November 24, 1940

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

Several months ago I attended a gathering of young Americans of Polish descent. It matters little where or when it was. The gathering consisted of about 200 persons ranging from eighteen to thirty years old. Few of them were married. The greater part of them were single working persons. Whoever saw this group would say that they were engaged. New fashioned elegance was in view. The new-fangled style is often only a mask which covers up animalism and baseness. You don’t need to uncover the mask totally, just lower it to diagnose its externality. The entire gathering gave away a certain nervousness and lack of peace. The faces were anonymous with clipped lips and clouded brows and an attitude bordering on audacity and revolt. It was an unappealing atmosphere. Basically it was distasteful and unwelcoming. There is, with me, a satisfaction hob-nobbing with our youth, when they are themselves, namely, happy, sincere and off the cuff, without adding a certain rebelliousness apparent in facial expression. I felt like leaving the gathering. It was difficult for me to mix in with this crowd. Before the meeting as was usual, those present would get into small groups for small talk. I walked among the groups several times; they were all known to me. Talking with one group, my ear was ready to hear what the conversation was in another group. You would think that, considering what goes on in the world today, and the death occurring in the war, would mold the mind of youth in a mature way. Listen to the sentences whose sound found their way to my ear. One of the young ladies said, “What’s it to us to know what happens in Europe. They made their soup, let them drink it. I won’t support it with one penny. I need the money to get me through the winter.” That was a statement to a well-fed lady dressed in finery.” Another remarked, “my old lady still has brothers and sisters in Poland. Se caqn’t eat or sleep. She turns our heads about them, that they she is not hearing anything from them. I am not interested in European affairs. It is all so far away.” A third said even more cynically, “I don’t care what’s happening there. I want to get all I can from this life. I live for that.” And further without end and without sense. But on to my talk, entitled:

COLD STONES; HUMAN TURTLES

It is scary when one has to hear words spoken by those who ought to have a compassionate and merciful heart about the suffering and poverty of one’s brothers and sisters. How can people think only of themselves of their personal needs and comfort when millions of women, mothers and wives as well as their children daughters and sons wander without food or roof over their heads like animals hiding and spending time in holes and woods hiding from the enemy chasing them without mercy. Every honest and noble person is conscious of his neighbors plight. And natural law and God’s law demands it. Besides, every human being as an individual does not live for himself. He is a social being. Therefore, he should live for others and not just for himself like ***a turtle*** in its casing. Are the three young ladies who so brutally spoke of the war in Europe and its impact on society aware of this? Are they rather hardened self-loving when their hearts should be warm in thinking of their brothers and sisters in such dire circumstances. They hear not the voices of mothers and their children in time of need. But listen to a letter from Poland sent by ship. The letter is written by women, Polish mothers. You probably could call it, in reality, the plea of Polish mothers. Listen, and see if it doesn’t bring a tear of sadness to your eyes at the plight of our sisters who suffer. I read: “The works of man are filled with blood and tears. But the Calvary that we go through has not yet been known to history. We suffer as Catholics, Poles, mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters – we suffer in all kinds of emotional responses. Our husbands, our brothers and fathers lost their lives in mass murders, which numbered into the tens of thousands. Our sons, the future and pride of the nation also are lost like their fathers, they are sent to work camps deep into Germany from where no one returns. Our daughters, our youngest girls the joy of our lives, are taken from the street or from their homes at night and driven to German public houses. Our youngest, innocents, just born never get to seek the comforts of our arms. Move the hearts of women in a free America. Tell them of the hell, which our Fatherland has found itself in in these last months. The destruction that the Germans inflicted on us was just the beginning. As the walls of are homes were falling from the bombardment, while we hunted for protected places which we could not find, when after the bombing, we hunted through the rubble to find our beloved ones, when we only found body parts, while the Germans put out hunting parties to capture the homeless in the towns and villages, it was just the beginning. When the sounds of our armies silenced, the German machine guns shot and rounded up thousands of our countrymen. Then came the swish of clubs beating, breaking noses, teeth and poking out eyes. Mass arrests began and deportation to work camps. Then began the evacuation from their homes to hunger and cold, millions of people. Then began the organized, unpunished robbery, and destruction of everything Polish. Our national treasures, artwork, schools and museums were robbed of their goods and sent to Germany or the Soviet Union. Our factories and workshops are taken away and given to the Germans or are ruined, or socialized by the Russians. Our churches are ruined or closed; our spirituality attacked. Our fathers, husbands and brothers are murdered; they die in prisons or are shipped to Siberia and forced to work without pay like prisoners of old. Among them are even some teenage children. And a great deal of our girls are sent to public homes for soldiers. Not one mother there was who would not want her daughter to live facing what she had to go through. Everything that the Germans say about the Polish people living quietly and in peace is a lie. 3,000,000 of us have died since September. Polish women! Cry for help. We have the right to call on women of every civilized nation, because Polish women have worked diligently to promote women’s rights and cultural enhancement. We have a right to cry out about justice because you, sisters may be proud of your culture. We were the first in Europe not to give in to the Germans and let them take the land they wanted. The entire nation dedicated itself to battle in defense of freedom and honor. The nation, traitorously attacked, was not prepared for war, for it was attacked from three sides, with no Maginot land, or fortress, and because of the further traitorous action of the Soviets who from the forth side assailed with a million soldiers. It is a nation which still wages war in the woods and muddy areas. This nation, among terrible suffering, hunger and terror in the midst of none who would come to its aid. And so ladies, sisters with head held high with all the emotion you could muster, call out for help for us for we lose our freedom and justice in this world to the Germans.

