November 17, 1940

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

On the occasion of my visit to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, which is overrun these days by cultural barbarians, I was a witness of various scenes. I had seen things about which I never even imagined. I heard accounts, which I had repeated a various meetings and which touched on the unbelievable. Listeners had accused me of exaggeration. I had witnessed poverty in all of its brutal nakedness. I saw the underfed, hungry, bare-footed and naked. I saw those who were in fear and enervated. I saw those who were burdened, those who were deathly ill and dying of malaria, typhus or dysentery. In the midst of this need and suffering, I did not detect dissatisfaction and even despair. Why? The crowds of immigrants have a strong faith and know how to pray. From the above encounters of which I witnessed, and which lifted me up and those which depressed me, I wish to read the following: One Saturday I had, as a guest, a Polish government official. He was of mild and peaceful disposition. After a lengthy and sincere conversion, this ex-minister addressed me with the following advice: tomorrow is Sunday and you, Fr. Justin, should visit churches attended by the Polish people for devotions. They paint an extraordinary picture worth seeing. I informed the official that I indeed already was in those churches except one, namely an Italian church on the boulevard. We then spoke of my having mass in the chapel of the Sisters of Mercy. After breakfast we would gather and go to the Italian church to be with others at a High Mass. And so, on a wintry December Sunday, we go. In spite of the fact that it was just about 10 o’clock and a heavy fog had rolled in. Rain together with a chill was in the air. A few blocks from the church, I saw hundreds of people beside the walls and at the front doors of the church. When I stood alongside them, I noted that these poor people, thin, emaciated, in their poor clothing, worshiped and prayed earnestly. The minister made way for me and I entered the side doors of the church which was filled with people. These poor immigrants knelt in their pews. Each held either a rosary or a prayer book. Their faces were peaceful; they were recollected. After the Gospel, a young priest gave a short talk. The congregation’s eyes were fixed upon him as if they wanted to peer inside the soul and heart of the speaker. He finished. He turned to the altar and began the creed. The choir accompanied with the organ. Someone intoned the petitions. The congregation took up the melody: Holy God, Holy almighty, holy, and eternal. They sang with saddened and beseeching voices. When however they came to the words “from air, fire and war, their song ceased. All cried. Women cried; men cried. They cried aloud. I could hardly stand the scene. It was with difficulty that I maneuvered outside the church. At last the Mass ended. The priest knelt at the foot of the altar and said the prayers for the souls of the suffering and intoned: “Boze cos Polskie:. The organ accompanied the melody. No voice was heard. It seemed that, in the imagination, the crowd relived the entire burden of their predicament which came upon them suddenly, unexpectedly, like a summer storm, breaking, destroying, ruining everything in its path. Instead of singing a song, they wept. Their tears were large, warm and bitter, flowing down their cheeks and into Bucharest’s soil. I have never in my life heart such earnest and beautiful praying as the supplication of these displaced people. It leads me to my talk:

WHY PRAY?

When I look at our society, I see confusion, doubt, discouragement, helplessness. I see that even amidst our plenty there is a certain emptiness – dissatisfaction. And whether I like it or not, my imagination takes me back to yesteryear. I pass through years when our forefathers came to the United States. Some were prompted to come here because of hunger. A lack of bread threw them upon the shores of America. Others journeyed here to shun political persecution. Discomforting was their lot, like forest animals. They left their native land to save their lives. Others temporarily left their families, because the enemy wished to abandon their God and to take away their native tongue. They could not tolerate that. They could not agree to it. And so they took all of their possessions and earnings. The packed them into a chest or suit case and headed for foreign lands. They went to aliens, without knowledge of their traditions and tongues. After arriving, they faced difficulties and hindrances, annoyances, shame and contempt. They were offered hardship in the work available. They took advantage of their stick-to-it-iveness and sincerity. They were paid negligible wages. They earned their bread through sweat and tears. Despite this, they survived without being totally discouraged. Where did they get the strength to persevere? God was the source of their strength because they believed in Him! Also, love of family which they loved above all here on earth. Their entire life revolved around home and family. Prayer was their means because they needed it most and wanted it to be effective. They understood the worth and need of prayer. And prayed they did!

