JANUARY 30, 1949

I greet all of you my dear countrymen with the words: Praised be Jesus Christ!

Today, I will read to you excerpts from two letters I received, and then I will touch on the themes they touch upon. Someone writes the following: “Father Justin, would you please talk about “Lying” in one of your programs. For several years, all I hear from my mother are lies, not only in small matters but in important matters as well. At this time, I cannot believe her at all, even when she is actually saying the truth. I have heard from others too, that she lied on more than one occasion. You have reminded people to be respectful to their parents and obey them. I second the motion on that one. However, living with parents who always lie is difficult and nerve racking. Mother, is ostensibly a religious woman. She spends a half an hour in prayer after breakfast. She blesses herself before meals. She kneels at her bed before she retires for the night. Is that not pretense and hypocrisy? I have two children! My mother hates them, and regards them as “brats.” It gets on my nerves. Sometimes, she doesn’t talk to me for two or three days. She brings herself food and tells the grocer that I am skimpy and don’t feed her properly. Please talk again about daily family living and teach us how to live in harmony and peace, like reasonable people instead of and biting and vexing themselves like animals in a pigsty.

In another letter I read: “Two years ago in a large corporate factory the workers went on strike for fourteen months. I had and still own a grocery store. Quite of few of my customers were involved in the strike. I had compassion on them and started to give them food on credit in an IOU book. I was promised sometimes with tears and always with complaints that they would pay me back to the penny when they returned to work. I believed them. Their debt rose to over twenty thousand dollars. When the strike ended and they went back to work some repaid what they owed. After each pay check they returned some money thy owed. Others started to pay off their debt but did not finish to pay it off. Others forgot that they owed me money. One of the women told me that I had enough money and didn’t need more and that she did not have any obligation to pay off her debt. The money still owed to me from my borrowing is six thousand, three hundred, and two. I think it will never be repaid. Father Justin, is it possible for you to give a talk about repaying your debts which you personally incurred with the promise to pay back? And so, to my talk:

THE LIAR AND THE DEBTOR

“Thou shalt not give false witness to your neighbor.” This commandment has a prohibition and an injunction. The eighth commandment firstly places a prohibition and then places an in addition, telling the truth. This commandment is a safeguard and protection for the greatest good of a person of which the Holy Spirit says “Better is a good name than a great monetary treasure. What exactly does it prohibit? Not only false witness in court or in private conversation, as some have erroneously maintained to themselves but it includes anything that would soil the reputation of a neighbor. And so, lies, hypocrisy, backbiting, slander, gossip, suspicion and judging others. In addition, telling the truth. This commandment is a safeguard and protection for the greatest good of a person of which the Holy Spirit says: “Better is a good name than a great monetary treasure.” The sword is sharp. It wounds and kills, however the human tongue which also is destructive and is sharper than the sword. This is confirmed in scripture: “Many have been slain by the sharp sword but not as men as have lost with an evil tongue.” Close your ears; do not listen to an angry tongue, and close your mouth” What then does it mean to lie? It means to deliberately speak a non-truth, or indicate it some other way, like the nod of the head. A person can tell a non-truth but still not lie. I can give an example that I heard from my brother did not occur in reality. I can speak of fiction as a talking dog. I can say words that are not expressing reality but they do not constitute a lie. A lie depends on the will and desire to deceive someone. Ask yourself why is it that people lie? The most important reason is the desire to harm someone; to beat someone as its goal. And to do that is persistent. It is born of jealousy or to get even with someone close to you, perhaps a friend. It is sufficient to read the processes of getting a divorce to convince oneself of the fact. The will to help yourself or another. A good example: Last year, a young man came to me to testify to his moral posture and good behavior. Why? He stole a car. He maintained that he did not steal the care but simply borrowed it. He was released but with cautions. Not only did I not know the young man, but never saw him in my life. I directly told him that I could not help him in his predicament because I would be lying. He gave me this explanation: My mother told me and in great need, one can lie. What an enterprising mother who brings up her children in this manner. – During the depression on old gent came to me asking that I give him an application to the “poor Fadra” as it is said. When I told him that I could not do that in honesty because I knew that his mother who died recently he received seven thousand dollars which the naïve mother kept in an old mattress. He ripped into me saying that he didn’t want to discuss financial matters, but asked me to do as he wished. He left with indignation at my refusal. I told him, “And I am not a gypsy to honor such a request.” Lying, whatever kind it is and for what reason it is used is always sinful. I do not say that it is always a grave sin but it is a sin to lie because It is wrong to do a bad thing to accomplish something good. Lying is ugly and filled with anger because it is contrary to God’s will; the truth should not be a deception attempted to deceive another. Speech ought to represent what the mind knows rather than an attempt to use deception. St. Augustine said it beautifully: “The gift of speech is not given to mankind to deceive his or her fellow human beings but to communicate what one knows to be the truth.” The consequences of lying are harmful and unpredictable: “all lies, even those that seem to be the smallest, always harm either others or our own selves or it misrepresents the truth or tarnishes a sincere heart. The person who lies, even in jest, indicates that he possesses two hearts.” The learned claim that the lie harms the person who believes the liar. He who in his naiveté believes the lie sometimes incurs a great harm. For example: a buyer believes a lie about the goods that the merchant sells and the purchaser believes the lie. – Lying harms the social structure. It fosters dishonest and insincerity, and trustworthiness. It turns the world into a den of thieves and rogues. If you wanted to make a deal, sign a contract, or to buy or sell something, you would be wary of a deception, a fake, or betrayal. If you were in a trial. You would not be able to call in witnesses, and the judge would never demand oath taking if it were legal to lie. Thousands of years ago the prophet objected: “There is no truth on earth… lying came upon the scene.” Are things better in our day? Take a look and the so- called diplomats, who take part in international affairs. There's one process of hypocrisy, deception and lies! "Whatever they touch, is covered with lies." – The newspapers and writings are immersed in lies. It is why there is so much mistrust. The entire society is spotted with lies. There is so much misery, doubt and lack of peace in this world. Everything is in a state of flux. One does not trust the other. Treaties are signed, agreements postured. Governments make treaties, write agreements with the attention not to favor them and regard them as just pieces of paper which may be thrown in the paper basket at the moment of necessity. Politicians shake hands with their constituents just for the show. They confirm it as daily necessity in political life even if it means nothing. It all results in suffering, worry and cries out to heaven for vengeance. And so the liars without taking into consideration the obligation of their stature or governance bring about such great harm and takes on harsh judgement and penalties. People look upon them with scorn. Friends do not believe the perpetrators even when it comes to telling the truth. Whoever lies deliberately and without thought is godless and worthless. The writers of the past regard the liar as a snake, delivering poison to human blood and veins of people. Claudius, the Roman Emperor, a pagan, having heard of the death of the certain Roman citizen, who in his life was known to be a public liar, did not permit him a decent burial but ordered that his body be thrown to be devoured by the birds, his house destroyed, his treasure to be put in the public treasury, and his wife and children exiled from the city. You probably have heard this story but it is so important that it is worth repeating. Persians, considered two misdemeanors as the ugliest: lying and obtaining unnecessary debts. The Romans had liars branded on their foreheads with a red-hot iron. And in old-time France, the liar had to carry a dead dog in his arms. The Chinese up to this day still restrict the liar from any kind of reward or honor. In our times, despite expansion, lying and the liar are looked upon with hatred. In Sacred Scripture, in many instances, lying is condemned: one: “Who lies, dies.” The Psalmist wrote: “Those who lie, lose all.” In our daily life as well as in the public, one should pay head to the saying of St. Justin, the martyr: “We would rather die, than lie!” – The Christian obligation is to love truth and speak it. It is why the Lord gifted us with speech which was not meant to lie to people and deceive them. Remember the words of the Scriptural suffering Job: As long as there is breath through my nostrils and the Spirit of God within me, my lips will not say the unrighteous thing, or my tongue even think about lying!

