

## REQUIRED SUMMER READING FOR ALL SENIORS

# RADICAL GRATITUDE

At the age of five, Andrew Bienkowski was banished to Siberia with his family. With virtually nothing to see them through the long, cold winter, his grandfather chose to starve to death in order to give his family a chance of survival.

Through a series of trials and struggles Andrew and his family survived the horrors of World War II and then moved to New York State. He became a psychotherapist and moved with his family to Western New York where he now lives. Teaming together with local author, Mary Akers, they wrote this book recalling episodes from the dark days in Siberia and extracting positive messages about how to develop a view of your own life that is illuminated by understanding and empowered by hope. Poignant, haunting and inspiring, *Radical Gratitude* shows us that the only limits we face are those we place upon ourselves.

In September the authors will visit all the religion classes to discuss the book and its message for us today. Currently the book is only published in Australia while the authors move towards an American publisher. So there are 4 ways that you can obtain the book:

1. Bring a check for \$20 made out to Mary Akers to Deacon Pijacki in the Religion Office before June 13. He will have autographed copies of the book for sale before homeroom and throughout the day.
2. Go to Inspiration Point bookstore at 483 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo NY 14222, 883-8670 where they have a limited number of copies available.
3. Go to Mary Akers' blog at <http://www.maryakers.blogspot.com> where you can order with a credit card for \$23 to cover postage.
4. Send a check for \$23 to: Mary Akers, 72 Woodbury Drive, Lockport NY 14094

Peace and Blessings  
Deacon Ted Pijacki

# RADICAL GRATITUDE PROJECT

Rather than having a written test for your summer reading of this book, you will write your own mini version of *Radical Gratitude*. Using the style of the authors, you should write a short story of your own family's life and the lessons learned from those experiences. I would invite your parents to also read the book to assist in recalling events that shaped their identity as individuals and as family. Use the following format as a guide:

1. Reflect back upon your life, your parent's lives and the life of your family. Select 3 events that have had a significant impact on how you view life and taught you how "to feel and recognize your own healing powers and use them to make the world a little bit better, one person at a time." [p. 232 of *Radical Gratitude*]
2. Describe each memorable event from your family's life as a separate chapter of your life.
3. Explain the sense of "Radical Gratitude" that came from each experience and the life lessons that emerged from this time in your life.
4. Find quotes from Scripture, philosophers, books and the like to reinforce the message from each lesson such as: "There is an old Chinese saying that goes, 'To attain knowledge, add something every day; to attain wisdom, remove something every day.'" [p. 89 of *Radical Gratitude*] or "As Albert Einstein said, 'There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.'" [p. 162 of *Radical Gratitude*].
5. The theme for writing about these experiences is summarized by the authors, "Even though my lessons from Siberia were learned in extreme adversity, you need not have faced similar adversity in order to learn from them and begin to put them into practice. As you put them into practice, there will be times you feel unsure or times you stumble. When that happens, remind yourself that there are no mistakes, only lessons. And if you are alive, there are lessons to be learned. Always."

If you have any questions about this project during the summer, please feel free to contact me at my personal email account: [deaconpi@hotmail.com](mailto:deaconpi@hotmail.com) and put "Radical Gratitude" into the subject box so that I do not delete it as junk mail.