**March 19, 1933**

**Let Us Go Today for a Visit (The Sins of Parents and Children)**

I greet you, esteemed countrymen and countrywomen, with the words: Praised be Jesus Christ!

We will take a visit today. This visit will not be very pleasant but I expect and ardently believe that it will be beneficial. I will lead you to the best local hospital. It has an enormous hall with one bed after another. Each one has someone sick on it. Pale face, burning eyes, sweating forehead as we hear painful sighs, desperate cries, and pitiful begging. These poor, broken, human bodies! Suffering, sobbing, and tears! The hospital is the best and most practical school for us all. We will stop by one of the beds. It contains a middle-aged man. He was once a giant with great physical strength. It shows even now when the disease has cut his legs off and tied him down, painfully, to the bed. Let us listen: maybe this unfortunate soul will tell us his story,

“Thirty years ago, I came from Poland. I left my good and esteemed parents who I would never see again. My heart hurt as I was leaving when my mother kissed my forehead, raising up her tears, and when my father, with a shaking hand, traced out a cross over my forehead and warned my to avoid evil and evil people! I remember all of this as if it were today. At this moment, it seems as though it did not happen years ago, but rather yesterday. I am re-living all of that today and it tears my heart apart. But less of that. I came. I went to work. Healthy and strong, I started earning pretty well, and not excusing myself from my responsibilities, I helped out my parents and siblings. Slowly, following the example of my peers, the love and attachment to my family dried up. My love of fulfilling my duty to God died out. I changed. I abandoned my attachment to God’s and human matters which I had brought from my home country and I forgot about the promises I made to my parents. For years, I treated my life like a toy. I did not think about tomorrow. My wife left me and I started drinking. Through drinking, I lost my job and my health. Today, I am right here. I understand that I will not live long. Please hear my confession.”

Dear Radio Listeners:

Did this sickly poor man, physically and morally broken and wasted, this once giant, stable, strong, and in good health and now helpless and weak who could, if he only had wanted to, take a commanding position in society. Unfortunately, he weakened himself and is now on the verge of death. Does he not exemplify our Polish emigration? Once, not long ago, he seemed to be a giant and was so promising. And today? He is so sick and weak that instead of being the master, he became the slave! Why? Instead of defending, he surrendered! In an unfriendly environment, he allowed for his old Polish and divinely ingrained principles to be torn out. He discarded the ancestral love of family life, the domestic upbringing, the responsibilities of his position and he started to live on warped values of some monster who has discovered the noisy cover of education and progress! This emigration is sickly. You demand proof. Here it is, taken from numerous letters sent to us from all corners of the United States. Listen:

Chicago, Illinois

Dear Father:

Please talk to the sons and daughters that they would show at least a shred of love toward their mothers and fathers. I have six grownup children and none of them want to take me into their home. I and my husband worked hard to not only raise the children but also to have them educated. My husband worked in a steel mill for many years; I would clean offices at night. My husband died four years ago; he left me the house paid for and some money in the bank. My children convinced me to sell the house. I did that. My children cheated me out of the money when I stayed with them. Today, they don’t want to keep me in their houses but are, instead, forcing me to go to the public nursing home! Will such children be happy, who rob their own mother and kick her out and send her into a home of strangers?

Signed, R.M.

Dear Mother: I am listening with surprise and fear and I ask all children who hear my voice, “Can God bless such children?”

Beloved Father:

I am seventy-six years old. I have been a widow for twenty years. My thirty-eight-year-old son lives with me. Since my husband’s death he has not worked at all. His favorite diversion is drinking moonshine. Recently, I gave him fifteen dollars to go to the dentist. Instead of doing that, he brought home five gallons of vodka and drank it in one week. Should I keep him in the house? He does not go to Church or to confession. He makes fun of me in that he doesn’t believe but is still alive.

Signed, R.R., from Cleveland.

3

Dear Father Justin:

My daughter was obedient and good until she started going to high school. Now, we cannot handle her! She is not home for any evening. She is seventeen and looks like she is thirty. She threatens that she will leave the house because it cramps her. But we never did her any harm. She comes home in the morning. She always justifies herself, saying that all the girls from her school do the same. When my husband did not want to open the door for her, she started to scream and swear until a policeman came and wanted to arrest my husband. I have raised eight children to be decent people and none of them has caused as much pain as the youngest.

Signed, K.S. from Detroit

4

Dear Father:

Please read my letter and tell me if God is taking care of or if he has abandoned me. Last year I married at the age of twenty. When we were dating, he was well-behaved and polite. He even went to church with me. A few weeks after the wedding, he started drinking. Our house turned into a living hell. He would swear at me, calling me the worst names. When I would cry, he would beat and kick me, just like a dog. Five months later, he took his stuff and left me. Today, with a baby, I am back at my mother’s. Not a day goes by that I do not cry or lament because I do not know what to do. My neighbors make fun of me instead of taking pity on me. I hear that my husband is pretending to be a bachelor and stands on the street corners all day while I suffer. What is God punishing me for?

