November 1, 1953

Dear Fellow Countrymen and Countrywomen. I greet you with the words: Praised by Jesus Christ!

My first talk at the opening of a new season of the Program of the Rosary Hour will be short. I expect that it will also be interesting. It is not taken from some old moldy tome but from the life of man, who was lost in Warsaw at the beginning of the Second World War, and so it happened not too long ago in 1939. This happening was told to me by the late Father Peregrin Haczela who was the late Provincial of our Cracow Province, when, in 1923, I visited Poland, and stayed about a week at our convent in Warsaw. The information about the death of the person who played the main role in this event came to me from a Polish officer in London in 1923. I begin.

A certain Polish Officer who was dismissed from Army service at the end of the war returned to his family after his tour of duty to Gdynia, where his mother, a virtuous, pious elderly lady still lived. Her son, an officer, left home a believer but came back as an unbeliever. He returned as an atheist. In his service in the war he not only lost his faith but every trace of it. He returned an atheist. He did not however pride himself in his atheism. No. He had too much respect for his mother; he did not wish to disappoint her. Every Sunday, he got up early and left the house ostensibly to go to Church but he went to the shore, sat and went fishing for a couple hours. He hid his fishing gear with a drunkard who lived near the shore. That behavior lasted for a few months. It so happened that the local Pastor, shortly after Easter visited some elderly people in that area. He visited the elderly lady who didn’t know what the Officer was doing. In the chain of conversation the Pastor bewailed the fact that there son, the Officer was not attending Mass and had not done his Easter Duty. At that the elderly mother was mortified and saddened. At length she burst into tears. When her son came home she confronted him on his bad behavior. She reminded him of his pious father and his early years of innocence and his First Holy Communion. She begged him and in the end reprimanded him with bitter words. Her son, the ex-officer, had that much honor that he didn’t lie but opened up about his absence of faith. Despite his mother’s plea, he could not bring himself to ret urn to his faith. She begged him to return to the faith of his fathers for then she could die in peace. He pleaded with her, that after she died to communicate to him so he could believe that there is a life after death. She died. She was buried. He was at the cemetery but stood far away from the casket and the grave. He never returned to the grave. Several days passed and his mother did not appear to him. She gave no sign that there was life after death and so he was not assured that there was life after death. He packed away all of his mother’s effects and returned to his prior atheism.

And his lived a faithless life as before. He lived without God and without people. They looked at him with suspicion. And so he remained in that state when one and two years passed. One Sunday early in the morning, our ex-officer sat by the water with fishing rod in hand and smoking one cigarette after the other and tried his luck at catching a fish. No response. Then suddenly a sharp tug at his line! He sharply tugged at the rod and it went flying behind him. He turned suddenly to see what kind of fish he had caught. On the hook was a small perch. It didn’t interest him but on the path to the water the figure of a woman appeared walking toward him. On the first glance at the figure of the woman, he noted that she was wearing dress similar to one of his mother and a dress that he had threw away after he got rid of her belongings. He was taken aback and couldn’t stop looking at the figure. There were tears in her eyes. She held a rosary in her hand. The figure stood before him. He remembered his words about her appearing to him and telling him whether there was life after death. What was the effect upon this recalcitrant son? He converted from his former way of life. He reconciled himself with God by going to confession. From that time on he led a faithful life. He became a practicing Catholic. Today we are celebrating the feast of All Saints and tomorrow we recall those days when we celebrate All Souls. Are we actually profiting spiritually from these feast days. We can learn what we want to learn from the season. Let us look at the example of those who have gone before us and whom we wish to admire. What they have accomplished with their inner lives, is it not a possibility for us? We can. But we do not want to since it necessitate blood, sweat and tears. We rather choose the dance instead of the work or even to go to the cemetery to give tribute. For s all without exception there is death, the grave and eternity. An eternity we work out for ourselves, an eternity that we earned!