March 5, 1933

I greet you countrymen and countrywomen with and old Polish and Catholic welcome: Praised be Jesus Christ!  
 With great joy and happiness I stand here before the microphone to start a new series of Polish programs. I am grateful to God's Providence in that he allows me to reach so many of my dear compatriots through the radio; I am sincerely grateful to my older friends, for not only not only for moral encouragement but for material assistance as well. I approach work with a motivation and a strong will to fulfill the obligations of my vocation. I wish to work, as you listeners already know, for the Church and for Polish issues. To avoid all misunderstandings in the future, I turn attention to the following:

1. I am a Roman Catholic priest, at the same time a religious, though very unworthy, but always a son of Saint Francis of the Province of St. Anthony in Buffalo, NY.  
   2. The programs of the Rosary Hour are broadcasted with the knowledge and consent of Our Excellency Bishop Wilhelm Turner; I answer to him and only him for the radio talks.  
   3. I am the son of a poor Pennsylvanian miner, raised in a large family at the same time and with no lack of poverty and misery. I am well aware of the sad position and the struggles with hardship of the working class. In front of this gray working mass, I will stand, but I won't be passive. I will explain to the struggling worker, not only his responsibilities, but also his rights, because certain rights belong to him. God gave them to him and grants him them by nature, and even though some privileged social classes want to deprive him of these rights- these rights cannot be discarded.  
   4. I intend to always teach the truths based on the principles of Christ and according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, without regard to human opinions or personalities. I do not intend to offend or insult anyone, because I view all as my brothers, and them, though they are misguided, Our Savior commanded to love.  
   5. I will try to present to my listeners an image of the life of our society. And you will see, like a mirror reflection, our virtues and vices. You will see our shortcomings and our pains. I will show our national virtues. Where praise and acknowledgment is proper, I will not be stingy. Where correction will be needed I will harshly but objectively correct. I will speak simply and clearly without floating on clouds because I speak to simple people.  
   6. I will open myself to criticism because I speak publicly. I understand this all too well. I even ask you for constructive criticism. As for destructive and provocative criticism...I won't even pay attention. In all matters, I ask you for patience and understanding. I don't seek or ask for pity or mercy; I have a right, however, to justice, just as every other person does. I enjoy fighting, but only in public and with honorable weapons. These weapons will be justice and the cross. I expect that our compatriots will take advantage of not only helping the soul and eternal happiness, but also to improve their temporal happiness, by enhancing their own lot. And now we turn to today's talk which is entitled:
2. My dear radio listeners! In the story of Kazimerz Przerwa-Tetmajer, titled: "Father Piotr", we read: "Mr. Dziegielewski, wiping his sleeve in his flaxen, graying, and long moustache, kissed the canon priest below the elbow and went out. In the meantime old Fr. Piotr crossed himself, put his hands on his heart, and started to walk about the room in a slow, uniform pace, whispering a prayer, while the old dog Zagraj, sleeping in the meantime under the couch, raised up one eye, than another, got up, stretched, sighed as he was in the habit of doing daily for a long time, and followed his master step by step. From time to time the old priest chased flies away with his hand; from time to time Zagraj snapped at them with his teeth. And so they both walked until breakfast. During the prayer Fr. Piotr glanced occasionally at the wall where there hung a beautifully polished shotgun and the large forking antlers of a deer. He looked at the windowsill where the hyacinths and azaleas bloomed in their containers and at the ostentatious mallows and sunflowers. Occasionally, he moved his eyes over the even rows of pipe-stems and unusual smoking pipes, without interrupting his prayers, he stopped in front of the shelf with books, fixed it, and went slowly onward with the dog right behind him. He glanced out into the world once in a while; the farm boys bustled about in the courtyard in working jackets; Mr. Walenty Moscik, the steward, was yelling and ordering people around; young pups were chasing the chickens; the domesticated crane, Marcin, chased away the colts and confronted the turkey; there was a buzz of movement.

