**November 7, 1959**

**First Program After the Death of Fr. Justin Figas, OFM Conv.**

Dr. Stefan Graczyk:

In October, in the month dedicated to honor Our Lady of the Rosary, the patron of the Rosary Hour, Father Justin, ended his life here upon this earth. This untiring laborer and God’s champion, preacher for the uncounted number of Rosary Hour listeners; the defender and protector of widows, orphans, the poor, the old, the infirm, he, who so eagerly through 28 years by the help of mysterious and unseen airwaves taught, comforted, soothed by his melodious voice – on the 23rd he was silenced for mortals, so as to finish his prayer and intercession by the throne of God, and to repeat without end “Praised be Jesus Christ.”

On October 23rd, on the streets of Buffalo there was a great commotion, because the news spread with the speed of lightning and soon the whole neighborhood had learned the sad, mournful news which touched the hearts of all, regardless of class, age or religion, that Father Justin had died, that our beloved Father lived no more. Vox populi vox Dei: the common voice of the people was somewhat like the expression of God’s will, that he who had left this world, he who had faithfully tread in the footsteps of his Seraphic Master, Saint Francis, and in his life had climbed to the heights of Christian excellence, merited the sorrow of all hearts with no exception.

On Saturday, October 10th, after six o’clock, Father Justin fell seriously ill. The sick Father Justin was anointed with holy oil. In Mercy Hospital this great follower of Saint Anthony of Padua bore his last illness with angelic and unremitting patience. There were short moments when the doctors noticed a slight improvement, but the illness showed a steady and progressing deterioration. On an autumnal Friday, the 23rd, at 3.30 AM, tired and worn out by so much work, his heart exhausted by the difficulties of life and the effects of a chronic illness, yearning for heaven, without agony, he gave his life up to God, this truly apostolic Father, our warm-hearted Father in the truest sense of the word, after having lived 73 years. Father Justin left this world, dying the death of the just, full of years and merits, fell asleep in the Lord.

The preacher had his last talk on Sunday, April 26 of this year. At the end of his talk, his last words were: “And so I bid you all farewell. I ask for your prayers. May God bless you and your families abundantly everywhere and in everything. Praised be Jesus Christ!” and after the blessing by the Blessed Sacrament, when the announcer said goodbye with the words “Remain in the love of Christ”, Father Justin was visibly tired. When parting with his small group, he said only “May God bless you abundantly.”

During the last three years, slowly, almost without notice, his health deteriorated. This happened slowly, on its own. Days rushed into weeks, weeks closed in months, and suddenly a year passed, before anyone had realized it. The seasons of the year changed, but Father Justin had a subconscious, quiet hope that some unknown, supernatural forces would mysteriously help him.

Apart from broadcasting his program from the chapel of the Saint Francis High School in Athol Springs, Father Justin didn’t leave his cell. In the shadow of approaching death, this quiet and humble friar often said that the most salutary thoughts come to mind in solitude and that is where it is easiest to hear what God is saying to our soul. He also often repeated, holding the rosary in his thin, withered hands, that praying the rosary is the only proven weapon.

With profound emotion, at this moment I turn with my heart and mind to the fresh tomb, and along with Jan Kochanowski I repeat:

“My son, it is right for the wicked man to fear death,

But it is not fitting for the just to be afraid,

Because for the wicked, all is dead for eternity,

Whereas the good man then sails into port.

And you, do not lament my death! I am well,

Void of fear as of hope.

The Grace of God is upon me; do not abandon me,

And never stop being virtuous!

Virtue is rewarded by heaven and eternal bliss;

To hope in this world’s delights is amiss;

In due time, like grass everything ends,

But virtuous fame even after death resounds.

Son, virtue is what you must try for by all means,

I will be more grateful than if tears you shed

Over my grave day and night; know then that

He who once in heaven is found, needs no tears.

