

# PENTECOST, THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY

## **Pentecost**

**May 14, 1978**

*Acts 2:1-11*

*1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13*

*John 20:19-23*

My dear sisters and brothers

Today is the Church's birthday. This is the most brilliant feast in the liturgical cycle that step by step we have been reflecting upon. Today is Pentecost. Today is the crowning celebration of Easter. Today the glorified Christ is prolonged in the people who want to follow him. Today, Christ lives more than ever before on this feast of Pentecost. My homily could be entitled: Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. And like good children of the Church who celebrate the birthday of our mother, this Cathedral is filled with joy and happiness on the festive occasion of the birthday of the queen of our home. Today is the birthday of the Church. I will develop my thought with these three ideas: (1) The Church is always an event; (2) The Spirit of God makes the Church a new creation; (3) The Spirit of God renews the actual world.

### **The Church is always an event**

In the first place, I say that the Church is an event; the Church is news. Twenty centuries have passed since the time of the occurrence of the events that we have just heard proclaimed in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles (a). At this present time the Church continues to be news, an event, just like on that first Pentecost when the sound of the wind and the rain of the tongues of fire that upon Jerusalem attracted all the pilgrims who were there for the celebration of Pentecost --- pilgrims who had come from all the corners of the world. The Church is always an event that attracts people to listen to the proclamation of the marvelous deeds of God. The Church is also an event that attracts people to listen, from the gospel perspective of a faithful follower of Christ, to the denunciations of sin in the world, to the denunciation of sin wherever it is found. Therefore, the Church is news because people always have a need to hear the proclamation of the wonderful deeds of God. The Church is news because people, especially those who are poor and suffering and those who seem to be living without hope --- these people need to hear the voice of the Spirit that lifts up their hope and denounces the injustices that oppress them.

Who could have told me that this feast of Pentecost of 1978 would become like a hurricane that would attract the attention of the Supreme Court of Justice to listen to my words? The publication of the Court's note in the press has made the celebration of Pentecost a most interesting celebration here in the Cathedral. I know that there are many people waiting to hear: how is the Archbishop going to respond to the position of the Supreme Court of Justice? Therefore at the beginning I want to tell you that today the Supreme Court has been a sign from God that attracts the public's attention and that has become like that

wind and those tongues of fire of Pentecost that make the eternal news of the Church interesting.

As long as the Church makes her face transparent in the beauty of the Holy Spirit, then it will always be a time of Pentecost in the Church. The Church will cease to be this news, however, when she no longer supports herself with the power that Christ promised to her and bestowed on her on this day, when instead she supports herself in the fragile and passing power and wealth of this earth. The Church will be beautiful, permanently young, attractive at all times as long as she is faithful to the Spirit that has been given to her and as long as this Spirit is reflected in the communities, in her pastors and her very life.

Thanks to God, the Church in our Archdiocese has tried to be faithful to this Spirit. Therefore I believe we must be grateful to the Lord for this hour of Pentecost is not only celebrated today, May 14, 1978 but this Spirit of Pentecost is prolonged in the sorrows, the way of the cross, and the resurrection events of our people. A profound joy fills the heart of the pastor and the communities for wherever I go I experience the event of Pentecost in our Archdiocese. I therefore ask all my beloved priests and religious women and all our institutions to glory in the name of Catholic. I ask this of the Catholic schools and associations and communities and even those Christians who though they might not be Catholic yet have expressed their solidarity with the evangelical attitude of the Church that she attempts to live in the four Departments of the Archdiocese. I want to tell you, my Catholic and Christian sisters and brothers: *Let us try to be faithful to the Spirit! Let us try to be that immaculate reflection of the Spirit of God! Let us be faithful to the holiness of the Spirit who breathes the Kingdom of God into the world!* I want to greet all those pastors, catechists, leaders of the Word, communities, etc., who are collaborating with the Spirit of God and each day are renewing the beauty of the Archdiocese with a genuine face that reflects the beauty, the light, the fire, the wind of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Spirit of God makes the Church a new creation**

My second thought is the following: the Spirit of God makes the Church a new creation. Let us look at the gospel passage: the risen Christ is with his disciples on that first Easter evening. The doors were locked and Jesus stood in the midst of his timid disciples who feared the Jews and persecution. They had hidden themselves behind the locked doors. Jesus, with the serenity of a person whose life will not fade or wane, spoke to his disciples: *Peace be with you* (b). With a solemn gesture the reading leads us back to the first pages of the Bible where God created man in his image and likeness, where God breathed upon the clay of the earth and shared his spirit of life (c). In today's reading, Jesus who is God and man, breathes upon the apostles (d). We can say that Jesus is the Creator who creates from the clay of human flesh a new creation. *As the Father has sent me, so I send you* (e). *Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain, they are retained* (f).