Girls with yellow and many-colored kerchiefs on their heads, walked by humming a sentimental melody; peacocks puffed themselves up and spread out their wonderful tails, dragging their wings along the ground; the flocks of pigeons flew over the roofs and lifted themselves above them, forming a big circle. A very bright and piercing morning sun shone down upon all of this. It lay golden patches on the ground and sent an iridescence onto the linden and birch trees. Father Piotr, not ceasing his prayers, looked into the window, quiet and graying, touching his lips, and when he said the last words of his prayers, before making the sign of the cross, stood by the window and looked out for a long time. Then, first crossing himself over the shoulders, he blessed, with his hands in the air, from his room, all the cornfields, forests and fishing waters as well as the people working in the fields and the pasturing flocks in the fields of Klonick. It was often this way. Drinking his coffee, Father Piotr lit up a beautiful smoking pipe on a long cherry pipestem, with a big expensive amber, a gift from the deceased benefactor, and inhaling a couple times he leaned back to the back of the chair and started to doze off. In his sleep, he usually dreamt something and murmured “Ho! Ho!”… and he pointed with his right hand, which he always did, whenever he talked vigorously or remembered something from the past. He also had a lot to dream about.

His childhood was really, “tranquil, angelic.” In the Zalany he served under Father Konstanty; a few years of emigration, a long journey, and finally several decades in the service of God, difficult and done in a soldierly manner, without vacations, and done dutifully. This excellent Ulanian cavalry captain did not become a priest due to a vocation…he admitted this openly. “I,” he said many times, “was born, my love, to be a priest just as my girl Wikta, who carries bushels of potatoes on her back, was born to be a ballet dancer. I was young, handsome, Ho! Ho!… not poor, and to that lively, light-headed, empty that…polish nobleman and bachelor. But I found out, my love, where we went wrong. I had a cavalry footman, Sobek, a boy from Zalany, whenever my saber was unpolished or when he did not bring my boots on time I would smack him in the face. My father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather, all of us Zalanians did the same things to our Sobeks for the same infractions. For that reason, my boy ran away before the first battle. For that reason, in the year of forty-six, my cousin Stanislaw was dragged off his horse by his own butler, and the peasants beat him so badly that he was unrecognizable afterward. I decided to go on an expedition for myself and the other Zalanians. I went, my love, to serve those towards whom I felt guilty. Do you think, my love, that it would so easy to abandon everything, the whole world, of which I dreamed, and take up the cassock and head out to a country village? I often thought that I could not stand it anymore, my love. When the Hungarian war broke out, I almost hung up the cassock and rushed out beyond the Carpathian Mountains. But I told myself, ‘You stationed yourself to God for service…so serve!’

The service of God was hard stuff and He doesn’t joke around. When He’s good, He’s good, but when He distributes justice, everyone runs away: even Michael the Archangel, who is a great warrior and defeated the devil, who rattles his saber at his side, before God, he carries it quietly, treading lightly as if he were entering the rooms of the czars. What does that mean for a miserable man or even a canon priest? Ho! Ho! But later I would not abandon my cassock for all the treasures of the world and I would not leave my parish. Yes, my beloved, that which I took up, at first as penance and as an expiation as well, so that I, a gentleman among gentlemen and a cavalry officer, could walk among simple peasantry, I offer my life…my days and nights in sacrifice carried. I came to love all of this. Then I came to love it and those things of God and I started to turn souls to God. I thought to myself: ‘Who am I, with one Klonian soul, which I can prepare so that He, the just and merciful Judge, can forgive a Zalanian, after a year, with one act of purgatorial penance?’ And then, with the mercy of God, I started to love the people, and that love grafted into the Klonian souls.

Tell me, can you see anything more beautiful on Earth than to treasure souls for God, country, and humanity? These Klonian souls, they are rocky and clay-like, but they have fertile soil; they are not bad, they are good. But they are very difficult and we have to, my love, really love them and tolerate them and attest to humanity. If I had not beaten my Sobek so much and, instead, talked to him, then he would not have told me before the first battle, ‘To hell with it !’… and ran off. You see, my love, I can say, with boldness, that that to which I offered my service I fulfilled and I was, I can say this boldly, a good priest and good pastor. If you had predicted this to me sixty years ago, when I rode a grey Turkish mare for Jadwiga Karsnicka, and than stole her away on that very horse, God forgive me, for my friend Hilary Roszczewski, or that they would bury me in a tomb with a cassock when I thought that I would go down in a general’s uniform in the valley of Jozefat. Ho! Ho! Man shoots and God carries the bullet. Ho! Ho! Where is Mr. Dzięgelewski?” The old priest could not stand to be more than a few hours away from Mr. Dzięgelewski.

