January 5, 1947

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

During the radio season, I receive quite a few letters. The variety of writers communicate a variety of concerns. Good and honorable people write to the Rosary Hour; Cold-hearted people, careless, not having the slightest humanitarian feeling; deceitful people, poking fun at spirituality; believing people write but also such who maintain that they do not believe. I need to read them, look over them, and sort them. Having been a veteran broadcaster on the radio, I am aware of the fact that there will be people with a variety of dispositions; there have to be people who have different outlooks on this world, have different upbringing, and a variety of educated and uneducated people who express many, many different postures in life. I am not surprised at this human condition and generally in my daily practice of preparation for talks, I expect that the human condition will be present and a certain number will go into the basket. A certain number deal with situations and opinions that, when an occasion arises that treats a theme that would be profitable to explore on the radio, they will be of use. This letter is one of that kind. It comes from New York, having been written in April of 1946. Listen. I think it will be of profit to do so: “Fr. Justin, you claim that the world is beautiful and life is beautiful, that people are good. Why deceive people when things are the way they are in the world today? Why or how is the world beautiful? Do deprivation, hunger, and sickness make human life wonderful? Where are the good people? Does -injustice, hatred, and treachery bake a beautiful life? And the worst people are women - a divorced woman stole my husband. Three of my sons were stolen from me by no good women and left me alone. No one is civil with me. Everyone runs from me. My neighbors don’t share a word with me. Life is distasteful to me. And you, Fr. Justin urge people to be happy among good people. If I could I would teach these people reason and give them what they deserve.” - I break the reading of this correspondent’s letter. I do not wish to offend your ears with this ranting. When I finished reading this letter, I thought to myself: “I would like this woman to stand before a mirror and look earnestly one her visage. What did she see there? She would see an angry, offended face filled with hatred. She would see pursed lips. Would looking at such a face not bring on a feeling of shame? Or would they fear such a countenance? And now to our talk entitled:

“PUT ON A SMILE”

In previous years, having more passion and energy, I accepted every request to various spiritual activities. I conducted mission and recollections; conducted Forty Hour Devotions, gave talks at festive occasion, graduations etc. I entertained ever occasion. Everything interested me; I received all. I remember this occurrence. A pastor related to me about a husband and wife who lived in the same home for 23 years and did not speak to each other. The story grabbed my attention. I wanted to meet these very interesting people. Since they lived not too far from the parish, I went to visit them, wearing my habit, thinking that my religious garb would be of interest to them or at least break the ice for our conversation. I enter a small one-story house with a kitchen, two bedrooms and a small parlor. I’m in the kitchen. In the corner is an antediluvian old geezer – a stove. It leaned against the wall like a drunk at a fence. It seemed like it was in a war for it was filled with holes. Under a dirty window on which two newspapers took the place of curtains, I see a table. It was filled with various dishes, china, and glasses. Seated at the table is a 60 year old bemused lady. From her eyes came sparks and fire. At my greeting of “Praised be the Lord” she muttered some indistinct answer, not paying attention to me. She sat motionless; you would say that she looked like a grave stone hewn out of marble quarry instead of a human being. I introduce myself. She remains still. I asked about her husband? She responds unwillingly: “He sits in his own room.” I move several steps and find myself at the doorway to the bedroom. On an unmade bed, sits an unshaven character. He looks like a chained dog and not a man. I invite him to come into the kitchen to have a talk with him. ”Why?” he asks. I tell him that I wish to talk to him. He says in no uncertain words, “There is no use to do that, because I wish not to talk to my old lady.” And his wife from the kitchen: “Same with me, not a word to her.” I left the field of battle completely disconcerted and went to the rectory. On the way back, I thought to myself, “If those two old stubborn goats new the power and worth of a smile, they would not have reached to such a state of abandonment.” - I cannot understand why people know not how to smile. Some look at others like a goat at a head of cabbage; others gripe like they had the sins of the rest of the world on their soldiers. Finally there are those who go through life with pomp and circumstance as if they created the world. These, look at others from above, from the heights and consider them to be like ashes. I could never understand this. And to this day it isn’t a guess, but a mystery. I have seen Italians in a clothing store with torn pants. In one hand they held a piece of dry bread. They hungrily gnawed this gift of God and sang joyfully: “Santa Lucia” or “Bella Napoli” or some operatic aria. I saw Frenchmen, barefoot, emaciated but singing the Marseilles. I’ve seen the Spanish and Portuguese with a handful of hard bread and rice but singing none-the-less. I have seen very proper Englishmen smile and carry on a civil conversation. I saw Irishmen speak about their sons in the Green Isle. In the meantime there was such hunger there that one could cut through it. But their faces were peaceful, serene, and smiling. - It is curious to me that people from our nationality are feared by their children, dogs run away from us and cats hide from us. We look like ghosts. Did God create us in order to maintain this kind of demeanor? Does it cost too much for us to smile, so that we get rid of the capability? Let us learn to smile if we wish to get to heaven. Wrinkled foreheads and pursed lips and curved lips are not the passport to heaven. - The smallest smile on the lips gladdens the heart, holds on to good humor, keeps peace in the soul, is healthful, gives a pleasant face, brings peaceful thoughts, and gives way to good works. Smile to yourself and see your countenance begin to demonstrate that sourness goes away. Then go outdoors and share the smile with others. Your joy will have the ability to give glory to God and help others along the way. And further:

Smile to faces of the worried.