Adam, when he awoke from that first human dream and saw the life of God reflected in his whole being, when he intelligently understood the marvel of creation, he surely must have fallen on his knees and adored God (the first gesture of a man kneeling before God). I imagine that the apostles, simple men, cowards in hiding because they feared persecution, when they received the Holy Spirit, they too must have fallen on their knees and adored God. Saint John in his gospel wants to unite in one single action the resurrection of Christ and his sending of the Spirit. In our Liturgical calendar these two feasts are separated by 50 days but

these two feasts form one single reality: the glorification of Christ, the glorification of the man/God who becomes a Creator in order to create with the apostles the beginning of a new creation. In this way then, the apostles can be seen as a new Adam, as persons who do not only possess the natural life that was given to them by the Creator but also possess that life of the Holy Spirit which is the same life that God shared with his Church, the same life that opened the eyes of those who felt overwhelmed, the same Spirit that placed in their hands the power of God to forgive, the same Spirit that placed in the hands of the Church this Easter event so that in turn this Church might reveal the life of God to all humankind and thus continue to be that leaven and light and seed that Jesus spoke about in the gospel when he compared the kingdom of God to these different realities. In this way the Kingdom of God is now present in the midst of the world. This was the Easter creation!

Pentecost, then, is the Church's birthday because on that day the Church was born. The Church is that group of believers in Christ who receive the Spirit of Christ, who receive the all-powerful breath of the Messiah and Redeemer that enables them to convert all people to a belief in this Redeemer and Messiah. My dear sisters and brothers, we are all part of this new creation. The world cannot be renewed without us and we are responsible for the renewal of the world. On the day of Pentecost God placed his kingdom in the midst of humanity and the Kingdom of God has to be built up on this earth. To preach about a Church whose only hope is fulfilled after death is to falsify the Kingdom of God. The kingdom that Jesus preached and constituted is made visible as he breathed forth his Spirit, as he breathed forth upon those concrete individuals who are on a pilgrimage through history and who have the responsibility to transform history into the kingdom of God. No, the Church does not have any ambitions for personal power. The Church's mission and great responsibility is to sanctify all human institutions. Thus the Church does not need to take away from people their power, their money or their idols. The Church needs hearts that are converted to Christ, that are purified like clean glasses so that new life can descend upon them --- the same new life that was inaugurated at the time of the resurrection and Pentecost.

Throughout twenty centuries the Church has continued to be news and has celebrated her birthday each year. Today, we add one more year to the life of the Church. We are able to say that in 1978, as the Church of the Archdiocese unites herself to the universal Church, then this Church celebrates her feast day, her birthday and she finds herself very young and beautiful; she finds herself stronger and more extended throughout the world; she finds herself more faithful to the Spirit. Blessed be God! Yes, my sisters and brothers, it is good to belong to this new creation and good to allow ourselves to be possessed by this power of Spirit that identifies us with the mission of Christ, that mission of bringing peace and destroying sin and making humankind more just.

This would be the opportunity, if we had time, to give a beautiful catechetical lesson on the meaning of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Yahweh, as that term unfolds through Scripture. In Hebrew, the original Biblical word is *ruáh* which in Greek means *pneuma* and in Spanish is translated with the word *espíritu*. What is meant when we read this word *ruáh* in the Bible or when for the first time we encounter this word on the mouth of God as the clay of the earth is molded into the first human being? (g)