And now the Very Reverend Father Jerzy Rozkwitalski, Franciscan Father Provincial of the Province of Saint Anthony will speak:

My Rosary

The hours happily spent

Like a chain of pearls are united

With a prayer each I move…

My rosary, my rosary.

Each pearl is a prayer –

To soothe the tense heart,

Each one I pray, devout,

And end with the holy cross.

Oh my life’s memories are miserable

What I need is the grace of salvation.

I end my holy Rosary

Kissing the cross, kissing the cross.

“The hours happily spent,

Like a chain of pearls are united.”

“Time is a book of life from which we take wisdom; time is the tree of life whose fruits we gather; time is the ladder reaching to heaven upon which we climb upward; time is the treasure in which we find rich merits before the Throne of God.” These were the words used to describe life by the Seraphic Doctor, Saint Bonaventure.

Our life is made up of hours. An hour, in turn, has an eternal value. An hour has as much merit as the good it contains. Every hour in the life of Father Justin was an hour as valuable as a pearl. How beautiful before God must be the long chain of Father Justin’s pearl hours which represent his apostolic life.

He was born in the town of Everson, Pennsylvania. His parents gave him the name Michael, the name of the Archangel who conquered the whole host of devils when fighting withSatan. Already his name, given to him in holy baptism, prophetically points to his future. However, there is no life without crosses. Already at the beginning of his life pearls of God’s providence appeared. Every pearl is born in tears. The illness of polio which touches young Michael doesn’t douse the fire of his Daddy’s faith. His father, Jacub, holding him in his arms, vows to the Blessed Trinity to give his son to God’s service if He heals Michael.

In a family of twelve children – whose Father knew only a few words of English and worked in a mine – poverty reigned. Michael, still young yet now strong, helps his Father with the tiring work of mining. When he turns fourteen, he starts to put into life the holy vow of his Father. Young Michael goes to the school of the Franciscan Fathers. Soon afterwards he goes into the Novitiate where he takes the name:Justin. He finishes his theological studies in Rome where on July 17th of 1910 he is ordained by His Eminence Cardinal Merry del Val, the Secretary of State of the Pope, Saint Pius X. His father, Jakub, too poor to go to Rome and witness this holy moment, kneels with his heart overflowing with happiness, with his eyes wet with tears of joy, kneels in a small parish church in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, thanking the Blessed Trinity for this grace**,** that God accepted the sacrifice of a vow made in the hour of trial. The newly-ordained Father Justin, following the instructions of his superiors, stays another year in Rome, to get a Doctoral Degree in Sacred Theology, as if foreseeing that his future activities would require special preparation.

When he returned to America, Father Fudzinski designated him to be an assistant at the parish of Saint Josephat in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He sets to pastoral work with all his zeal. In the parish, in spite of his young age, he turns out to be the Father of everyone, a talented school teacher, an unusually-gifted preacher, a caring comforter of the sick. Father Fudzinski’s bright eyes look upon the activities of young Father Justin with great satisfaction, and in 1914 he chooses him as the Secretary of the Province of Saint Anthony and his personal advisor. Seven years later, in 1921, the General Chapter in Rome elects him the Secretary of the whole order. Father Fudzinski, foreseeing his own coming death, asks the Father General to release Father Justin from this position, as he was more needed in America. And so from the year 1914 until October 23 of this year, during 45 years he earns a long chain of pearl hours of activity in Buffalo. What pearls of unrivalled value! What hours of happiness for everybody; for those who got to know him, or only met him, for those who needed him, who listened to him either in church homilies or in his radio talks. He was “everything for everybody.” The parishioners in Corpus Christi parish had no words to adequately express their enthusiasm for his talents and his activity as an administrator: painting the Church, making new stained-glass windows, new altars, new organ, and two clubs for young people by the parish. Above all this shines his spiritual activity: his confessional was always surrounded by penitents. Like a magnet he attracts young people to the cloth. In spite of his numerous activities, he always finds time to enjoy recreation with young people, teaching them to play Football or baseball.