Signed, A.O., from Chicago

5

Dear Father:

I am writing to you, Father, because I have to vent to someone. I am twenty-three-years-old. Would you believe that my own mother did not only force me but sold me into a marriage? I never had a vocation to marriage; I wanted to be a teacher and remain single. I studied vocals and music. I did not go to theaters or to dances. My nineteen-year-old brother brought home his friend: the son of wealthy people. This repeated a few times. One day, my mother told me that it was time to start thinking of marriage. She said she has fed and clothed me long enough. She said that my brother’s friend was coming to us so that I would marry him. I told my mother that I could go with the young man to the theater but that did not mean that I would go for him because I did not intend that. I went with the guy but I openly told him, so that he would not be deceived, that I was only doing it for my mother. This dragged on for a year and a half. During this time, my brother got a new car, my mom received new coats, furniture, and rugs. Finally, my mom told my in anger, “either you marry him or get out of my sight and out of my house.” I was in tears and my mom was stewing in anger. “He gave you so many presents, a car and furniture, and you do not want him? He has money, what is lacking?” We married! We lived at my mother’s house. My husband spent his entire days at his father’s house and in the evenings he would go to the “speakeasies”[[1]](#footnote-1). Six months after the wedding, he developed mental problems and today he sits in an insane asylum and the doctors say that he will stay there for the rest of his life. As for me, I have in terrible pain and despair and my nerves are all shot to pieces! My heart hurts every time I look at my mother! I would like to live honestly and peacefully. Will I be able to do that now?

From Cleveland

Beloved Father:

There were six of us children in the house. Currently, the only ones left are my dad, my older brother, and me. Since my mother passed away about twenty years ago, I keep up the house. My dad and my brother drink not just in the evenings but all night as well. They never let me have any peace. They don’t allow me to go to church. Both of them blaspheme and mock God. I know that if my mother was alive things would be better, but I have no influence on them. I only console myself that I am doing my duties. May God forgive them my tears and my pain.

Signed, K.B. from Buffalo

7

Dear Father:

I am writing to you, Father, while my mom lies in bed and tells me what to write. I am twenty-years-old. I have four sisters and two brothers. Our father is a drunkard. We are all poor and my mom is ashamed of begging. We have nothing to eat and our house is cold. Our father makes nothing of it. Everyday, he goes to his neighbor who makes his own booze. He sits there all day and gets drunk. Last Sunday, when he came home, my mom reprimanded him. He beat her senseless until she spat blood and then he left us all and went over to the neighbor’s. Our mother tells us to pray for our father and we pray, but we don’t see any improvement. Does God not listen to us? Other children have good fathers. We are terrified of ours because he does not love us and he does not take care of us.

Signed, M.B. from Pittsburgh

8

Dear Father Justin:

For years I went to the school of Corpus Christi. We belonged to that parish until our mother died. After her death, my dad did not want to belong to any parish. We would go to the local parish, which was not Polish. Our dad started drinking and abusing us. It got so bad that my three sisters had to leave the house and I remained, worried about what would happen to him. I have not worked for a year. I would like to work but there are no jobs. I don’t dare show up at home because my dad curses me out for not working. I go around in old clothes. Often, I have to stand on the street, hungry and freezing! Once, not knowing what I was doing, I got drunk, thinking that it would be better to be in jail than in our home. Many thoughts cross my mind about hurting my dad, who is not a father to me. Am I sinning?

Signed, B.K. from Buffalo

9

Beloved Father:

Please, patiently read my letter in which I would like to tell my pains and sorrows. I am from Poland. With a little hard work, I saved up some money. It was time for marriage. I met the daughter of a neighbor and soon we were married. I then tried even harder to provide the best for my wife. God gave us three children. It seemed to me that there was not a better woman in all the world. Then something changed. My wife joined some society. At first she would only go in the evenings, but then she went every afternoon. The house and children were neglected. I brought this up to her. Misunderstandings, arguments, and anger ensued. We had money in the bank. A few months ago, she ran away with some other man, taking all the money, down to the last cent. I was old-fashioned for her because I was hard-working and sober, and because I loved and adored her. Now, I don’t trust any woman.