As you know the Bible has many anthropomorphic expressions, that is, in many different ways God is compared with the human person. Thus when the gestures of God are compared with the material gestures of humankind, the Bible frequently mentions this *ruáh* of God, this breath of God, this spirit, this exhaling of God and refers to this as a power that gives life and

a power that transforms the sinful life of mortal human beings. At times this breath of God is expressed in terms of a strong driving wind and the Scriptures interpret these words as God breathing deeply. At other times this breath of God is present as a gentle breeze and these words are interpreted as the gentle encouragement of God. This breath of God, however, is always creative and always called holy. We also have the image of the holy arm of God. This is another anthropomorphic expression since God has no arms even though the Bible speaks about the holy arm of God when referring to the power of God. (h) Thus *el espíritu, ruáh, pneuma* are words that refer to the holy encouragement of God that emanates from God. So far we have been speaking in a natural order. When Jesus comes among us, however, he elevates the natural order to a supernatural order. All the literature of the New Testament carries this concept forward from the Old Testament and as Jesus is revealed he tells us that the Spirit of God is not simply the deep breathing of God but is a person, the third person of the most holy Trinity where the Father engenders eternally the Son, and where the Father and the Son love one another so profoundly that they breathe forth a person who is constituted the person of this mutual, personal love. The Spirit of God is love, is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. In theology the Holy Spirit is referred to as *hypostasis*, that is, a person. The Holy Spirit is a person in the same way that the Father and the Son are persons. The Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus when he is glorified, sent as a witness to the fact that God has accepted the action of redemption and sent to the world to take possession of all those who believe in Christ.

During the Last Supper Jesus spoke to his disciples and told them that if he did not leave them, he would not be able to send them another Advocate, another Consoler (i). Notice how Jesus speaks about another person as being divine like himself, as being as loving as himself, as being powerful and truthful like himself! We no longer see the person of God incarnated as a human person and walking this planet earth, but we do see on this earth the footsteps of many women and men who follow Christ in the Holy Spirit, who are guided by the divine power of redemption for the Spirit that Christ sent from the depths of his being is the same Spirit that the Father sent to the Church that is on pilgrimage on this earth. This is the other Advocate who preaches through his ministers and continues to be life for the Church.

If I had time, my sisters and brothers, I would analyze paragraph four of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. But today I invite those who are Catholic and are concerned about knowing the teaching of the Council to open the Council text of the document that is entitled *Lumen Gentium* that speaks about the Church and read paragraph 4 that speaks about the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church (j). Notice the beautiful synthesis that the Council makes with regard to the functions of the Holy Spirit in the Church! The Council states that the Holy Spirit guides the Church in the way of all truth and renews its members in holiness. The Spirit enriches the Church with gifts and charisms. Saint Paul expressed a similar idea in today's second reading where we find another beautiful synthesis of the functions of the Holy Spirit in the midst of people. The Spirit raises up vocations and bestows upon the Church varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts. The Spirit also gives the Church perseverance and strength to continue her mission despite the many trials and tribulations that she encounters.

Therefore on this day of the Church's birthday, my sisters and brothers, we ought to implore the Spirit to provide strength to the Church, specifically to this Archdiocese of San Salvador, so that we might be blessed with many priests, religious, catechists, committed lay people and communities who allow themselves to be guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us also be clear that because of our faith and hope and Easter joy we have the privilege of belonging to this Church that is in the midst of the world as an effective sign of a new

creation. Therefore as Catholics, if we truly have faith in the Holy Spirit, let us allow ourselves to be renewed! Let us become that new people that is so necessary if we are to have new structures! Let us become that new people so that we can make our nation a new nation! Let us become that new people that makes all the sins of El Salvador and all its institutions the object of our mission! Let us destroy sin and build the Kingdom of God.

If we are truly a people that are guided by the Holy Spirit, then the Catholic people of El Salvador have to be the seed for renewal. If the Church is the depository of that creative breath of the Redeemer that makes us all his followers, authentic liberators of that true freedom from sin, authentic liberators for the true development of life in God's grace; if the Church is the depository of that creative breath that makes us all children of God and citizens of heaven then let us not allow this nation of ours, so gloriously named San Salvador --- indeed the whole world could be called San Salvador because everyone who believes in Christ is a prolongation of Jesus' divine salvation --- let us not allow this nation of ours to continue along the same path. As the people of El Salvador let us make a firm resolution to live our lives in fidelity to this Spirit! Let us resolve, that despite all our trials and tribulations, to allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit! Let us root this promise in our baptism, the gospel, and our baptismal commitment. We all experience this Spirit, but we are not all faithful to the Spirit. We are reproached by our cowardice because we know that we are capable of overcoming this cowardice. We experience the powerful breath that can make us more courageous and yet we are cowards, even traitors and liars despite the fact that we have been given the Spirit of truth. People should not call themselves Christians just because they have received the Holy Spirit. We know there are some people who have received the Spirit and yet they attack the Church because their lives are filled with lies and injustice and slander and violence and so many other sins that repress the life of the Spirit. Hopefully our Church will truly be that new creation in the midst of all the circumstances of our history.

