

THE GOD OF OUR FAITH

Trinity Sunday
May 21, 1978

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

John 3:16-18

My dear sisters and brothers and radio audience.

Last Sunday our celebration of the Easter season reached its culmination and now we return to that season that was interrupted at the beginning of Lent, that season that is called Ordinary Time. The sixth week of Ordinary Time was interrupted by the celebration of Ash Wednesday and the Sundays of the Lent and Easter Season and continued until the celebration of Pentecost which took place last Sunday. Easter is the most glorious time of the year! Today we continue with the seventh week of Ordinary Time but today the Church presents us with a synthesis of the Liturgical year and so instead of celebrating the Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time, we celebrate Trinity Sunday. We might compare this celebration to the action of one who runs upstream and finds oneself at the source of the water. Today we find ourselves at the source of our redemption: the mystery of the Christ. Today, the life of faith that gathers us together every week, our religion that is rooted in our hearts and our desire to discover God, finds its response. I repeat, we find ourselves in the same position as those who run upstream and find themselves at the place where this water springs forth into energy and life and fertilizes the areas that it touches. Therefore, today we might call this homily: the God of our faith.

This God of our faith is a phenomenon that in many societies and peoples has become lost. There is a great urgency today to become more clearly aware of this God who is presented to us in faith that is enlightened by the Word of the same God who has desired to reveal himself and who in the three readings offers us a very precise image.

False ideas about the God of our faith

Before presenting the image of God as found in today's readings, let us look at some of the images that mankind has designed. Some of these are not caricatures but abstractions or reflections that leave the heart cold and do not move us in the same way as the love of a Father who gives us life and is present with us.

First we have the God of the philosophers, the God of metaphysics, the God who is found through creation. This is legitimate and indeed God is revealed in creation. God is revealed when one looks at the splendor of the sun, the bountiful harvest, the beauty of the sun as it sets over the ocean, the majesty of a volcano, the tranquility of a lake. But these reflections and philosophical deductions lead us to what is called in philosophy *the first insights, the great laws that rule creation* but they do not fill the intimate longings and hopes of our heart. As we reflect on these arguments for God from creation, God does not seem to be an intimate God. For many people these philosophical and metaphysical arguments leave the mind and the heart dry and in fact often lead people to atheism or materialism.

Thus we have one of the most painful phenomena of our time: atheism or, at the very least, an indifference toward God. This lack of knowledge, disparagement and denial of God has led people to proclaim the death of God, *God has died*. Certainly this is not a God who gives us any fulfillment but is a God that has been designed by people, a God that, at times, is the product of a moral vacuum in people. My sisters and brothers, atheism or the denial of God is almost always accompanied by a moral vacuum in people.

A people who have thrown aside a God of love and who prefer that God not exist so that they can act unjustly and commit sin (sin that God will punish) are inspired by practical atheism. Therefore, atheists are not only Marxists but practical atheism exists among capitalists who set up money and power as their idols. They substitute these idols for the true God. Others favor a revolution to resolve the problems of society and they rely on human force and put God aside. Others are comfortable in their present situation and so they forget about God and believe they can survive with the material things of this world. This is atheistic materialism.

There is another false image of God, one that Jesus lashed out against when he found it in the very Temple where people were supposed to find God. He found a superficial, legalistic and utilitarian religion: the religion of the Pharisees. What a strong moral lesson from the Divine Master who says: *God is not worshiped in one temple or another, but God is worshiped in all places in Spirit and in truth* (a). This spirit and truth had become profoundly absorbed in laws and a casuistry and a series of exterior practices. God had become the fruit of a legal system, as though God were content with seeing people with clean hands or seeing the Pharisees dressed in strange garments proclaiming God in the city plazas. Jesus says: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like white-washed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth* (b).

What a façade of piety, but inside they are nothing more than atheists! How many forms of prayer and how many religious practices are simply exterior, ritualistic and legalistic practices! This is not the worship that God desires! The same kind of accusation has leveled against us, the sacred ministers of the Church, because many times we have made our worship a type of business. The Lord can enter with his whip into our temple and say: *My house shall be a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves* (c).