In 1923, the Chapter Fathers gathered in Buffalo chose him as Father Provincial of the Province of Saint Anthony. He serves in this position for sixteen years. And so the chain of pearl hours is further lengthened.

With the help of his Drivers in 1925 he builds and funds Saint Francis High School in Athol Springs, New York, which until this day, inspired by his heart and spirit, develops for the good of our young people. In 1926, seeing the necessity of special education for Franciscan seminarians, he builds a monastery in Granby, Massachusetts and to honor the memory of the Very Reverend Father Hyacinth Fudzinski, the Founder of the Province, he calls this school: “The Seminary of Saint Hyacinth”, which today is recognized by the states of Massachusetts and New York as “St. Hyacinth College and Seminary.”

In 1930 in order to fulfill a pressing need for a separate Novitiate House for the Province, he builds and funds the Novitiate of Saint Joseph of Cupertino in Ellicott City, Maryland. This building is imposing in its architecture.

Furthermore, so as not to neglect spiritual matters, Father Justin creates two groups of Missionary Fathers: one group in Ellicott City, Maryland, the other in Hartland, Wisconsin so as to help Polish parishes with special church services, Missions and anytime substitutes are needed.

To maintain and strengthen the Catholic and Polish spirit among the Polish community, he funds a Polish monthly by the title of “Seraphic Chronicle”. He sends his Priests to Polish communities in Canada according to the principle which he always repeated: “Wherever Poles can be found, there we will be too, bringing them religious comfort in the Polish language.”

In the unhappy year of 1939, when the fire of a new world war was ignited in Poland, Father Justin goes to Europe as a member of the “American Committee for Polish Relief”, observing and working with refugees in camps in Hungary and Romania. On his way back, he goes to the Holy Father, gives an account of what happened and requests help for the refugees. At the same time, he goes to his Father General and resigns from the position of Provincial Father in order to be able to devote all his energy, talents and heart to Poles. The Father General accepts his resignation and grants him the highest honor of the order, naming him General Definitor until death with the title Most Reverend. It is no surprise that his heart gave out. So said our Father Justin: “The soul belongs to God. The heart – to Poles!”

“My Rosary - - my Rosary!”

Each pearl is a prayer

To soothe the tense heart.”

Father Justin’s Rosary Hour, during which he soothed so many hearts and led so many souls to devout thoughts and lives had a very humble and modest beginning. The greatest works always begin in quiet and humility. Father Justin’s radio work began when the Kopaliński Brothers, the owners of an electric appliances store in Buffalo, asked Father Justin to speak on their radio program. His talks became so popular, that in response to numerous requests submitted by letter, Father Justin had to broadcast his own program from a local station. Due to his great devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary, Father Justin names the program “Rosary Program.” Hence the current name: “Father Justin’s Rosary Hour Radio Program.” Soon the fame and popularity of this program grow and reach Poles in other cities. Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh are linked together by a radio network called the “Great Lakes Network.” Today the radio network named “Rosary Hour Network” connects 79 radio stations and reaches Poles everywhere in the United States and Canada.

“What I need is the grace of salvation.

I end my Holy Rosary,

Kissing the cross, kissing the cross.”

The Buffalo newspaper “Buffalo Evening News” from October 23 has as its headline: “Father Justin, Kindly Friar of the Rosary Hour is Dead!” And later it reads: “The well-known radio voice of Father Justin became silent today morning, at Mercy Hospital. He emitted well over 750 Rosary Hours to more than five million listeners among the American Polish population. So much for the Buffalo Evening News.

Already two months ago, Father Justin sensed his coming death. He asked Father Klemens Kacprzyński and me to his humble dwelling in the Faculty House of St. Francis High School in Athol Springs, New York. Then he told us of his last wishes, something like a testament. He asked us not to neglect the work undertaken by him. He told us that he surely would not live until the next radio season. And again he asked us to keep the Rosary Hour going: he, for his part, would not stop to intercede before God for its success; he would not stop praying for its listeners. “I will be with you!”