### **The Holy Spirit renews the actual world<sup>1</sup>**

Finally my sisters and brothers, my third point is that the Holy Spirit renews our actual world. Here I am going to focus on three events of this glorious celebration of Pentecost, 1978.

The first event took place last night --- the confirmation of two hundred young people. Last night, the Vigil of Pentecost, the Cathedral was filled with two hundred young people and their parents and godparents. These young people promised the Holy Spirit that they would accept this Spirit and would try to be faithful to the inspiration of the Spirit. When the liturgy was concluded one of these young people addressed his peers from the same pulpit where I am now preaching<sup>2</sup>. I want to underline the two great initiatives that he offered the young people.

He exhorted all the young people, but especially those who had just been confirmed, to continue to gather together in small groups in order to reflect and mediate on the Word of God. We know, my sisters and brothers, that at this time in our history reflection on the Word of God, the study of our religion that attempts, in light of the Word of God, to make people aware of their dignity, that rebukes the coward and those who want to live in conformity with the present situation, that seeks justice and the common good, that denounces abuses --- we know that Word of God causes conflict. Therefore, to gather

together to reflect on this Word is a challenge and is also constructive. It is not subversive. Last night the young women and men committed themselves to reflect on this Word of God.

The other initiative that was offered to the young people who had just been confirmed was made in the form of an invitation (I would call it a challenge). An invitation was extended to all the young people in the Archdiocese to begin preparation for Holy Week 1979, so that the celebration of the Easter Vigil might be a celebration of young people, an Easter of Salvadorian young men and women who proclaim that Christ lives, that Christ has risen and that the best argument for the Lord's eternal life is found not in the empty tomb but in the lives of those young men and women who are inspired with the enthusiasm, the joy, the sincerity and the Spirit of Christ's renewal.

This event constituted for me the most beautiful gesture that the Holy Spirit has given us on this feast of Pentecost, 1978. I want to greet and thank the Catholic Schools, the parishes, and the communities that collaborated in this beautiful initiative that resulted in the administration of Confirmation to these young women and men. This action also confirms our belief that Confirmation is not a sacrament that should be administered to small children, but rather to young adults. On the first Sunday of Advent, that is, at the end of November of this year, we will no longer administer Confirmation to small children. I ask you to try to understand this change, my sisters and brothers, for we are talking about that which is most beneficial to the children. It is two distinct realities when one is confirmed as a child and not aware of what is happening and when one is confirmed as a young adult. As a young person new passions stir in the heart and the person faces a new life situation and realizes new strength is necessary --- the strength of the Holy Spirit. For this reason our celebration of Pentecost was very great. Two hundred young people were confirmed. Two hundred young people opened the hands and their hearts and said: *Come Holy Spirit, fill my youthfulness with your joy!*

The second event concerns the fact that today is also Seminary Day. The fact that here in El Salvador we join the celebration of Seminary Day to the celebration of the feast of Pentecost ought to make us reflect and send our greetings of admiration and love to the young people who have heard God's call to become priests. At this time in our history to respond to God's call in this way, to desire to be a priest, is either an act of madness or an heroic act. Mediocre priests, priests who try to make a compromise between God and the devil --- these are not authentic vocations. We greet and we admire the young men who fill our seminary and know that to commit themselves to the priesthood, if it is not an act of madness, then it is because they desire to live very heroic lives. It is good to be a protagonist with Christ and through the mediation of his Spirit to preach the Kingdom of God in the midst of so many idols that exist in the world.

My dear sisters and brothers, we want all of you to have a great esteem for our Seminario San José de la Montaña. This is not simply some monument constructed with cement but rather it is a school that forms priests for the Church. This seminary should be seen as a symbol of hope for the Diocese and we ought to give our moral support and our prayers to this institution. We should not discourage our young men but speak to them about the kind of priests that the world wants. Above all, my sisters and brothers, we should understand, as the seminarian said here before the beginning of Mass, that the seminarian today cannot be the seminarian of past traditions. We are not forming *guerrilleros*, for the seminary is a school that develops young men to become the priests that the People of God need: men who know how to be truly men of prayer and men committed to God, but men who also know how to be

one with the people, in the midst of people, the voice of the people, men who feel the anguish and the hopes of others. Thanks to God, these are the kind of seminarians that fill San José de la Montaña.