This God is a ritualistic God, a God of exterior actions, a God who from the depths of the heart is proclaimed to be loved and yet is receiving the greatest abuse from those who disobey God's law and make God's religion and holiness consist of merely legal and human practices. We must be very careful my beloved priests, men and women religious and dear lay people! How many times do we see ourselves as good people and others as evil? When we come before God how many times are we like the man in the gospel who prayed: *O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --- greedy, dishonest, adulterous --- not like this Publican who is beating his breast* (d). After listening to the prayer of the Pharisee, Jesus says: *I tell you when the two men left the Temple, the humble Publican who did not even raise his eyes to heaven, he went home justified. The Pharisee, the hypocrite, the arrogant and blessed one who had no esteem for others, he did not go home justified. For all those who exult themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted* (e).

My dear sisters and brothers, another false image of God, one that is similar to the previous one, is the image of a spiritualistic God, a God who is not incarnated in our reality, the God of the priest and the Levite who saw the wounded Jewish man on the road and did nothing. This is the God of those who say: *Ah! The Church is involved in politics, and speaks about socialism and earthly realities.* They would prefer that the Church not speak about these things and they want the Church to ignore the wounded man lying on the road. For them none of this is religion because they see religion from the perspective of the priest and the Levite, namely, to go to the Temple to pray (f) and thus there is no time to provide for the material needs of the earth. They have forgotten that Christ did not justify this false piety that so many people seem to accept. On the other hand, Jesus praised the Samaritan who did not exalt himself as being holy and pious, who was neither a priest nor a Levite, yet he dismounted his horse and acted well toward the injured man without taking note of his nationality. Jesus says that this man, the Samaritan, was a true neighbor and that we should act like this Samaritan.

This is the true God. Therefore, when they asked Christ: *Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?* He responded and said: *You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself (g).* When the Church preaches a God who is not incarnated in the realities of our life, when the preachers of the gospel say that we do not have to be concerned about the things of this world and should simply praise God, when some Protestant sects proclaim the gospel and criticize the Catholic Church because she demands that the human rights of all people be respected, none of this is authentic worship of God even though it might take place in our Catholic churches.

True worship of God consists in the following: a worship that incarnates this awe, love, adoration and faith in the Absolute and in the transcendent in the present historical moment. From this perspective of God's power that transcends our weakness, this worship of God makes the Church's voice all powerful in order to speak out against the sins of women and men, sins that offend God. Those who proclaim a God who is not concerned that unjust people sin and offend God are preaching a false God. These are false concepts of the God of our faith.

Who, then, is the true God of our faith? In today's three readings, we are presented with three beautiful concepts and I invite you, my sisters and brothers, not to focus on the negative and repugnant aspects that I have outlined above. I have spoken about all of this so that we can avoid falling into this false worship of God and so that during this time of confusion we do not allow ourselves to be seduced by false religious concepts that are utilized by many persons to maintain situations that are very sinful. Let us focus on the God of Moses, the God of Jesus and the God of Paul. These are the three ideas that I want to present today.

The God of Moses

Moses, in one of the most beautiful chapters of the book of Exodus, speaks about the time when the People of Israel felt as though God had become distant from them because of their evil conduct. I invite you to read in your own Bibles, not only the passage that we have just heard proclaimed, but read the whole thirty-fourth chapter of this book. In this passage from the book of Exodus two concepts are highlighted: 1) God is a monotheistic God and 2) God is involved in our lives.