Father Piotr discussed everything with Mr. Dzięgelewski. They talked about sheep and politics and ended with astronomy and metaphysics. He bantered with him and hit on his Saraczkian noble dignity, turning his gossip into flowers, which for at least thirty years would always end with the same results. Father Piotr liked him a lot. The parsonage was like Noah’s ark. Other than ordinary house animals, Father Piotr had a small zoo in which deer, rabbits and more sociable geese lived in exemplary agreement. The supervision of this menagerie and over the garden was entrusted to elder men and women, as well as the crippled and orphans who were found in the area. Father Piotr gathered all the poor and raised them. Himself needing very little, because his biggest expenses were nice shoes and cassocks, to which he had a weakness, and having from the parish and from himself a significant capital, he fed and clothed a whole legion of the poor. “My neighbor,” he said, “Father Wajdzik, when the church in Nowosiołek was being renovated, would forbid his painters to walk about the scaffolding because some of them could fall out the window, and windows are expensive; one cent destroys another, the dog will not be given up for butter, so that after his death, the peasants will cover the church with metal sheets and put up a new bell, and I say that I would do that better. Because God does not care about the metal sheets of the church but cares about what kind of souls are praying in the church. If the bell is higher or lower doesn’t matter: only that the hearts of men are being carried to heaven. In my church, we manage to fix something here and there.

But the mouth of the orphan is more important than the hole in the Church boards.” Father Piotr had a large shady garden, in which a lot of trees, nowadays already grown out and planted with his own hands, have sat for half a century in the Klonian parish. He knew a lot about fruit, he grew them as a gift to the benefactor and neighbors. He also had an abundance of flowers. Whenever he was around them, he always talked to them. He praised one, another he scolded, and on others he took pity. One of them, a narcissisius bloomed so much that it would fall over. Father Piotr would say, “Wait, I will support you. Yes…now it will grow better for you. Take care! Yes! That mischievous sunflower, it wants to rule everything. God knows what he thinks! And what of the imported tulips, or the pineapple. You, bindweed, why are you clamoring up here? Look. It will climb on the fence. As if it lacked a pole. What evil will these honest peas be lead to! Just try! These lilies, how beautiful! You asters should not push so much. Ho! Ho! I know you. Supposedly you were not by the lancers! Ho! Ho!”

Father Piotr, in the summer, liked to go out to the rectory’s garden entrance, sit down on a bench under an old yew tree, and look out over the world. From here he saw the golden wheat, the dark forests; wild ducks swam in the lake, blackened in the ripples of the whirlpool; above him hung a heron with long wings and a flock of screeching lapwings and the lake stretched out deep into the country: quiet, dreamy, with the wind causing light waves.

Father Piotr looked and looked and immediately differentiated the wheat from the meadows, the lake from the woods, but slowly the whole large and varied world started to blend in, mix, and morph into a single florescent color. It seemed to Father Piotr, as if he did not see the real world, but rather the soul of the world: some vapor or fog: the colors that carry the earth rather than the earth itself. And then this vision became lost, more so to the soul than to the eyes, and then a breeze of warning, taking out the memory of pictures, sometimes seen; forgetfulness took him over as did contemplation. And occasionally, by the thought of the elderly housekeeper sending the old man’s favorite, seven-year-old Ignaś Zajda, woke him out of deep thought, pulling him by the cassock:

“Reverend Father”

“Uh… What?”

“Was the Reverend Father sleeping?”

“Uhm, I had a little doze”

“Mrs. Housekeeper told me to run and ask if Father would come?”

“Alright, alright, we will go soon.”

“Reverend Father!”

“Now what?”

“Does Jesus walk in heaven the way the Reverend Father does on earth?”

“Yes.”

“Is he barefoot?”

“Of course. Why would he wear shoes up there when it’s warm? ”

“Is he big?”

“Ho! Ho! Like the world! ”

“When lightning strikes, does it come out of the toes in his feet?”

“Of course, of course!”

“Is he good?”

“Ho! Ho! Like Honey! ”

“Is honey good?”

“Did you not try it?”

“And God the Father?”

“God the Father is also good.”

“Is he better?”

“No, the same, the same.”

“Is he big?”

“Yes, like Jesus.”

“Mrs. Housekeeper told me to run and ask if Father would come?”

“Alright, alright let’s go!”