My sisters and brothers, let us not forget the humble conditions of the families from which the majority of these young men come. They need our understanding and not our alms. Indeed, it should be understood that everyone has a responsibility in this work of vocations because our people need priests. If there are families, even though they might be very poor, if your family has provided the Church with a vocation then it is just that other families who have not received the same grace should also embrace this honor of a vocation and generously help the Seminary. Today, my sisters and brothers, when the desire to be a priest is met by so many obstacles, one of which is economic, as a Church we find our strength in the Holy Spirit who in the midst of so many generous people provides us with the assistance that enables us to maintain a seminary that is filled with so many young vocations.

I want to honor here and greet the team of young priests who represent the whole Church and take seriously their responsibility to form these young men. I would like all of you to come to know these priests so that you know these priests who are forming our future priests. Thus you will also know that there is no truth to the accusations that are made against them in the hope of disparaging the work of the Seminary.

Within this same framework I also want to give express my tribute of gratitude and admiration for that unforgettable person, Father Ladislao Segura. The Seminary, in a gesture of profound gratitude, has buried his body beside the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin where the seminarians pray. Thus the seminarians will always be there in prayer over the body of a man who consumed his whole priestly life, a life that was hidden like the violet, in this apostolate of vocations.

Finally, my sisters and brothers a third event of this Pentecost is an evangelical proclamation of justice in the midst of the realities of our country. Two weeks ago in this Cathedral I said.

*We cannot forget that a group of lawyers is struggling to obtain an amnesty and have published the reasons that have led them to ask this favor for so many who perish in our prisons [the Archdiocese has also supported a general amnesty for those arrested in San Pedro Perulapán]. These lawyers also report anomalies in the procedures of the First Criminal Court, where the judge does not allow lawyers to enter with their defendants, while the Guardia Nacional is allowed to be present and intimidate the accused, who often bear evident marks of torture. A judge who does not report signs of torture and does not allow himself to be swayed by its effect on the testimony of the accused is not a just judge. I think, sisters and brothers, in view of these injustices that are seen all about, even in the first Court, not to speak of many other tribunals, judges that sell themselves<sup>3</sup>. What is the Supreme Court of Justice doing? Where is the transcendental role in a democracy of such a power that should be above all other powers and claim justice to all challenging it? I believe many of our country's problems have their main source here: in the president and all who work in the Supreme Court of Justice who should insist with greater firmness to the legislative chambers, the courts, the judges and all concerned with the administration of justice, that they be real agents of justice. I wish to congratulate the lawyers, Christian or non-Christian but who, with a great sense of justice, are putting their finger on the sore. May all our lawyers be truly a*

*hope for justice, which is so ill-treated in our surroundings.* (This is what I said fifteen days ago<sup>4</sup> Homily of Archbishop Romero, April 30, 1978).

The secretary of the Supreme Court begs me *most respectfully to express the names of the venal judges* to whom I referred in my homily.<sup>5</sup> In regard to this honorable communication I should explain the following, principally to avoid the possible confusion of public opinion occasioned by the Supreme Court's publication and by the commentaries in the press of the country.<sup>6</sup> First of all, I am thankful and happy to have the opportunity that the Supreme Court offers me to expand on what I said in my homily on April 30<sup>th</sup> in the Cathedral Mass. I am thankful and happy because at last, after speaking out for so long about these things, I see the Supreme Court declare publicly its intention to begin to remedy what is wrong in that supreme power that is so transcendental for the peace of our national life.

Secondly the way in which the Supreme Court has called my attention to this matter is not through some legal instrument since it does not follow the legal requirements for such an action. Therefore my reply is a spontaneous reaffirmation of my pastoral commitment in defense of justice, truth, and the people.