A few months ago, I was returning from Chicago to Buffalo. I went to the smoking car. I was alone until some intelligent person came to me. You could tell from his facial expression that this was an uncommon person. He lit his pipe. He looked at me with a searching look. Naturally, after a few opening remarks, he steered the conversation to the topic of religion. He was a protestant minister who journeyed throughout the world. He gave his impressions of the people and places he had visited. One example he had given struck my fancy. He spoke of the worth of prayer and how it changed people’s outlook on the world.

Having a job in a small hamlet near the city of Boston, where during the summer, American tourists spend a great deal of their time, I observed their habits and the manner of doing business. One found among them a variety of behaviors, good, negligent and evil. The greater percentage, however, were the latter. It is not to wonder, since when there is a lot of gold, there is less of God. Often in their work one met derision and ridicule. There was, however, among them a family which, although had a great deal of riches and material possessions, had a deep and abiding faith. After forty years of marital life and after bringing up three sons and one daughter, an industrious and well known wife, who was called by the Father to eternal life. At the funeral, the widower paced unsettled and nervous. He couldn’t bring back his former peace and satisfaction. About a month later he asked the minister for an important meeting. The minister went to him the same evening. The disconcerted man went through the threshold of a veritable palace. The floors were covered with thick carpeting; the appointments in furniture and decorative items were from foreign lands. In a word there was nothing to be wanted that was purchasable. The widower was in good humor. With a smile on his lips, he greeted the pastor saying: ´No doubt dear sir that you marvel at my invitation. However let me tell you the reason that I wanted to see you: listen; just about forty years ago right after the wedding I made an agreement with my atheist wife: Every evening after work we both kneel by the bed and recite certain short prayers. I was convinced that she was better than I was and that God would more quickly hear her prayers rather than mine. She recited the prayers and I would repeat after her quietly while holding her hand. We practiced that for forty years, praying like little children. I guess God liked it because he helped us along and we lived in agreement and in peace. We raised the children to be responsible adults; our savings increased. Then after a short suffering she left us, and went to the Father. I walked around despondent for several days. I didn’t know what to do. Last night I knelt by the bed saying the prayers, forgetting that my wife was not with me. It seemed that some unseen hand was holding mine tightly. Then I felt a new energy and a feeling not to worry but to live on working and remembering that there is good work to be done. That is why I wanted to see you and tell you what prayer accomplished in my life. A similar situation may take place in your life, my dear listener. How sparingly people pray in their own lives. It is why the world is in such sad shape. Look at the sun; look at the moon. All creation declares the might of the Lord. Yet human beings and only human beings forget about their God, turn away from Him and discard Him.

Listen, do you really want God to force you to pray? I would advise you not to wait for that moment to happen. Sincerely! Would you want to wait until God shoots you with flash of great misfortune or sickness? Isn’t it less peril-less to bend the knee, bow the head, fold your hands and cry out: Our Father, who art in Haven! Isn’t it more reasonable to live with God rather than without God or more insanely to live against Him? I throw out a more significant question to those who live thankless lives in regard to the Creator of life and the savior of every being on earth. Would it suffice to throw away the whole gamut of our earthly being? In a flash of an eye, peace is gone, doubt rips the soul into shreds; our happiness ends, and in the end the moral and physical fiber of life goes to nothing. Would not this catastrophe of being end by a simple talk to God? Prayer is the answer. It is expected by every parent of a child. The son or the daughter cannot and doesn’t know how to solve a problem. What do they do in such a case? They easily go to their parents. The child sincerely presents the problem with a hope for help. A wise parent patiently hears the problem, gives advice and willingly helps to solve it. Why? Because the parent knows how to solve it, is able to solve it and wants to solve it. And it is in this way the child sees the way open to live a normal and ordinary life. The parent is satisfied with giving advice and help to the child whose well-being the parent always hopes for, cares about, and plans. Why is it that we do not use a similar way to behave in regards to God? After all, the child comes willingly. It doesn’t require super-human effort. What is sufficient is the feeling of humility, helplessness, and belonging from the seeker. And He who created the world, this all wise Being who runs the world and in His justice will be the Judge.