Smile to faces of the fearful

Smile to faces of the sad

Smile to faces of the doubtful.

Smile to the young; Smile to the old.

Smile to those beloved faces of the members of the family and in the company of friends, in order that all might drink of the joy in the smile…etc.

How many smiles returned your smile in the course of the day? That number will demonstrate to how much satisfaction and joy, built up the hope of others. These smiling demeanors and good feelings always are the reason for good and noble deeds. The smile brings back hope far and wide even though we may not realize it. The smile is capable of bringing back a life of hope to the hearts in those who are depressed, disheartened, and despairing.

Your smile is capable of supporting a vocation. Your smile can be the beginning of conversion to the true faith. Your smile can begin a return of someone to God. A smile can influence the actions of your beloved friends. And in the end….smile to God. Smile to Him by your loving ways, accepting them from Him and earn that most beautiful Face of Christ’s smile upon you in the smile of love.

And now to another theme. The Poles across the ocean, particularly those in Warsaw, in the terrible years of the war, knew how to smile and have good humor. These three roguish qualities: smiling, good humor and joking gives courage to the Poles – strengthens their optimism, their faith and hope, to which the war and politic gave them recourse when the Bavarian attack on British peace came about. - God, enervated with the chaos risen on earth, sends one of his angels, in order to bring a resolution to the situation, to our dilemma. The heavenly messenger comes back with the following conundrum, “Lord God, I understand absolutely nothing. I saw the German Reich on the offense and armed from foot to head and there is only talk about peace. In Great Britain, only civil people walk and everyone talks of war. In Poland I saw only persecution, evacuations of people, arrests and executions. And everyone talks of victory. – England, an ally of Poland had as much sympathy as sarcasm and impatience. It was one of the English political strategies. St. Peter opens the gates of heaven for hordes of slain. Hundreds of thousands of Poles, Russians, Yugoslavian and Chinese are wishing to get into heaven. When at last there is a lull in the entry, the holy key-keeper opens the gate slowly. A poor Englishman stands at the gate. “God love you” – St. Peter is surprised – “What have you done that they killed you?”

Two friends for the first time after the outbreak of the war, met amidst the hoard of passengers on a trolley. Being separated, they shouted to each other: One said, “How are ya, buddy?” – you still alive! What’s new?” - “Everything’s fine,” the other answered. How ‘bout you?” “What are you doing now?” - “Who? Me,” cries out the other over the heads of the crowd, “I’m hiding!!!”

A certain man walking a country road, tipped his hat before a figure of a Crucified Christ. A German soldier spots him, and lays into him, “If it were an image of the fuehrer, you probably would not have tipped your hat!” – the man replied in an even tone, “If he were hanging – I would tip it!!”

A mustached ringleader gathers his coworkers to consult on the project of building a tunnel to England under the channel to accomplish an invasion of England. All methods looked over were not applicable. Finally General Frank raises his hand and says, “If you please, Fuehrer, I have a way. I will hire a few smugglers of meat from Warsaw. The leader agrees eagerly. The members of the planning committee, hearing the plan, say, “Good. We’ll supply the carving machine and the German soldiers.

Hitler, obsessed in creating a canal to get into England hires a Jewish man from Calvary. He comes in for the job. – “Listen, the ringleader says in a harsh voice – “Your Moses waved a wand over the sea and the sea split in two and the Jews walked over. Tell me if that wand exists and if it does I will spare your life. The Jewish rabbi says it does…..in a museum in London.

A young man knocked on the door of a dwelling and asked: - “Can I pick up some carbide here?” The reply: “I don’t sell carbide.” – After a while another young man knocks on the door and says: “I came for the carbide.” The reply? “You’re mistaken, I don’t have carbide here.” After a while, a third man came in and asks for carbide. After a fourth man came in and asks for carbide, the owner of the home said, “My dear man! Your get-together is on the fifth floor. I am: “volkedeutschen!” Despite the fact that Poles were bloodied and were dying, and knew how to die, they did not forget to smile. To that, I add prayer. Then and only then, will you understand the hardy character of those martyrs whose souls were strengthened to sustain suffering and those who kill.

