October 21, 1934

I greet you all, noble countrymen and countrywomen, with the words: Let Jesus Christ be praised.

Through the vacation months I helped our Missionaries. I drove here and there. The work was linked with difficulties and discomforts. However, I did not mind the time spent in the missions. I not only heard things but saw things which will come in handy with the Rosary Hour program. For the most part they were things related to the tragedies of our lives. In them often are played out roles by heroes and heroines. I repeat these characters were not related in the stories of books; not from the imaginations of men but are characters and flesh and blood people like we are. The may be found, not so much among the wise and learned but among the poor. One needs not to seek them in palaces and for flung places. We find them among ordinary people. who not infrequently cannot read and write; we come across them under the roofs of homes which are not adorned with the good things of life but instilled with nobility of soul and heart. They are truly stars, among the black clouds of human life. They ought to serve us as models, for if they have certain virtues, we also are capable of them if we so desire. They ought to present us with incentives to carry our daily crosses and especially those which the Lord's Providence allowed us to incur in these past years. This is the goal of today's talk entitled:

LAZARUS’S OF LIFE

I arrived at larger settlement of Poles Saturday night. In a conversation with the Pastor, a noted and pious priest, we agreed that I would visit the sick of the Parish on Tuesday morning. I would like to relate to you several events which I encountered. Here was a small house and very well taken care of. Here was a tiny kitchen, small rooms, especially the bedroom. The mother met me with a candle in her hand. A kind face, although wrinkled. Life had worked on her aged body. I walk into the bedroom. There lies a young girl. She is about 25 years old, emaciated from suffering. After confession and communion, she speaks to me in a subdued voice: "Father, I would like to talk to you because I am in such straits" - "I am at your service", I sit beside the bed and listen to her pathetic complaint, flowing with sincerity, from a broken heart. Please listen for it is worth listening to. "Father, I have been suffering since I was fourteen years old. My dad died before I reached my twelfth birthday. He left Mom and two brothers. Later, one of the brothers was in the war and he was torn apart by a grenade. Then Mom got seriously ill. I took care of her the best I could. My brother hassled me at every turn, especially when he had something to drink and that was often. In attending to my mother, I encountered a rupture and had to go to the hospital for an operation. From that time there hasn't been a day or an hour when I haven't suffered. I prayed and still pray but evidently my prayers are not listened to, because they are not answered. Father, can you explain to me why God is punishing me and for whom must I suffer? She could not speak further; bitter tears streamed from her while she gasped from her emaciated body. Listening to these complaints, I too found tears in my eyes, the voice stuck in my throat, while I could not find a word in answer to the plight of this child. I tried to cheer her up but I felt in my heart that my words were hardly enough to answer the question: "Why is God punishing me? For whom am I suffering?

I visited another home on my route: a two story house. The sick lady lives on the second floor. I see that there is no bell. I enter and walk up the high, steep stairs. I knock on the door. An elderly lady opens the door. Some kind of sadness covers her brow, and suffering is expressed in her eyes. Again a suffering youth. On her countenance a mysterious smile and peacefulness: surrender to the Providence of God. After hearing confession and giving communion, the mother comes near to me and says in an emotional voice: “Father, I have to complain in our situation because sometimes I think I’ll lose my mind. If only God would give my daughter health, we could help each other. But alas, she cannot work now for two years. Doctors and hospitals have eaten up our reserves resources. We have surrendered to the will of God but cannot understand why my innocent child has to suffer so much. If God had given me that cross, I would have accepted it for my past sins. But here, my innocent daughter suffers. She is a hard working person and at ease with herself. She never ran around. She never went out to a dance, to entertainment. Others drink, smoke, run around, argue and are healthy, and she must constantly suffer. Why? I am already old, time to leave this earth; she is young, her life before her, why must she suffer? My gaze goes back and forth from mother to daughter. Again my lips are still; I cannot possibly answer those two questions: Why? And For whom?

Another call. I’m in a hospital. In a bed lies a gentleman in the prime of his life; he lied for fourteen months. Without doubt he will be there until his eyes close permanently and they take him out. He understands his state of affairs. He tells me his sad story. At home he has a wife and four small children. How he would have liked to live for them. Tears stream from his eyes. After a long while searching for a job, he finally found one. On the first day of his job, a heavy derrick of old iron fell on him. With difficulty, they freed him form the derrick. After telling his tale of woe, he said, “Father I was never a drunkard or a philanderer; I was a good son, husband and father, why must I suffer so now? Shortly I will have to die and leave a widow and orphans. Why? For what reason? I fruitlessly sought for a good answer. I could not find one.

Another scenario. An old gent, eyes unable to see well, ears not hearing well came slowly leaning on his cane. I sit with him and listen. Fifty years ago he left everything in Poland and came to America. He came to work for bread, by the sweat of his brow and tear in his eyes. He was careful with his money and sent money back to Poland to his parents. He married a good wife, a good home maker and good wife. They brought up five children. He made sure they were well educated so that their life would be easier than his. Four years ago his wife had died. The children argued and maintained that the old man was losing his mind. The affair went to court. The Doctors and lawyers took the money. The Old man had to sell the house. And today, without money, without a roof over his head, he was thrown into the hands of merciful people, but he roams unsure of his tomorrow. He is devastated by the actions of his own children.