What is the meaning of this word? Monotheistic, one God. The Old Testament did not have a concept of the Blessed Trinity. The Old Testament knew the One God. The Blessed Trinity is revealed with Christ, but the Old Testament attempted to educate people about religion. These people lived in the midst of a spontaneous polytheism. Polytheism refers to the phenomenon of many gods: poly, many; theism, gods. Polytheism refers to a system of many gods. A god was created for every phenomenon: the god of storms, the god of fertility, the god of anger, etc. There were so many gods that in the Roman Pantheon, where the Roman recognized the gods of the people that they conquered, there was not enough room for all the gods. This was the danger that Moses warned the people about. The People of Israel had been led out of polytheistic Egypt, had been delivered from Egypt where there were many gods. Moses had received from the true God the charge of educating the people in monotheism, in the belief in one God. God revealed himself to Moses when he asked: *If they ask me, "what is his name?" what am I to tell them? God replied, "I am who am" (h).* For the first time in history the sacred name of Yahweh was pronounced. *This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you (i).*

What is the meaning of this phrase? There are two different explanations. One is philosophical, which holds that in this phrase the essence of God is presented. God is being. But there is also another explanation that is held by the majority of biblical scholars and they see this phrase as an historical-salvific explanation: *I am the one who is in the midst of the people. I am their hope, their protection and their activity. I am not a foreigner to you but I am in your midst.* This is the God of Moses. For this reason I speak here about a monotheistic God, one God whom the people of Israel prayed to day and night in their famous prayer: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (j).* Even the youngest person in Israel knew how to repeat this monotheistic formula. *The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!.*

This one and only God is also a God who is experienced, a God who is involved in history, a God who is not distant from people, but a God whom people can experience in the vicissitudes of history. These people have their own history but they recognize that God has chosen them as a father chooses his firstborn. Thus, in the Bible, Israel is called the firstborn, the beloved of God, a people who experience God as their Father, a God who accompanies them in all the difficult and glorious moments of their history.

Look, my sisters and brothers, at the way in which all of this has been passed down to us. Here, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, we encounter a God who is monotheistic and involved in our lives. I would like this homily to awaken in the hearts of all people --- especially those who have distanced themselves from God and those who are most pessimistic and unjust and sinful --- the same awareness that filled Moses when he exhorted the people to love and adore and obey and be grateful to this God who is not a stranger or a foreigner but a God who accompanies the people on their journey.

The Second Vatican Council states: *The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design over man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human (k).* How complete is humankind's vocation! We who have faith in God as well as those who are not people of faith are living the same signs of the times. El Salvador, this

small nation, is composed of people who are non-believers and believers, people of faith and people who have no faith. Yet all of these people live with the same signs of the times, the same realities that I am going to speak about at the end of this homily. All have felt during this past week the consequences of the abductions, violence and injustice. But for those without faith, all of this seems to be a dead end street, a failure in history, while those people of faith, as the Council states, are led by the Lord's Spirit to interpret the events of history in a more human way.

This is the true God, the God experienced, the God of Moses, the God of history, who not only saves in Israel's history, but saves in the history of El Salvador. This is the God who has established a Church to proclaim faith in the true God and to purify history of sin and to sanctify history in order to make it the vehicle of salvation. This is what the Church wants in El Salvador: the Church wants to make our nation's history, not a history of ruin, not a history of atheism, not a history of abuses and injustices, but a history that coincides with the ideals of God who loves the people of El Salvador.

If Moses had been a Salvadoran in 1978, he would have heard from the burning bush the same voice of Yahweh that he heard when God sent him to deliver the people from Pharaoh's tyranny: *I will be with you* (l). Let us fill ourselves with great trust today when the Church invites us to go to the sources of our hope and of our religion to encounter the true God, the God who loves us, his family, as a father.

The God of Jesus

It is easy to move to this second idea. Saint Paul uses a beautiful phrase: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (m). Let us repeat this phrase over and over again during our meditations and let us realize that this God of our people is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was for this reason that Christ came to the world. Here we are presented with today's third reading, the gospel, in which Jesus speaks to us about the great revelation: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life* (n). These words explain why the messenger of eternal life came into the world. They explain why the only Son of God, the One who in his divine essence has received the quality of the Word, the Son, the eternal nature of God, life that will never end, light that breaks through all darkness, the solution of all problems, the love of all those who are hopeless, the joy of all those who are sad --- yes these words explain his appearance in the world. Whoever possesses this Son of God lacks for nothing.