“Then let’s go. Let me have your hand. Slowly, because you’re old. ”

And Ignacy took Father Piotr’s hand and they went together along the path to the rectory, talking copiously and seriously along the way. Occupied with the service of God and man, and heavily occupied was the vicar who would study theology day and night, which was a help for him, and he did not have a lot of time to think about death, especially since he had claimed for a long time that God would sustain him until one hundred years of age.

One autumn evening, when the sun was setting, the last violet patches were falling in the dark heavens, Father Piotr, who for a long time had sat in silence on the garden porch, seemingly dozing, turned his head to the seated organist, and said in a more serious than usual tone:

“Mr. Dziegielewski, it seems to me that it’s time to go!”

“If I dare ask, go where?”

“Further than the parish chancery. There.” and he pointed with his hand toward the whitening wall of the nearby cemetery.

Dziegielewski tossed his head,

“Father is talking nonsense! Truthfully speaking, it’s unbecoming. Pff! In the wrong hour....”

“You’ll see, Mr.Dziegielewski, Klonian organist, that it’s time to go. It’s time, I will have to give God back these thirteen.”

“O! O! I would prefer that the Revered Father would not say such sad things!”

“ Oh, it’s time already. I confessed this morning, as if I was already aware, and I received Holy Communion. I am ready. We can still send for the vicar with apologies because he probably is sitting over “Summa Theologica” or “Imitation of Christ.” We should be making those kinds of canons, not those old absurdities. Listen, but not to me, but to the world. Can you hear the buzzing? It seems to me, that I can hear the turning of the giant machine which God built and is eternally maintaining. They are turning on the axes of the planets and sun, everything goes along its roads and buzzes. The whole world is buzzing. And He, the eternal builder and machinist, listens and rejoices. Think only, Mr. Klonian organist Mateusz Tymoteusz Dziegielewski from the house of Chicory, what an enormous and wonderful buzz it must be. Think of the windmill of Kuba Michałow from Zardzawica; there must be a thousand or a million of such windmills. Ho! Ho! Like all the waves of the Atlantic and all the winds of the Sahara put together. Listen only…”

“I’m listening, Father”

“Can you hear?”

“I can hear how the wind blows about in the garden”

“What about the buzzing of the world? Can you hear the giant machine?”

“No, I’m sorry, Father.”

Father Piotr was quite for a while and then he started to talk:

“Can you open, my esteemed organist, that window from the north? May as much of the scent of the field come in. There, there, if the merciful God, and the beautiful world, and the choirs of angels, and the victorious heavens can be a great miracle, but the Klonian fields will not be, there will not be the scent of my parish garden. Eternity is long, but even the dog will not survive fifty years. Make sure these young elms are supported and that the peas will be well wrapped with hay for the winter. Ho! Ho! Such a smell has never been as there is now in Klonia, Mr. Dziegielewski.”

“At your service, Father”

“Is the moon coming up?”

“Supposedly.”

“Is it clear? Because it hurts to look up.”

“It’s clear.”

“Praise be to God. I would not want to die in bad weather.”

“What does Father…”

“Silence, Mr.Dziegielewski, organist, quiet. The moon will light up the soul, and go down the lit road. It’s good if it’s from the porch. It’s almost as if it were from the field. In our house, few people slept in beds. They retired in the fields. It’s good that they finished, because who knows what would be with them. The cat sleeps nobly on the bed, without nobility in his soul. Yes, Mr. Dziegielewski.”

“I’m listening, Father.”

“You will dress me in a new cassock, the one with silk lining, a silk sash, the golden pin from Korabia, new shoes will be polished, the canon chain around my neck, and the military insignias on my chest. Leave the signet ring on my finger, may it go with me. You will put flowers on me, a lot of thyme, because it smells well, narcissus on my head and my saber, esteemed Dziegielewski, will be broken because I am the last of my line. Why are you crying Mr.Dziegielewski?”

“Uh-uh, because Father is tearing up my heart.”

“Well you know what, Mr.Dziegielewski, it’s a shame to break the saber. Just quietly, so that the vicar doesn’t see it, put it in the folding. The crucifix will go in the hands; I’m just a priest, but with a saber on the side. Can you feel the smell of the garden, Mr.Organist?”

“I can feel it, Father”

“The will is there, in the desk. Everything is in place. Make sure that you, Mr. Dziegielewski, always water the flowers in their flowerpots and watch over the garden. Don’t sell or chase out anything. There are funds for everything. There is stuff for the old men and women, for the orphans and cripples, for the menagerie, for Marcin and Zagraj. Everything should be as it was until it dies, grows, or moves out. I had one heart for the whole world. “The deer without goats, are worth as much pity as a small child”. God created everything, loves everything, and knows about everything. Mr.Dziegielewski!”

