JANUARY 31, 1943

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

Human life is a series of various ups and downs. They are painful or happy; sad or joyous; good or evil. These ups and downs are intimately bound with the life of every human being so that each person’s disposition depends upon them. And so we have happy or sad people, crying or smiling people, and good or bad people. Someone cleverly maintained that the life of a human may be compared to a forest brook, peaceful and even plowing among two flowing banks, worldly and eternal. This has to be a rather poetic or idealistic expression. The true practical and everyday life is rather comparable to a rushing, raging flood roaring through rocky crags and speeding onward until, sooner or later, it falls into the depths of eternity. Such was the life of human beings in the past; it will not be different in the future. For us, the daily life of others ought to be a lesson for us, in other words, the ups and downs of others should teach us, and we ought to profit from them. The lives of others ought to rouse us to humility as well as to thankfulness. To humility, because God has sent us lesser crosses, and to gratitude because he has bestowed us with many gifts. The experiences of others should awaken in us a seriousness, patience, and perseverance, because unless others can bear up with the misfortunes of life, why is it we cannot do so. More about this in today’s talk which is:

IS THAT IT?

Detroit, Mich.

Dear Father Justin;

What do you think about these young men and women, who every Saturday evening through Sunday spend their time at parties and dances; then come home Sunday morning; afterwards instead of going to Mass, sleep to a late hour, and early Sunday afternoon go out again dancing and drinking. What is worse, among these young people are waitresses and others take part in “floor shows”. – My brothers and sisters do these things. They call their parents “old-fashioned”, because they ask them not to behave in this way. My two sisters laugh at mother when she asks them to get up and go to church on a Sunday.”

I don’t know how many years your so-called “old fashioned” mother has but I have inkling that your brothers and sisters won’t make it to that age if they act like you describe in your letter. Go to the nearest better hospital and you will see rows of young men and women who did not believe in the so called beautifully named “old fashioned life!” They rather leaned toward the “modern” and “sophisticated” ways. Today, they rest; rather, they lay in beds of pain. Go to consumptive clinics and there you will hear breathing bony corpses speak of the truth better than I can ever speak it. Take a look in insane asylums. Ask the young why they are there? I need not enlighten you further. Parties and drinking are temporary pastimes. And a time will come to pay for it. Slowly the heart becomes weakened, health dissipates, reason dims and the young man gets old and the young maiden decrepit. And what about their countenances? Better say nothing. A surfeit in the eye, dissatisfaction and lack of peace. No interest in the glass or the dance. On the other hand, is it appropriate to behave that way when in these times that there are so many tears on this earth, and when our soldiers get bloodied, suffer and die? Our youth should take these things under consideration. If at any time, it is in these times that our youth should follow the dictates of our Christian faith, follow the advice of their parents, care about their health and take care of themselves in their youthful years. Youth understandably has its right to recreational hours. No doubt about that. However the moths that fly close to the fire will burn their wings. Then the sweeper “death” will brush them on to the cemetery. I remind the lovers of the tavern and the roadhouse…remember Cocoanut Grove.

“Dear Father:

I have a grocery store. I strive to be good-hearted and understanding to all. I let customers put their purchases on a repayment book. Sometimes it occurred that someone was delayed in payment by hundreds of dollars. Now that someone will laugh and refuse payment. Sometimes they will move to a different part of town and changing their address so as not to pay back what they owe. Because of my goodness, people now owe me eight thousand dollars. May I take them to court?”

There is no law that prevents you from demanding what is owed to you. Therefore you may take the recalcitrant ones to court. No one will condemn you for it. No honest person will take that action as inappropriate. However, among the debtors, there may be people of good will. With these people, one needs to be understanding and to have patience. With those who refuse to pay back even when they can, there remains only the road to court. A responsible and good polish lawyer with advice you as to the best course to take. There are lawyers and even firms who are debt collectors. For this they will take a small percentage of the returns. I have spoken a number of times on the topic of restitution. I maintained that the sins of theft will not be forgiven until the return of what is stolen or its equivalent. Scripture bears this out.