From Buffalo

10

Dear Father:

Please read my letter because it is written for those Polish women who can learn from my unfortunate and painful story that has left my life ruined. I only ask that my last name be omitted so that it does not shame my parents or my siblings. I am nineteen. For two years, I had a fiancé. He would postpone the wedding from one month to the nest, always coming up with different excuses. I would regularly go with him, three times a week, to either the theatre or dancing, often to the city. In the summer, we would drive to roadhouses. I will not describe the details. Not long ago, we went to such an establishment for dinner and fun. He had a bottle of vodka with him. Under his urging, I got drunk and lost consciousness. I woke up next day in a rooming house where I was kept for two weeks. What I went through is better for nobody to know. When I escaped from there and returned home, my fiancé was gone. He left without telling anyone! I exist, but I do not live.

11

Dear Father:

I was in church for the one Sunday where you said, in a homily, to parents to not hold it against the children that they do not work, but to show them a good heart. I have to thank you, Father, from the bottom of my heart. You do not know that you have saved my life. I already had a bottle of poison with me and I was about to use it in the dinner after high mass. Oh, how I was sick of everything! How much I wanted to die! My father is extremely stingy. He has the house paid down and eight thousand dollars in the bank. My mother has complained that I do not work, that I want to eat and clothe myself, and that I don’t bring any money home. Please, Father, I have willingly worked in jobs, often hard ones, for years I always gave them the whole paycheck. Now that my job is gone, I have to listen to my parents’ reproaches and look at their unloving gazes. I was despaired by all of this and I was about to finish it all. After hearing you, Father, I changed my perspective and my parents have allowed me some peace!

Just one more letter and then I will finish:

Beloved Father,

I ask, in the mass and in prayers, to remember us and our poverty! My mom is sick with pneumonia. We don’t know if she will pull through. My dad is drunk, he sits by the kitchen table while we keep watch over our mother’s bed because we fear that something bad will happen if our father wakes up. If God were to take mom away, we don’t know what would happen to us. Our dad is not good when he gets drunk, and we are afraid of him because he curses and beats us. We pray but we ask that you would pray for us as well, Father.

Signed, A.P. from Pittsburgh.

Dear Radio Listeners:

Do these and other similar letters not prove that something is wrong amongst us Poles? That some worms got into the root of our emigration and are eating up our once healthy branches? That some poison is sinking into our ancient, ancestral principles? That something that looks healthy on the outside is feverishly sick on the inside? I repeat that, today, not slowly and insignificantly but quickly and decisively, we are going through changes. These changes are not good. They will not lead to health, strength, unity, or agreement. It is historically true that the Pole is the epitome of piety, hard-work, manliness, and nobility. Poles acquired inner virtues that were unknown and foreign to others. That is what our fathers were like. That is what they left in their wills. Have we forgotten and let go of our promises? Have we not squandered our inheritance? Let us look one more time on our fathers’ tough but fair faces. We look at the gentle, wrinkled faces of our mothers. Are we worthy of them? Do we follow their example? If we are not so lucky as to have them with us, let us ask ourselves this short and clear question, “Are we such people, do we live the way our parents would want us to live?” Let us not be cowards! Let us not cheat our own conscience. Let us admit the truth because that is what will take us the farthest.

I admit to you openly that I have done this for years. I lost my mother as a young boy. I was sent to foreign and often unfriendly schools. Then I went to Rome. How many times, wearied down by the difficulties and trials, sitting by the desk or saying my evening prayers, my memory would bring back my deceased mother. In my soul, I would complain that, except for God, I had no one. It seemed to me, that I heard gentle words of consolation and solace, after which I would rise up with new courage and strength to my everyday work. I am not ashamed to admit that I have done this, especially in the last ten years. Sitting by my desk at night, late into the night, with my heart full of troubles, almost dropping my hands, while doing my examination of conscience, I see, as though through a foggy cover, the figure of my mother who has been in the grave for many years. She looks at me and I at her and I bow my head, with tears in my eyes, and I complain, “Mother, if you were still alive and had been with me all these years maybe I would be better than I am.” And so, in spite of crosses and crucifixes, in spite of sadness and unfriendliness, I rise up, with new motivation, and begin a new day. I also often think of my esteemed father, today an old man, who went through so much, suffered so much, and never did anyone any harm. Though he was often hurt, he always repaid unkindness with kindness.

Towards us kids, though sometimes too harsh, he always showed a golden heart and he often told me, “Boy, remember always that it is better to earn a dry piece of bread honestly than to dishonestly acquire Turkish sweets.” Whenever I think of him I imagine that I see a whole procession of old Polish virtues and I ask, “ Why does our young generation here move away from such examples?” Do not be surprised that the Polish giant turns into a goblin. That our Polish Goliath is being surpassed by foreign Davids in every field. That we move from being masters to becoming servants and that a shameful slavery awaits us! It is time to wake up from the dreams of indifference. Otherwise? Pity for us and our descendants.

1. A speakeasy is a term for an illegal alcohol establishment during the Prohibition era. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)