As a rule, I rarely speak of the ministries of Polish priests, today I make an exception, because praise to the praise worthy and honor to the honor worthy. Catholic and non-Catholic writers maintain that this priest, in all circumstances did not lose the spirit of peace, gentleness, and calm. With a smile on their lips they died under walls on hanging decks, in jails, concentration camps and gas chambers. They didn’t pay attention to being forbidden to say Mass. They organized secret places to have devotions, taking all the blame themselves. Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they knew by heart. Instead of wearing albs, they dressed in pants and shirt with a glass as a chalice. Mass was organized in all times of the day and night. Despite bans on singing and flogging, they sang religious songs. Unknown people became brothers and sisters in the midst of persecution. On Christmas Eve, in one on the concentration camps, all the necessities of a Mass were prepared secretly. The celebration was advertised as “The fish is ready.” Jesus came more frequently in the Eucharist at all times of day and in different places. Nothing stood in His way! Not even the guard’s attempts to frustrate the celebration of Mass or the distribution of the Eucharist. Jesus could be found in a thousand ways and the most unexpected moments in order to strengthen the hearts of the imprisoned. One way was for the priests carrying serving trays with coffee to distribute coffee. Catching his breath, one friend says, “If you want Jesus, go to Alosia. I find him between the beds in the sleeping quarters. I know what he is distributing. A bit of recollection and I go to a corner with a Favored Guest in my soul. These were the ways between 1941 and 1942. There were a hundred ways. Communion was brought in gloves during the winter; even sometimes in the lips when the necessity was urgent. Sometimes, through the windows of the barracks at four in the morning, at noon in the wash rooms, on the road, early in the morning or late at night in unused rooms. And so Christ was present to help the burdened hearts in concentration camps. Priests in pairs adored the Eucharist on a white cloth on a table. Some adored from their beds. Christ’s love was ever present. In 1944, there was an outbreak of typhus. Very few knew what that epidemic meant in the environs of a concentration camp. The infected blocks are surrounded with barbed wire; all who are not affected leave and the blocks are guarded so that no one else leaves and are left to their own loss. There is no mention of medical help. The sick are dying by the tens each day. The dead are thrown out into the street, and the dead are picked up daily, are cremated and put into a cemetery. No one cares about them. Even nurses and other personnel run away from the diseased barracks. That’s the way it was in 1944 and 1945. Those infected are already skeletons. Several thousand people are in a block and fenced in with barbed wire left to die. The daily death rate was one out of three. The despair of the inmates was great. Four or five lay in one bed and knew they would never get out. They were totally abandoned! Who would cheer them up? In despair, they turned to the priests. The priests gave themselves to care for the sick and exposed themselves to disease. In each room of the sick there were about five hundred people and there were about 20 rooms. Each room had one priest who was doctor, mother, and grandmother. The people flocked to the priests; the Germans were not there and didn’t care what happened. Mass was offered for the dying skeletons. Poles, Belgians, French, Hollanders, Italians, Czechoslovaks, and Hispanics received Holy Communion in tears. Perhaps in Dachau there appeared smiles of joy which came from reception of the Eucharist. Many pagans seeing this asked to be baptized.

In September, 1946, Polish newspapers carried an article about the works of mercy of Dr. Fensena. He lived at one time in Copenhagen in Denmark. He lived in a beautiful residence with an established clientele, in a big city which provided him with all the creature comforts. War broke out. As a sensitive person, he saw the misery which accompanied the war. With a fantastic passion he devoted himself to Samaritan work, and when the gunfire ceased, as a missionary chef for the Red Cross. He came to Poland. When he arrived he came to Pułtusk and Maków, once affluent counties of the country but today they are in ruins because of the war. When he observed the devastation, the children bloated from hunger, people living underground, without shoes or clothes, he did not go back to his own country. He stayed; many people came to him. What was his attraction? Nothing more than his goodness and smile which was always present on the face of Dr. Fensen. He patiently listened to every one of his patients. Everyone left his presence with lifted spirits, a new hope in their heart and a more serene countenance. This kind and gentle doctor is especially devoted to the Polish children for whom he arranged feeding stations which served the children well. He visited the sick children and took care of their health needs. Above all he gives them his joyful smiles.

And who has not heard of our Beloved Fr. Maximillian Kolbe? He established “Niepokalanów” and published the “Rycerz Niepokalanej!” He was a man without guile. He was humble, peaceful, understanding and always smiling. Nothing bothered him. Nothing in his personality would wipe the smile off children’s faces. The Gestapo put him in the Osmiecim concentration camp. One day in the camp, from block 14, a prisoner escaped. In order to dissuade others from escaping, ten prisoners were to be put to death. 600 inmates watch the procedures as the Gestapo chose ten prisoners. Among these was a man named Frank Gajewski a sergeant in the Polish army. He had a son and a daughter and was distraught. Hearing of his plight, Fr. Maximillian went to the Commandant and offered to give his life up for the man condemned and whispers about the children who are about to be orphaned by the father’s death. The Commandant asks why he is giving his life in place of the man’s. Fr. Maximillian responds, “ Because I am single and he has a wife and children.” The Commendant was amazed and permitted the switch. The sergeant returned to his quarters. Fr. Maximillian joined the ten condemned to death. He was abandoned. Nevertheless he comforts the other nine. Fr. Maximillian leads the song, “Pod Twoj Obronę….) Under your care…(Heavenly Mother). The condemned smiled. They all died.

As a conclusion, I offer these thoughts: 1. Look upon life in daily sunlight, not in the darkness of night. 2. Think only about the best things of life and expect them to come. 3. Strive to better yourself and spend little time in criticizing others. 4. Strive to be as noble as not to be angry and disgruntled; free of anger and worry about things that will never happen. 5. Keep a quieted countenance and smile. You will be convinced that God and people will smile to you.