A certain father, when on his death bed, pleaded with his sons that they compensated a certain individual for the mistreatment cause by him. While he lived, the father forestalled the restitution always having some kind of excuse. But as he felt he was going to die, bothered by his conscience, realized his error. The sons ceremoniously promised the wish of their dying father. After the funeral they gathered to consult each other about the course to follow. Naturally the gathering did not proceed without looking deep into the “happy” glass. One of the defiant sons advised: Let’s forget about our promise. What will happen to the deceased? If he’s in heaven, he doesn’t need it. If he’s in hell, certainly it will not help. And if he’s in purgatory, he is sure of salvation. Later, the sons agreed not to pay back what was due. – A lesson is to be learned from some foreign cultures. They have an honorable tradition. At the end of the year they pay all their bills and take care of anything that needs to be reconciled. Such a pagan feels that he ought to even up scores by giving others what he owes them. And so, on the last night of the year, all the banks and stores are open in order to give people a chance to get rid of their obligations. If you are indebted to someone, give back what you owe. You will not only please the one you are obligated to but, above all, please yourself.

Chicago, Ill.

“Father Justin:

Why do those who strive to work for the Church and for good causes in Church Societies, get hurt by gossips for their good heart and good work? The gossip is many times untrue and unneeded. Whenever some Polish man strives to advance his position or some Polish woman gets a better position, then there is no end to gossip and dislike.”

Because it seems to be our national characteristic. A few years ago, I had the chance to chat with Albert A. Gardiner. He was at that time the assistant manager of the Canadian National Railroad Passenger Department. Gardiner took upon himself to aid some of our people during the depression. Because of this he received a commendation from the Polish government. He told me: “Father, for some years now I have studied your compatriots. I was convinced that there was too much jealousy among them. Why don’t you emulate the Scottish people? Whenever a scot achieves a higher status, his countrymen extol him to the heavens. They speak highly of his accomplishments. “They are proud of him. They would like to see him rise even higher. Your people instead, would like to pull one of their own, down, way down.” Truly, that ugly trait attached itself to our souls. You will find it in every occupation, in every field: Among the educated and the simple. In children, youth and the elderly. On will help by patching some rip, joyfully sew a shirt or shorten pants. Which is true. But then there are about 40 metaphors which speak of jealousy. : (jealousy) is as sure as shadows follow the sun, - after honor, the jealousy” and “Jealousy if born of someone’s good fortune.” And “Jealously cries with those you rejoice – it rejoices with those who cry” – “There is not honey without the bee’s pollen collectors, no roses without thorns, no fortune without jealousy.”

Truckville, Pa.

“Dear Father:

In our family we have two in-laws both German. Both my daughter and son forsook their faith, no longer go to church and don’t observe the penitential season. I have a heavy heart due to the fact that my children forsook their faith. They even make fun of me.

This is not the first case nor will it be the last case of mixed marriages. Mothers in many towns and places can relate the same story. The historical circumstance of the fables Queen Wanda in these times is not repeatable. Not only mention it, dear Lord! Youth maintains that they have the right to pick a partner for themselves who are not of their ethnic persuasion. And so Madam Pole is engaged to Signora Italian. Etc. I repeat, the church is not against mixed marriage. I do not advocate it but am totally against it. Men, pick an American Polish wife. Ladies, take up and American Pol.”

Chicago, Ill.

“Drogi Ojcze Justynie:

It is with great interest that I heard the response of the lady who lost her home. They did that to me too. I could not pay my percentages or my taxes. At work they cut my salary in half. My wife and children got sick. My wife needed to go to the hospital for an operation. I rescued my wife and children but lost my home. I said to myself, “God’s will be done.” God has more than he has given out.” Why should I despair? They took away my material treasure, but no one in the world could take away my faith, health and peace of conscience. Let the Heavenly Father gladden those poor people whose homes they took away. “

There were hundreds if not thousands of people such as you – especially during the depression. I am amazed at your faith and your hard stance. I have the feeling that your virtues will be rewarded and the good Lord will remember your cooperation with Providence. Your letter is really a sermon. It is better than I can pen; I see from your letter than nothing can break your faith and your resolve. What can we assign your determination? Faith! That deep sincere and heart felt faith, with which one need not worry about any of life’s storms. That kind of faith is feared by the enemy.

Scranton, Pa.