“What is Father commanding?”

“The pipe with Marie Antoinette and the brown inkpot with Napoleon should be given to the vicar. From my fortune, there will be funds for a school, and for you, Mr. Dziegielewski, I have willed two calves, ten thousand and a little more sheep, and here you have my tortoise-shell, ruby snuffbox, to remember about the old priest.”

“Father!”

“And don’t kneel before me and don’t kiss me on the knees. For shame, we are all equal. Because I have more, I give to you. It should be that way and that’s that. And don’t cry like that, because you will wake people up. Having worked all day, they need their sleep. I too worked half my life and must go to sleep. And anyway it seems strange. Supposedly one knows that one will die, and yet it is strange. Tomorrow man may no longer be here, and here for one leaf to fall from the linden tree or even one blade of grass to wither… After all, everything came out of one God and lasts with God…‘vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!’[[1]](#footnote-1)…They will remember for a year or two, than they will forget…Let it be, so long as the merciful God does not forget. The rest is nothing. How vividly I remember when I came here on the first day, walking along the ironwood path. Such were the paths as nowadays: extensive and buzzing. Fifty years, half a century ago...I don’t want to believe that the wheat grows the same, however it will…so many years…who did I baptize and who did I bury. Oh how bright it is!”

Between the leaves, which densely grew around the porch, there started to shine a careful moonlight, quiet and silver, hanging on the leaves, and looking down. The sweep of the wind, moving the leaves, as if it concealed and revealed its eyelids. Father Piotr looked up for a while, and then his head fell down to his chest, and Mr.Dziegielewski, whose fat tears rolled down his moustache, heard as the old man whispered,

“There is nothing, there is nothing, it’s time to go. Now it is evening, tomorrow it will be morning, but one has to. How the moon looks down on me. As if it foreshadowed heaven for me. But who knows…I was never afraid of anything…I looked death in the eye, and it was awful for me…Lord, be merciful to this sinner. Lord, be merciful to this sinner. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. And blood is on my soul!”

He dropped his head even lower onto his chest and was silent for a while, suddenly he lifted it and said with a strong voice, “Esteemed Dziegielewski, when they sing Requiescat in pace, have them fire from all the parish mortars. I remember how in Olsztyn, a dragoon officer riding for me, how I will slap him! But that was in a good affair, Mr. Dziegielewski…that wick is correctly put in the lamp before the Sorrowful Mother of God…Yes.”

After that, Father Piotr closed his eyes and started to dream, but it seemed to the organist as if the old man’s head fell down lower and that his breathing was weaker and weaker. This lasted for some time, until Mr.Dziegelewski was worried and was going to get up, to call the housekeeper, when the clock struck twice for nine thirty and little Ignacy Znajda appeared at the door, coming to the porch from the hallway. He approached Father Piotr’s chair and tugging at his cassock he said, “Reverend Father. Let’s go! The housekeeper told me to hurry and asks that the Reverend Father go to sleep. Let’s go! Slowly, because you’re old, Reverend Father! - But then Father Piotr did not move nor did he reply. At that time, Ignaś lifted his big eyes toward Mr.Dziegielewski and asked; “Mr. Organist, did the Reverend Father die?”

How do you like this story, dear radio listeners? How simple, true, pleasant, and human? Does it not contain in it a certain lesson for all of us? Do we Poles, here in America, in spite of an adverse or even openly hostile conditions, not squabble and fight with each other? If not physically, than at least morally? Do we not divide into groups and camps, thereby weakening ourselves? When we have more than others, do we share with them? Do we help them and comfort them? Do we have pity on those less fortunate than us? Do we see our compatriots as equal to us? After all, they are our fellow countrymen; they are the sons and daughters of esteemed and hard-working fathers and virtuous god-fearing mothers. Why, and once again, why do we not show them more warmth from the heart? More Christian piety and more Christ-like mercy? There will come a day when we, looking into the eyes of death, we will be forced to whisper: “God, be merciful to a sinner. And injustice, wrongs, and tears are on my soul.” And then? And then, truly, woe for our souls.

1. Ecclesiastes 1: 2 New American Bible. Annotation added by PKC [↑](#footnote-ref-1)