“Polish Women! Rescue your heroic, tortured nation!”

After listening to this plea uttered with bloody lips – this plea, which is at the same time a prayer of petition, does it not move hardened consciences or stony hearts, and are there no arms of mercy reach out to the unprotected, innocent, brutally attacked, persecuted and undefended. Will you not reach out but in cynical response say, “What’s it to us?”

Please have a bit more patience. I ask your favor. Listen to this:

I speak to a young man, who has a steady and well-paid job. He makes around 40 dollars weekly. He is healthy as a young oak. He has a car and a pricey one at that. He presents himself less of the ordinary worker but looks like an industrialist. Is he content? No way! Always and to his own end, criticizes everything and everyone constantly. He says to me, “Fr. Justin, you care too much and work for Polish causes. You ought to rather work for us here in America. Let the Europeans help the Europeans.” And so, in such a manner, this young American of Polish descent, who hasn’t the faintest idea what cold and hunger mean. I am speaking in the words of a woman from Warsaw who describes her situation: “after all these past months I come to the realization that, in spite of everything, there still exists some kind of personal life. We all submerged our identities in face of the collective suffering. You would not be able to imagine the kind of schooling we have undergone. All our hearts beat in the same rhythm of hatred toward our enemy. Walking the street, I look at “my own”, and only sometimes I detect a glance from one in a green uniform, one of our “protectors.” They walk proudly, armed, and none of them social. Is servitude and imprisonment the sower of depression and pessemism. Did our captors stop being people; they are not even savage beasts? Even savage beasts only attack when hungry or wish protection. The occupier of Warsaw got rid over every restraint. My God! I have written so much about our occupiers and you, who live in the wide, wide world, are making decisions on whose hands we are in. But you have not seen Warsaw; - your eyes have not wept seeing our beloved wounded city. When you return, when for the first time you personally experience it, greeting your home of yore, I will lead you by the hand because I know the way of the cross. We experience it daily. Tell our people to strengthen their souls. Let them return to their country spiritually reborn. There is no place here for personal ambition. It you do not want to be renewed, stay away from the country. We will never be the way we were. The wounds of Warsaw convince us of that. - Now I ask the question: Will you remain “stones” and “turtles?” Good. I continue. “One Sunday, around five in the afternoon, there was a meeting of ten girls and about the same young men, at Mrs. M’s. They chatted over tea. A bell sounded and the gestapo came in. A short barked order: Take off your clothes. One of the young people who experienced the event was deathly ill for a few days. They did not realize what is to come. The execution of 150 defenseless sacrifices in the suburbs of Warsaw. It happens every day. Do not deem that I write you to terrify you or have you think that we are giving up. On the contrary, the entire society with some exceptions is keeping heart. Faith is a common denominator which sees all of it as a temporary processing. We will overcome, even amidst the hunger, the cold, and the illness. - even though there is no work and our streets are roamed by our predators. We wait impatiently for news of our victories. The papers in Warsaw and Krakow make the successes of the enemy in propaganda. But we know that that time is passing. Know that I am with you in thought, and we wait for news from you all in France, the Poles in Canada, the United States or Argentina await for you to tell the world in what sort of circumstances we live who is our occupier and what are his methods.

Those of you who think about your comforts and stay cool hearted about what you brothers and sisters are experiencing, listen yet a while. “In Lwow, the secret police conduct frequent arrests. These prisoners, mainly officers, soldiers, and students are shot or sent to prisons. Those in prison received a glass of warm water daily and a piece of bread, every second or third day. Those arrested have only 15 minutes time to leave their homes. Those who are opposed to do so are packed into trucks like cattle and taken away. Even the sick are required to leave. They are packed into cold railroad cars. News from the occupying Germans becomes more brutal as time goes on. They break up families with members taken from Poznan to the northern areas. Young men and women are torn from their families. The young girls are taken to Germany and their parents are deported to central Poland. They are sent to work camps. Young people are experimented with. The secret police handle these transports. The women’s names are unknown; they are separated by intelligence. Some from Torun returned in terrible shape. In a few hospitals in Poland there are found many girls, who after a monthly stay in a public house in Germany were sent away to be healed. There are more terrible incidents with women in Warsaw. The raids were conducted on the streets as well as in the homes.

In the last expedition of Polish soldiers from France to Great Britain there were men women and children who have been travelling through several countries.

What will my radio audience say about these narratives of brutality. Think, Father, what you would do if at night the gangsters would break into your home; took you from the circle of your family and took you to a work camp. Think, mother, if at this moment the bandits would take you from the family circle to lands unknown? Son or daughter what would you do if you were stolen from you family home and took you away to parts unknown?

I would want to believe that hearts still beat in your bodies. Large, warm, golden hearts. Show your mercy not only in word but in deed. Quick action, practical and sacrificial. The Good God Father of us all will not forget a deed of mercy. He will be mercy and compassion.