“Dear Father,

I cry as I write this letter because I am abandoned by my own children. I am alone like a weeping willow along and old country road. I am seventy one years old. I brought up eight children. None care about me. Before the holidays my in-law threw me out of my own house and gave me a hut no bigger than a dog house. He beat and kicked me. Such a Christmas I awaited in my old years. I worked in the mines for thirty years for my children, and my deceased wife had saved, so the children are well off, but their own father doesn’t have a corner.”

For some children it seems that God died and the commandments are no longer to be obeyed. Without honor for parents, the family cannot exist. St. John Chrysostom wrote about thankless children, “Take the ray from the sun and it will stop shining; take the stream from its source, it will not plow; take the branch from the tree, and it will dry up, take away respect of the child for its parents, and the child is no longer a son or a daughter. Why? Ask yourself. Because such a child changes the order established by God. Such a child places its parents below itself. In former times respect for parents was prevalent and so deep that when Solon, the wise man of Greece made his laws gave this observation: “I gave no law in regard to this idea, because I couldn’t think of finding a child who would disrespect his mother or father. Such was the idea of a pagan. Today, as the prophet wrote “the child rebels against the elder and the lowly for the famous.” Skarga, the noted writer wrote, “youth who are articulate, have little respect for the old, and have no idea of the road to wisdom. They talk to their parents in an insubordinate way as if their parents were their slaves. They dishonor them with their words. Some stoop so low as to strike their father or mother.

Even the wildest of tribes respect their parents, a d are concerned about their funerals and help their parents when they need help. One of the oldest African tribes has this saying: “take my life, but spare my mother.” One of the obligations given by God and nature is to support parents especially in their old age, when they don’t have the ability to help themselves. Have you ever thought of the idea that children in the young are dependent of their parents and parents in their old age depend on their children? This is why St. Ambrose wrote: “Care for your mother and father, especially your mother and you couldn’t repay her for her pain and sorrows which she underwent for you and you will not reward here care with which she bore you in her womb and the nourishment you received at her breast. The Holy Spirit reminds us: “He who disrespects mother or father is useless and unfortunate.” Children, you who have an old mother at home and white-haired mother realize what you have in these elderly parents. You have a treasure; you have the blessing of God. Do not get rid of your mother or father from you own home, don’t shut the door on them; otherwise God will close the heavenly gate on you.

Hamtramek, Mich.

“Dear Father Justin

I am sixteen years old. I am writing to you about our observance of Christmas. This vigil our father came home very drunk. First he beat up mother and then he threw out the Christmas tree. He cursed us all evening. He acts like this for three years already. Mother cares for us the best she can but there is always arguing and cursing at home. I wanted to go to grandmas a couple of times and live with her, but I felt sorry for Mom about whom I am worried. I fear that something bad will happen to her.”

There are various vices and defects among us; however, I would like to believe that they are far between and that such animalistic fathers are rare. What was the defect in this fathers heart for him to act like this, at this solemn occasion, Christmas, when the entire world rejoices in the season of good will, when the most hardened enemies shake hands, hearts are willed with emotion and here a pole a catholic a husband and father forgets himself and falls so low. On this day, when every honest man, on seeing the wafer and the tree, with caroling turns his thought to helping the poor and the days of his youth remembering, remembers his mother and father, his brothers and sisters. I believe that one has to have a lot of patience to last under one roof with this kind of a father who poisons life. Wouldn’t it be profitable to see your pastor and talk to him about you situation? I sympathize with you!

Milwaukee, Wis.

“Dear Father:

At this festive time, please remind our daughter that they should be more careful during the holidays. Entire groups of them go to the taverns for dancing. Among them you’ll find a fourteen year old girl. The holidays have passed. Perhaps in the course of the holidays will come to some sense, moral and physical. Some in the course of the holidays had hangovers and unsteady feet. They thought that you had to take that trail to have a “good time”. The toasted the vigil and Christmas with alcohol. And with the glass and the bottle they will greet the New Year. In the province of Queb3ec in Canada, the Premier promulgated an edict that all theaters, dance halls, and cabarets be closed and all should go to their churches in order to pray for victory in war, for peace, and the return of their soldier. And we??? Please don’t misunderstand me. I don’t have in mind hordes of meditative, pious, over-prayered and oversung. No. I have in mind the blinded youth, impertinent, forgetful souls who never give thought to their lives. How crooked and misleading are these outlooks. Life itself is not a game. The youthful years are preparing times, a novitiate, at what time young people have to develop their physical and spiritual abilities in order to have profitable and victorious experiences. Are teenage boys and girls who spend evenings and nights with drinks, traipsing through parties and dances preparing themselves for a responsible life? What kind of a future husband and father will that young man be or what kind of mother and wife will that girl be? Anyway, isn’t it time that a good portion of our youth left the crooked road they have been taking? Wouldn’t it be more profitable and healthier, pay attention more to their studies, training themselves at knowledge that will help them hack out a good living with bread on the table? Would not it be better to spend those long winter evenings hours at home, with a good book in hand or tune in to some instructive radio, getting some restful shut eye preparing for a healthier tomorrow. “Remember Cocoanut Grove!”

One more letter. This one from a mother in Syracuse, N.Y

“I had one daughter. In December she ran away from home and married civilly with a man who was not Polish. I don’t know how she managed to marry since she was just 16 years old. I have no idea what made her do that. She was still in education, she had everything she needed at home, and I didn’t prevent her from going out with her friends, and I didn’t ban any of her friends from coming to our house. She left without saying a word. It hurts me, because she is so young and I fear that she will waste her life. My husband claims that it is my fault that I didn’t watch her carefully and that I gave her too much freedom. I wanted to be a good mother to my daughter. Sometimes when my daughter went to an affair in school, I didn’t tell my husband because I didn’t know whether he would permit her to go and I did want my daughter to have some recreation with other students in her school. Please speak to daughters such as mine so they would not waste their youth and bring harm to themselves and their parents.”

Despite similar happenings, I believe in our youth. In each case there are the guilty and the innocent. There are circumstances when their action is diminished in guiltiness and others which promote that behavior. There are no circumstances which are the same. At one time, the home is to blame – at another the school – at another the company the child keeps, the theatre or the press. But then the surroundings may be good as well as the parents and the living may be ok, and despite all of that, the problem child may be a black sheep. We have to admit that in a family, for one reason or another, (I will not go into that in this program) God’s order or the natural order of things is changed. In days when family life was more abundant, the father had a certain role and the mother had a certain meaning. Time has changed all of that. Today, when there is only child or two, there seems to be a different kind of relationship. Father and mother choose not to have more children and it’s not only free choice but a commandment. Where did you see, in past times, ten year old children on the street at 10 or 11 o’clock in the evening? We didn’t even dream about things like that. Our parents had to know where we were going and for what reason, whom we were with and what –Today? Not only one or two talk to their parents to tell them where they are going but don’t even say “good buy” or “Zostancie z Bogiem.”. They say instead, “It’s none of your business.” But that’s the way it is. Or they maintain, “He doesn’t understand us, because he’s old-fashioned too. It’s a shame. But who knows, maybe one or two of the children will return to the “old fashioned” traditions, namely those which are the source of peace and happiness. Maybe they will join the family life in the way it was understood – family, married life, the obligations of the parents and the children. Rebellious people, a rebellious teaching, and rebellious times have warped the last two generations in God’s law and natural law. The new home is looked upon as a hotel and restaurant, actually “a boarding house”. The only reason is that it has a table and a bed. Today’s family has the impression that there is no connection among the inhabitants. Everyone goes their own way. Everyone has their own wallet and their own key. Everyone speaks of their rights; no one mentions their common responsibilities. There is a silence – about that. The family life style instead of being holy seems to be a “sport” – a recreation, a plaything. Instead of being a willing dedication of a wife and a husband, it becomes egotism. The Lord knows we could stem the tide of evil. We could remedy the situation if we all determined to get to work. First we need to realize the importance, the goal and the beauty of human life. And that means from the moment of birth to the last breath. Life is not without worth, without sense, without ideals and ugly because that is untrue. It is self-deception and the deception of others. Man is the archetype of God’s hands. Man for this reason should live nobly. Life itself is miraculously beautiful. But man can dirty it, lower it, and make it shameful. This does not change the truth that we all have obligations to God, to ourselves, and to others. If we understand this truth, we can begin to establish a new Christian Order in the world, removing the ugliness which we spoke of in today’s talk.