I also declare that the respectful note from the secretary of the Supreme Court has mutilated the wording and deformed the spirit of my original words and therefore he wants me to name *the venal judges to whom I referred*. In my homily, however, I did not use the words *venal judges*. I did mention in my homily *judges that sell themselves*, but this was a merely incidental term in the whole context of my message which spoke of more general irregularities that concern the whole system of judicial administration. To put an exclusive emphasis on this accidental term without mentioning the general context that frames it is an illogical and unjust procedure that one might even suspect is malicious. By it the Supreme Court gives the impression that it wishes to hide, or distract public opinion from the central point of my message. That was and remains, I repeat, to point out a social evil rooted in the institutions and procedures that are the responsibility of that honorable tribunal.

Thirdly, it is a well know fact that proving acts of venality that the Supreme Court invites me to present is one of the most difficult acts to prove for the simple reason that the crime involves the official who sells himself, as well as the person who offered the bribe and all those who have in some way collaborated in this act. Therefore it is very difficult for those who are involved in these acts to offer testimony about what they have done.

Fourthly, I also want to clarify the fact that when I preach my homilies I do so as a pastor and therefore my words have a theological perspective and not a legal perspective. I have said many times that the language and the attitude of the Church is not to enter into areas of human technology or politics but that her evangelical responsibility obliges her to denounce sin wherever she finds it. Therefore, as pastor I was pointing out those situations of sin and injustice that oppressed people cry out against. The Supreme Court, however, as an institution in an authentic democracy ought to watch over the fulfillment of the laws and denounce the abuse of the other powers of the state. As the secretary said in his eloquent note that was sent to me, the Supreme Court ought *to proceed to the trial and judgment of those responsible*.

I am not the one who ought to say who these people are but the court might conduct its own investigation, taking into consideration the known groups of mothers or families of political prisoners or disappeared persons or exiles, and the many reports of venality



published under the responsibility of the communications media, not only at home but abroad. Furthermore, at least from my theological perspective, I believe the concept of venality is fulfilled by any functionary who receives from the people a salary to administer justice and instead becomes the accomplice of injustice, moved by sinful purposes. This phenomenon can be investigated with greater facility by those who have the adequate means, the mission, and the grave duty to do so.

But, fifthly, and more serious than the cases of venality in the Supreme Court are those other situations which demonstrate an absolute contempt for the obligations that the political constitution gives to the Court and which all of its members have sworn themselves to fulfill.

This Honorable Court has not resolved those situations that are so contrary to the public liberties and human rights, the defense of which constitutes their highest mission. Day after day we see the fundamental rights of the people of El Salvador trampled upon and no institution denounces these abuses, no institution sincerely and effectively attempts to heal and resolves these situations.

a) It is stated that – article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - *Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.* In our own law, article 164 of our Constitution says: *every person has the right of habeas corpus before the Supreme Court and Court of the Second Instance whenever any authority or individual attempts to illegally restrict the freedom of another.* Various judges have honestly and valiantly informed the Supreme Court that they have found it impossible to carry out their sacred constitutional mission in the case of the security forces.

b) In Article 164 of our Political Constitution we read that *no one should be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without first having been listened to and judged according to the law. No one can be brought to trial twice for the same crime.* I wish to point out that this situation has been especially painful for me because we have spoken with mothers, wives and children, from one end of the country to the other, and these people have walked the way of the cross searching for their dear ones without finding any answer whatever. We know of about eighty families with some member arrested without having charges brought in any court so far. Before this most serious situation, which day by day tears the hearts of these mothers, wives and children, I quote Article Nine of the Declaration of Human Rights: *No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.*

c) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares in Article 13: *Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.* I also call to mind this right that is contemplated in the Constitution and that protects all those people of El Salvador who find themselves in exile. Article 154 states: *No citizen of El Salvador shall be exiled nor shall they be refused entrance into the territory of the Republic or denied a passport or other identification documents for their return.* This is an official statement of our nation and yet on the other hand the denunciations that are

d) Our Constitution also states that *every person has a right to direct a petition, written respectfully, to the established legal authorities. These authorities will then resolve said situation and inform the petitioner about the resolution* (Constitution of El Salvador, Article #162). We should not forget that several lawyers and citizens have exercised this right and presented a petition for clemency for those persons involved in the events of San Pedro Perulapán. They have petitioned that the *Law for the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order*

be declared unconstitutional. Several weeks have passed since this petition was presented and we have heard nothing from those who could resolve this situation.