Now, I come to another letter in which a merciful grocer complains, with just cause, about those who have no intention of paying back the debts they have incurred because of his good heart in permitting them to borrow money for groceries during a strike. Perhaps it is the place here to mention the seventh commandment which reminds us: “Do not steal!” –What is theft? I come to quoting a certain work of an unknown author, who writes: “Theft is the unlawful taking of foreign possessions, whatever they may be, wherever, whoever owns them. And so, the unlawful taking of someone’s money as well as wheat, fruit, animals, firewood or anything such is wrong. A thief is anyone who takes the neighbor’s goods whether they are safe-guarded or not and whether it is from his home or anywhere outside of it, if the goods belong to the person. And so there would be no theft if someone in the direst of conditions was dying of hunger, took something needed for survival if the owner had permitted it since there is a responsibility toward our neighbor. But take note of the following: Wives who “steal” secretly from their husbands if they are sober or not, if they take something that is necessary for the household. Example: money that their husbands would spend on alcoholic drink or gambling. If husbands are brutal to the effect that they deprive the wife of money because of their miserliness. Perhaps the family could use to buy shoes or some other deprivation of the family.

And if anyone takes away secretly something which the owner does not want to give up? This can undoubtedly be done if one who does not have the slightest doubt that this belongs to him and that all other legal means are unavoidable. Among many cases the mistreatment of people is the giving back of their things which are lost but found by someone. In this case, if someone keeps the found item which the owner would like to have the item returned, it is an injustice because, “The lost item “calls out to the rightful owner.” St. Augustine maintains: “If you find something knowing that it belongs to, not giving it back is considered thievery. Further, if you don’t know the owner of the thing found, you are not to keep it unless you take reasonable action to find out who the owner is and if it is of considerable worth, you should by means of newspaper seek to find the owner of the lost and found. If however the attempt produces no result, you may take available use of it or give it away to the poor or the like. If the owner is discovered later it is not necessary to return it unless one benefitted greatly by the sale of it. Among those who are unjust are those who do not repay debts which they own. There are folks of some sum of money, sometimes a lot of it or get goods on borrowing the money, or as we say, on credit and they know that they will not pay it back or worse, even if they could, they don’t want to. Seemingly, two thousand years ago the same thing happened as now happens because in one of the books of the Old Testament we read: “Many, before they receive, kiss the hand of the giver and in their promise to repay, they lower their voice…And when the time comes to pay some of what he owes, he will plead for time and will say and murmur and beg for time. Even when he could pay back he will dally, even when he still owes half of what he borrowed. When it comes to pay all, he stammers and instead of gratitude, gives back with a sour face. Many will come with the attitude of not being taken advantage of. All who buy on credit or with a grocery book, keep on borrowing before their previous commitments are taken care of. St. Thomas teaches that the unjust are also those who do not pay on time even if they could and because of this they harm those who helped them. Greater is the fault of him who lives lackadaisically and does not save his resources to repay the lender when he was able to and in the end says cynically: “After all, I gave nothing to give back.” Or as I heard just a while ago: “I had so many problems with borrowing so now let the one who lent me money suffer a little too. –The perpetrators have a whole litany of excuses not to pay back. And furthermore, so that I may not seem to sum to strict about things, let me use the expression of the theologian: “The offenders say: there is a lot of thievery in this world because there is so much deprivation: And I answer rather that there is a lot of deprivation because there is too much thievery.” In order the make life livable and peaceful, one must obey the Commandments of God. And does the thief and the unjust one do that? There is no blessings of God on him. Besides as the old Polish aphorisms claim: “Cudza krzywda nie utuczy.” “Injustice does not create harmony” “What is ill-gotten will not be useful.” The ill-gotten will not survive the third generation. And in Proverbs we read, “Some give their own goods and become richer; others do not tear his and always in want. You may say, “I cannot permit my children to die in hunger, so I cannot pay off by debts.” And so my attitude is: “Be thrifty and prudent.” Do not drink, do not live beyond your means. Thus neither you nor your children will die from hunger and gradually you will get out of your debts and give what you owe.” You may say: “Others also have debts and are delinquent in paying them off.” I know about that well enough. But is that a good excuse? Besides, how many are they who lived according to those kind of principles and now sit in jail behind bars. You may maintain to the contrary: “One borrowed from me and never repaid. Are you then praising those kinds? Is that kind of behavior acceptable to you? No. You judge the person, but you are guilty of the same trespass. You say again: “What I have borrowed and not repaid was inconsequential. First I ask you: “Do you truly know what is inconsequential. What you yourself think is inconsequential?” Some have a gum-like conscience which stretches out interminably very long! That kind of a conscience is erroneous and not healthy. Again, the commandment of God is general. **Because it is “Do not steal, but a little or a lot. Your commandment reads:" Do not steal much, but you can steal small.”** because it is "Do not much, but a little or a lot. Your commandment reads:" Do not steal much, but you can steal a little. The debtors cry out: My borrower is wealthy and he does not miss what I borrowed." **Whether it’s more or less is not the point, whether you steal from the rich or the poor. Once more I remind you there are points that we are not considering here. What is important is our obligation to pay back because the borrower expects that. The obligation of the recipient is to repay for harm can come of it. Who is required to pay the debt? Above all the one incurring the debt has to repay it, the one who borrowed it. The one who steals goods is obligated to compensate. Those who aided in the theft for example are also guilty of the theft. There are others who steal and need the confessional. Parent is obligated to pay the debt incurred by their children and to compensate for the harm done. Heirs are also obligated to pay debts incurred by parents. Those who aided or abetted in thievery are also obligated to help pay off their portion of the debt. Now logically comes another question: “Whom to pay back, whom to reward? There is only one answer: him who promised to repay. In a word, the actual owner and in the case of his death, the children. Often we hear of someone who has neglected to repay the debt for a long period of time in which the debt is almost forgotten. The person claims he is prevented to reintroduce his payment of the claim because it would create a loss of his good name. Is it possible that this is a motivation to settle the matter by not paying the debt? One could also pay the debt to the borrower by sending him payment by mail so only the debtor knows about the transaction. One can also do it through the medium of a confessor as a mediator to transact the repayment of the debt. Some claim that it would be better to give the amount of the debt to the poor. The Church does not want to receive ill-gotten money. St. Augustine reminds us: “The poor to whom you give alms is joyous at the deed and prays thanks to the Lord, but the one who actually owed the debt cries and asks the heavens for punishment on the debtor. Whom then does the Lord favor?? In both instances the action is the good intention. First, when the harm is minimal and the return is complicated. Win such a case it is reasonable to assume the harm could be turned into a good thing and the borrower would have no objections. Or, if the owner is unknown. For example, you incurred a great sum because of book lending over the years at the grocery store and butcher. Unhappily he died. His wife collected an interest. There are no children or they are dispersed all over the world. You worry about what to do? You give a portion to the underprivileged. Give toward a Mass for the lender. You will acquire a peace of mind, Tobias advises, “Give back immediately! He who sways and dallies before returning or hesitates, may have the intention of returning but doesn’t have the real intention to return. In the meantime the harm to the lender grows. However he who is slow in performing his obligation of giving back to the lender has to eventually do it anyhow. And if death prevented the payback? Chances are that problems arise. It is better to do whatever you can as soon as you can. Who lends should have the intention to returns as soon as one can. One should save and scrimp as one can to be able to repay so that the harm may be as minimal as it can be. One can pay back a little at a time.**