Besides do we not have reasons to come close to God and thank Him for personal graces obtained. You may say , “Thank Him for what? Well and Good, but listen. You have a life and health and work. You have a family, a wonderful wife and good kids. Is not that something to be thankful for? There are, therefore, reasons to pray. If you have all these good things, do you not want to keep them around as long as you can, true? Certainly you have experienced seeing others like you on whose life the sun has suddenly set. Strong winds appeared, storms, lightning and thunder. They have rerouted life, destroyed health, broke up families. As health deteriorated so did happiness, misfortune brought illness, unhappiness and death. Where do you have the conviction from that you will not come across such tempests in life? Who told you that tomorrow, in a week or in a month your will have work? Health? Stop looking so far into the future, don’t go further than tomorrow! I will ask you this question” Do you know for certain that you will be alive tomorrow. That in the next twenty four hours darkness will dim your life if it comes across the door sill of your home? That death will put out her skeletal bones and take away some important and dear person, leaving you helpless. But there is a superhuman and ever-present Being to whom we all belong. Do you not think that it would be important and worthwhile thing for you to come closer to that Almighty Being and communicate with Him in matters pertaining to your well-being as well and to those you love. You ask how? The answer is clear: through prayer. Through a sincere and plain prayer.

Long ago, very long ago someone wrote this: How exceedingly unthankful is the human person, who in his laziness drops his hands while the whole world works for him. The sun and moon constantly work for him, giving him warmth and light; the earth brings forth food, the bee makes honey; the sheep its wool; the cow, her milk; the grape vine, her wine. All creation serves mankind and fulfills his needs…but he occasionally does not think to thank God who brings him all these good things. What is then to do? Nothing more than to give prayerful thanks.

On the last Sunday of October we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Why? In order to remind ourselves, not only Catholics and believers but the whole world, all human beings that the One who created the world, cares for it. The One who said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” It is a sad truth that in the last twenty five years, the world in the name of humanity, not only spoke out but shouted, “We do not want Him to rule over us.” With what result? We have so much chaos in the world today but in reality, Sodom and Gomorra. People forgot that everything and everyone belongs to Christ. All of creation should be dedicated to Christ. And the way is through prayer!

Three years ago, I was called on a sick call. I was surprised to be called to a section of the city where few Poles resided. What was more surprising was that the name was not Polish. Nevertheless, not caring about these factors, I made nothing of it. It was important that I minister to the sick. I entered the car in which the son picked me up. As we journeyed forth, no word was spoken. I was quiet also. After fifteen minutes, we arrived at an apartment house. The son led me to the main door. I entered without a word. We went to an upper floor. In a waiting room sat three girls and two young men. They rose in greeting me. One of the girls broke silence, showing me the room and saying in English: “My father is in there.” Please go in for he is anxiously awaiting you.”

I entered the room. An elderly man lay in bed. His face was emaciated. His countenance indicated doubt and sadness. His eyes looked like burning coals. The man was suffering; it was easy to see. He spoke to me in excellent Polish motioning toward a chair for me to sit close to his bed. “Please sit down and listen to what I have to say.” There was an urgency about the way he said it. He props himself up in bed and begins: “Listen. I arrived in America fifty years ago. I took to work. In spite of difficult times, I began to earn more and more. The more I encountered success the more I dedicated myself to God. The more I had the more I reached for. In time I left the district I was in and changed my name. I did not give my wife any grief over how she was to bring up the children. In the end, I myself began to neglect my prayers. I lost my wife two years ago. When dying she begged me to give a good example to the children as my parents taught me. I was neutral in my response. But I kept thinking about it. Finally I decided to do what she asked of me. Now, when I need to spend days and nights in bed, I have to time to think of what God did for me despite the fact that I got rid of God and forgot about Him. In order to regain peace of conscience, and in order to die peacefully I wish to confess in the tongue with which I was born and learned on my mother’s lap.” The sick man breathed deeply and sadly. I looked at his face. His cheeks glistened with tears. He began his confession. Believe me, I have never seen a heart as crushed as his. The savior must have smiled at the sight of this prodigal son gone wrong. Who knows whether the prayers of his wife and children did not bring him to this state of mind. Two days later he left this life peacefully with a smile on his blanched lips.

O that all would want to understand that prayer is useful and necessary for everyone. The Lord would more quickly have mercy on this world. And the star proclaiming peace would shine more brightly. And so, let us all pray, all without exception. As an example let us take the words of a polish soldier from Rumania: “We gave our all in what we were up to giving, and even though we were experiencing deprivation, the spirit within us did not break and we are ready for further sacrifices. We await with spiritual certainty and faith in the victory and we offer daily prayers to God, each day in the hope that, at last, will come a day when we will vocally intone “Te Deum”!