I return to the hospital. A Sister of Mercy leads me to a room and explains to me on the way, that a few days ago and fourteen year old orphan was brought in. She still hadn’t been to her First Holy Communion. I see before me a skeleton as it were. From all the stories, this has to be the saddest. Both of her parents were alcoholics. What the mother didn’t drink away, the father did. One very cold night, the father was found dead on the streets of the town. The mother in despair hung herself. The child was taken by relatives. Soon, they could not handle her. Neglected and abandoned she roamed the streets daily and at night slept wherever she could find a place. Ultimately she fell into the hands of the police and today is in a hospital. Her days are numbered. She is body in time, but a philosopher in intellect. She says with effort, “God gives other children good parents, but I had a Father and Mother who were such drunkards: the never cared about me. Sometimes they would lock me in the house. Often I was alone and with nothing to eat. My father kicked me and my mother beat me. I never heard a good word, always the same name calling and cursing. The sooner I die the better. However, why do I suffer? Is God punishing for my mother and father?” I had no answer.

I continue my visits. I enter a sick room. There is a forty year old woman. She lies on old furniture, which doesn’t seem to be a bed or a sofa. It is very close. The air is stuffy and unhealthy. She has a fascinating story to tell. She married at seventeen. Her parents were against it because she was still a child and he was a lazy, worthless card player. After her marriage she had to walk to the factory. Her husband slept during the day and kept company in happy companionship at night. He took his wife’s money and wasted it. Married life was a way of the cross for the wife. One night, twenty years ago the husband never returned. He was found in the gutter. The widow had to go to work so that she and her three children would not starve. She washed floor and cleaned windows in a hotel. She worked willingly and with dedication. Two months later, standing on a latter, at a high window she fell a great distance and broke her spine in a couple places. And so she now lies like a log for years, paralyzed. Her ungrateful children left her at home alone. What to do now? Where to go? She complains about the bitter role she has in life. “I was so diligent to bring me children up, watched them carefully and now my own children has disowned me and went with strangers. Why is God punishing me? Why must I suffer?

Further. In a small bedroom on a high bed, poorly clad, lied and old woman; this is her tale of woe. She tearfully says, “I don’t like to complain to people, because I think it is useless, but I need to complain about my children. I am 66 years old and for some years, paralyzed. I brought up six children: three sons and three daughters. My daughters married quite successfully. One son married, and the youngest left home a couple months ago. At home, with me, is the middle son, and can’t work because of poor vision. Good people have cared to get help for us from the town. We receive three dollars and thirty cents weekly. With that we have to survive. After the death of my husband, I gave the savings to my daughter and asked her to please return it when she can. She got angry at me and does not visit me. Father, it is difficult for me to live and to suffer. Why is God punishing me? Why do I have to suffer?

Next. I enter a home. A reliable and caring woman. Her twenty year old daughter has lung problems. The mother says to me, “Father, please pray for us, especially for me, that God not abandon us because it is not good with us. My husband left me and went his way. We owned the home. My husband did not like to work and he continually drank heavily. I went to work and in five years, and paid out three thousand three hundred dollars. Now I myself got sick from nerves and have no strength to work. Our home will be taken away from us and we will have nowhere to go. I was responsible and worked hard so that at least I would have a small corner to live in. In the factory a machine cut of all five fingers of my right hand. My husband always came home drunk after work, gave me a hard time, cursing and using abusive language. Now I have the reward my diligence and goodness. Tell me father, is God punishing me for my sins. Do I have do reparation for my husband? And my children: why must they suffer? I did not want to add to the suffering and sadness of this hurting mother, so after a few words trying to cheer her up, I left the house.

I had one more visit on my list. I rode a few miles outside the town. On the hill, landscaped with bushes and trees, stands a hospital for the mentally ill. They lead me to a barred cell. On a rocker, sits a young lady about twenty five years old. Two years ago she was healthy and happy. She married. Five months later she was a nervous wreck. She had a breakdown and they had to restrain her. With medication, they sedated her. But what of that? Now she sits or stands for hours unmoving like a marble statue. She confessed with difficulty and I gave her Holy Communion. In a deep and long groan with fear and anxiety: “why is God punishing me?” I hurt no one in my life. I lived as God commands; but I suffer so. I am not envious of others, but I would like an explanation why God gave me this cross?” In this encounter, again, I was helpless.

I have put forth these portraits of human suffering before your eyes to uplift you in your lives daily crosses. To accomplish that a stronger will is needed, which takes time to work out strength of character within ourselves. Our Polish people, especially here in America suffers from a paralysis of will; it is one of our national vices. We have the best good intentions, but we don’t have the corresponding will to accomplish them. Sienkiewicz wrote in one of his works: “The Pole won for himself lofty religious and moral rules, and locked them within his soul like great wealth locked in a safe but never used. He holds them as if they were a treasure. He has a hoard of wealth but lives like a pauper.”

Our life has ideals in musings and imagination; but in reality it is a way of the cross more or less wroth in suffering. Human life is a war fraught with battles. It is beyond human ability to change it. When we compare the sufferings and hurts of others to our own, - ours not only appear small but disappear. Then, as someone once wrote our live is a drama, a play; the life of others, a tragedy. Nevertheless, we have taught ourselves to complain in such a manner that all stands in our way. We are inimical to our relatives, angry with ourselves, and even blaspheme God. It is always time to look at our hearts.

We have among us, not Lazarus, but Lazarus’s about which the world know nothing and wishes not to know. Someday will stand before our eyes that biblical portrait of Lazarus the beggar. We will see from afar Abraham in company with Lazarus’s and hear the word of the Patriarch: “Remember my sons that you had it easy in your life, but Lazarus very difficult; now they have joy and you suffering. And between us and you is a great chasm, so that neither we can come to you nor you are unable to come to us.