e) The press has published accounts of various situations that have greatly disturbed the people. The press has denounced administrative and judicial officials and yet despite these possible irregularities that are part of the public domain, we have not seen any interest from the competent authorities to resolve these situations. It is not my intention to specify details about these events but I am convinced that if there really existed a concern for public administration, the facts would be investigated exhaustively in order to bring about a true and genuine well-being of society and to lay down precedents.

f) Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our Constitution, as I have previously said, hold as sacred the right to freedom: *no power, authority or functionary is able to issue an order for detention or imprisonment that is not in accord with the law. Such an order must always be written*<sup>7</sup>. Yet this law is violated in many different forms. Contrary to the above law there are people who have been captured by the security forces and brought before the Courts long after the eight days prescribed by our Constitution. Persons have been detained illegally for more than thirty days. These situations are publicly known, are reported in the news, and are at times most painful like the events of Aguilares, El Paisnal, and San Pedro Perulapán. In light of these situations and in conformity with the Articles of our Constitution and Penal Law I know that there are legal ways to oblige the security forces to fulfill their responsibility with regard to the treatment of prisoners. Criminal penalties should be imposed on those who terrorize and violently abuse prisoners. How many prisoners have been presented to the Courts with evident marks and signs of mistreatment?

g) According to Article #91 of our Constitution workers *have the right to freely organize themselves for the defense of their respective interests and the right to form labor unions*. This principle: *Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests* - Article 23,4 of the Declaration of Human Rights - has been violated in several ways, from restricting the freedom of labor leaders to subtly giving favors and concession to those workers who reject the union organization. Let us also speak about *the right of workers to strike* (Political Constitution, Article 192). This is a means that is utilized in extreme situations by the workers of El Salvador and yet this right has been repressed and treacherously distorted. It is said that the majority of strikes are subversive and conform themselves to communist intentions, even though as a legal measure they are used by the workers to defend collective contracts, wages, and vacation days recognized by the labors laws, and to protect their occupational interests. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our Political Constitution the right to form labor unions is consecrated as a fundamental social right. It is, therefore, impossible to understand all the detailed inconveniences, hindrances, and obstacles that are put in the way of the farm workers to achieve the practice of their fundamental right.

Finally and sixthly, all of these situations are well known by the public and yet it seems that the Judicial authorities have, in general, refused to intervene. As I said in my homily, this is one of their basic and fundamental responsibilities. *What of the function, so transcendent in a democracy, of this power that should be above every other power and should demand justice of everyone that violates it?* This accusation is inspired in a positive *animus corrigendi* and not in a malicious desire to defame. I believe it my duty to make it as pastor of a people suffering injustice. It is a duty placed on me by the gospel, for which I am ready to face trial and prison, even though that would only add another injustice.

I want to conclude by thanking the countless persons, but especially these beloved lawyers and law students, who have come to me and expressed their solidarity with the Church's concern for justice in our nation. I thank them because their cooperation is a positive building of peace. This Church of the Holy Spirit has proclaimed from the distant times of the prophet Isaiah and today repeats with the renewed youth of this Pentecost amid the shocking conditions of our people: *Justice will bring about peace* (Isaiah 32:17).

Let us now proclaim our faith. (A standing ovation of applause)... Thank you for the seal of approval that you have placed on my poor words. Now filled with faith and hope in the Spirit who encourages this Church we say: *We believe in one God...*

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<sup>1</sup> Under this heading Mons. Romero includes his usual section on the life of the Church and the events of the week.

<sup>2</sup> See "Celebrando nuestra vida. Mensaje de la juventud", *Orientación*, 21 May 1978.

<sup>3</sup> This accusation provoked the Supreme Court of Justice to challenge Mons. Romero to provide the names of those judges. Mons. Romero prepared his reply carefully in writing which he reads at this moment. See "Monseñor Romero respon de a la Corte Supreme", *Orientación*, 21 May 1978.

<sup>4</sup> See Homily for 30 April 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Note from the Secretary of the Supreme Court of Justice, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 8 May 1978.

<sup>6</sup> A note in *La Prensa Gráfica* for 9 May 1978 affirmed that Mons. Romero could be charged legally.

<sup>7</sup> Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, Article 166.

*Margin References* (a) Ac 2,23: (b) Jn 20,19: (c) Gn 2,7: (d) Jn 20,22: (e) Jn 20,21: (f) Jn 20,22b-23: (g) Gn 2,7: (h) Is 52,10: (i) Jn 16,7: (j) LG 4.