

“I will always work for my Homeland”, - Dr. Joseph P.Kazickas

On November 22, 2013 in Greenwich, CT, Dr. Joseph Peter Kazickas was presented with the medal/order "For the Homeland Freedom". The letter read: "For his tireless efforts for reestablishment and strengthening of the Independence of Lithuania, patriotic work while organizing relations of the heads of the State of Lithuania with the heads of the State of the United States and Europe, for his philanthropic work in Lithuania and around the World. Order #31. Signed by the Chairman of the Board of the Union of the Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, Jonas Burokas. Vilnius, November 6, 2013" The order was presented by the Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York Valdemaras Sarapinas. Dr. J.P.Kazickas was congratulated by Sister Margaret Bareika of the Lithuanian Convent of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Putnam, CT, Elena Naujikiene and Neila Baumiliene, both of the Kazickas Family Foundation. Jurate Kazickas, the Kazickas Family Foundation President, was also present at the celebration.

Dr. J.P. Kazickas said:

"My dear brothers and sisters gathered here,

In this country we spent our lives fighting, thinking, dreaming about free and independent Lithuania. I always believed that that dream would become a reality. It came from my deep faith. I have to thank my mother, who inspired me. She was an Angel of Hardship, she was a deportee from Russia. Most of all, I think, and probably you'll agree, we all should thank the Lord. He heard our prayers. He also gave me ideas, energy and strength to try harder. He gave me strength to never doubt that the truth, the love will prevail. I thank Him for the ideas He had given me how to approach the most important men in the World, the heads of the State, and how to present to them our hope, our belief that we were worth to be free. We were worth to be free and to praise the Lord.

I will never forget how my Father would answer when he was asked why he had left Chiornaya Padina, where we prospered at the time. Why we left for the struggling reborn Lithuania. He answered that it was not an easy decision to make but it was not a sacrifice either. The other choice he had was to stay in the system where priests were being shot and churches burned. "Joe, - he would say to me and others, - it was an easy choice, the system would have killed us." His words stayed with me, and I have always stayed true to his values.

We built churches there, in the asylum. Later, I have built a chapel in Chiornaya Padina which is so important now to the local people who write to me about their place for prayer, peace and hope. I tried to write about my life in *the Odyssey of Hope*. I pursued the odyssey of my life with hope, with prayer for Lithuania's freedom and independence. I have third generation immigrants from Lithuania in my home here and I ask them to never forget that we owe to the Lord for all we have.

I thank you for this celebration to honor me. I am not worth it. I have done my duty and never expected praise. We are free now. Independent Lithuania has its honorable Consul [Valdemaras Sarapinas] who does an amazing work strengthening ties between Lithuanian émigré community and Lithuania. He knows everyone by now and I am very thankful to him. I am thankful to the sister [Margaret Bareika]. She has been working to keep religion alive in Lithuania for all the years, even during the soviet times. She has been working tirelessly

with our Lithuanian immigrants. She does work of a Saint. I am also thankful to our dear Neila [Baumiliene] who strengthened work of our Foundation with new ideas and new people. She is devoted to keep our Lithuanian Saturday schools alive, to support their teachers and to create opportunities for continuing education for them.

I have an endless list of people who I would like to thank. I would like to thank those who struggled and died for freedom in the woods of Lithuania. Our Foundation has been supporting efforts to record testimonials about those times and those people. They were saints who sacrificed their lives for freedom, and the tribute should be forever paid to them. I read their diaries, and I know that they should be honored more than I am. We should take every effort to make sure that Lithuanians know about them especially the young generation. When I read the memoirs I feel that I am not worth to clean their boots, to wash their cold and tired feet. I am addressing the young generation asking to never forget the efforts and fight for freedom.

We will continue our daily lives and these thoughts will sink into the past, but when we pay tribute to each other, let's not forget those who are more honorable than us. I thank those who work for the Independent Lithuania. I thank all of you who work outside Lithuania for Lithuania. You have a sublime love for it.

My dear brothers and sisters, we are happy to be here together, and I am thankful for honoring me. I will not be able to thank you enough. I am asking you to remember this chapter of Lithuania's history when we never gave up hope to have a free Lithuania. It is the Land where our forefathers and our parents were born and raised. It is our Homeland. Maybe some of us will never return to it. But we owe to those who sacrificed their lives for freedom. The feeling is difficult to understand to the youth, even to us as well. When you honor me, I feel the debt to those who sacrificed their lives. So for as long as the Lord gives me days to live, I will continue working for Lithuania. I will work like a slave who understands the weight of his debt and who at the same time is happy to work for the happiness of all of us. Forgive me for speaking for so long. Those feelings of love for my Homeland are always in my heart along with feelings of love for you."

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