoris Causa. The general gave a talk with the theme: “A Polish Mission”. After the talk, Archbishop Curley with obvious emotion, point to the General, addressed the audience, “Did you hear that wonderful talk? Now look upon this premier and noted leader of that nation, whom the Germans call inferior. Look at these public words, and the audience rose and clapped long paid honor to Poland.

I, pointing out the Polish people suffering in Poland and the Poles fighting in other countries for freedom of all lands call out: LOOK AT THEM!