Thirteen days before his death, before Father Justin was taken to the hospital, Father Dezyderjusz gave him extreme unction. It was a Saturday – a day especially consecrated to the Blessed Mother among Franciscans. The beginning of the end was near! He had the best possible medical care. Doctor Graczyk, his doctor for 30 years, watched over him at the hospital as if Father Justin had been his own Father, often from dusk to dawn of the next day. One of the Franciscan Fathers was always by his side. All of the doctors’ knowledge had been exhausted. God in his Providence had other plans. Father Justin said: “God is calling me – he is opening wide the gates of eternity for me.” He started to talk to his school friends who had left for their eternal reward a few years earlier! And again one hears the whispering of a prayer for the further success of the Rosary Hour. He sends up a prayer for the Holy Father, John XXIII. He whispers another prayer for help for the Poles. He doesn’t ask for anything for himself. This lasted until Friday, October 23 when at 3.30 AM in the silence of the night his soul bid farewell to his exhausted heart and went calmly to the gates of eternity. The beating of the great heart stopped completely. His lean body, exhausted by work for God and Poles awaits its place, its earthly repose by the statue of Saint Francis at the Cemetery of Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr in Buffalo, New York.

On Tuesday morning, October 27th at 10 AM Bishop Burke, Bishop of the diocese of Buffalo, in the presence of many diocesan and monastic priests, nuns and the faithful, said a Pontifical Mass in Corpus Christi Church for the repose of his soul, ending with the sign of the Cross!

Prayer for Father Justin

Lord, you who once said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” – we ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, let the kingdom of heaven be his also:

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land” – we ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, let your promise be carried out for him:

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” – We ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, be His comfort:

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” We ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, be his reward for his wearisome toil undertaken in the name of Your justice:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” We ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, show him your mercy:

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.” – We ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, allow him to see Your radiant face through all of eternity:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” We ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, reward Your Franciscan warrior by counting him among the flock of Your bravest Knights of peace:

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” We beg of you, Lord Jesus Christ, reward him by giving him eternal rest in Your heavenly kingdom.

O Immaculate Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, we ask you, intercede for us in these our intentions. Amen.

Now I would like to publicly thank Doctor Graczyk for his devoted care for our Father Justin. Father Justin repeated often that “After God, I am thankful to Doctor Graczyk for making my life longer.”

What about the future? Through all these years Father Justin’s Rosary Hour depended on God’s Providence, and even more so now. Father Justin asked for the work begun by him to be carried out further; he promised he would watch over us. We, the Franciscan Fathers, also promise that Father Justin’s Rosary Hour will not only always have his name, but will be broadcasted and lead in the spirit of Father Justin. Another voice – but the spirit and program will be the same! With the same zeal we will present to you the precepts of our Holy Faith – answer your questions – comfort you and help you as Father Justin did for so many years.

With uncertainty, yes, but most importantly not without faith in God’s Providence, not without faith in your noble hearts we will continue to host this program. That is what Father Justin requested. This seems to us to be God’s Will! As poor friars of Saint Anthony, we ask you for offerings in order to keep up this program, to fulfill the goals and intentions of Father Justin. Your offerings will your and His memorial.

Please address your letters to:

Father Justin Rosary Hour

Station F, Box 217

Buffalo 12, New York.

We will reply to each letter.

Dear listeners!

With the same tenderness and gratitude for the Name and Memory of Father Justin, we grief-stricken fellow brothers say the old Polish “God bless you!” for everything. This program is your program. Your sacrifices helped it come into being, your sacrifices will make it possible to keep Father Justin alive in his Rosary Hour. Through this program, led in the spirit of Father Justin and His favorite patron, Saint Anthony, we have become one enormous Polish Family in the United States and Canada. Let us pray that no one and nothing will ever break the unity of this Family of Father Justin’s!