**The Creator** has given not only the life of the human body. But He went much further, because he stood guard over goods and material properties and made sure that those are protected and neither secretly nor openly seized**.** God is the owner of all that is on earth, and he gave the goods to personal use. People therefore are stewards and administrators of the goods of God. God, in His infinite wisdom ordained that the earth and all that is in it is not for the collective good of man but; that man alone is the benefactor of the goods of the earth for his greater benefit so that every man who has that character works diligently, promptly and carefully, knowing that he works for himself and his children. I however everyone had the right to take and use whatever he comes up with there would be hell on earth, confusion, and arguments and no one would wish to work. The society would be full of people not wanting to work. The nation would go to pot because of hunger, disagreement, arguing and laziness... God commandment curtails this kind of condition with “Thou shalt not steal.”

I have the impression that what I have said is sufficient. I repeat however and that with a weighty consideration adding to that those who incur debts, borrow on credit beyond their means. Poles have a strong feeling about those who do not have the feeling of returning that which they have borrowed. The likeness of this is expressed in expressions such as “Borg died, credit is no more. If those kinds of borrowers say that they do not have time or resources to pay back what they have borrowed. There are plenty of these kinds of borrowers on this earth. When in need, they plead by oath that they will repay, and when the times come they excuse themselves, and postpone payment not worrying about the obligation they have. I end with the words of St Augustine who wrote: “Sin will not be forgiven until what you have taken has not been returned.” There are no excuses to be given – until what one has taken, has not been returned. Either you return, pay back or you hold back. Either you are rewarded for your justice – or incur the anger of God