Jesus said: *the Kingdom of God is within you if you accept it*. (o) From this follows the powerful words that conclude today's gospel: *Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe* (p) --- listen to this very well my sisters and brothers, *those who do not believe in the Son of God, those who do not believe in Christ, those who do not believe in this Church that is Christ's spouse and prolongation*, what will happen to them? The gospel does not speak of some future condemnation, but rather speaks of a present condemnation that will be carried over to a future time. *Whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he does not believe in the name of the only Son of God* (q). Thus the heart of the unbelieving person is a hell. I do not know how people can live without faith. I do not understand how the materialist can live. I do not understand how the idolaters of this earth can live. I do not understand how they can defend these paltry, passing realities of the world that have to be left behind at death nor do I understand how they can stop loving and believing in the One who brought us eternal life and as a condition for gifting us with this eternal life asks us to believe in him. Indeed the Father has so loved us

that he handed over his only Son to us. Look at this word *hand over*, it is a word that implies sacrifice. We might think of the example of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (r). Abraham is willing to hand over his son to God. We might also consider here the request of one who is in love and requests of another who is the object of his/her love: *if you love me, give me such and such a thing; if you love me, hand yourself over to me*. God has accomplished this handing over, this gifting: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...* (s). Jesus adds: *those who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life*. To believe is to give oneself over to Christ.

Thus Christ says in reply: *No one who believes in Him* (t). To believe is not simply a matter of the head... yes, we must believe in the eternal truths, but it is not enough to accept all of this with our minds. Saint James says: *Even the devil believes that God exists, yet he will never be saved* (u). To believe is not something that is theoretical but an act of the will. To believe is to be like Mary who says to the angel: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word* (v). This is faith: to give oneself to God. Faith is what a child has when its father puts out his hands and says, *Jump!* and the child leaps into space with the assurance that its father's hands will not let him/her fall. This is faith. This is what Jesus means when he says: *Those who believe in me will not be condemned* (w). Those who surrender and do not distrust, those who even in the hardest times believe and hope --- they will not be condemned. But those who do not believe, those who will not leap into Christ's arms because they are more anchored to their earthly possessions, those who do not believe, those who do not trust in God, those who do not believe that God accompanies them in their history and will save them --- they are already condemned. Their life is already a hell. There is so much hell all around us because we are the victims of so many diabolic acts ... but there is much faith in the hearts of the people of El Salvador.

What more can we say about the God of our Lord Jesus Christ? The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a solitary, single God. From this reality we have the revelation that gives a name to today's celebration, the feast of the Blessed Trinity. Christ came to tell us that he is the Son of a Father and that the Father, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, will send us a Holy Spirit who will come and teach us the truth and strengthen this Church.(x) This is a great revelation. God is not a solitary being but is three Persons. God is a family, a communion. God is love and three Persons participate in this love: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At the Jordan River when John the Baptist baptized Christ, the gospel tells us: *a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased* (y). The presence of the Spirit breathes forth the love of the Father and the Son and is presented as a white dove that rests upon the head of the divine baptized Jesus. (z) The same thing occurs on Mount Tabor: the Father and the bright cloud that is presented as the Spirit of God enfolds the Son in this cloud of love and glory --- Father, Son and Spirit are present. (a2)

Christ makes this great revelation that God is love and not a solitary, selfish God. God is love because he communicates this love and totally gives us his divine nature. Without losing this divine nature the Father shares it with the Son and the Spirit; without losing this divine nature the Son shares it with the Father and Spirit; without losing this divine nature the Spirit shares it with the Father and the Son. At the time of our glorification we will share in this great mystery that theologians call the light of glory, and then we will be able to understand the supernatural realities. We will then see how great is this source of light and joy and love that we called the Blessed Trinity. Perhaps the name, slightly effeminate, doesn't fully express the majesty and beauty of this God, three in one, this God of majesty

and power, of love and wisdom, the God of all creation. In this light of this trinitarian love, it would be good to reflect on the beauty of creation. Only when we see the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ illuminating our dawns, our seas and our volcanos, can we understand that God has created the world through love to give it to his children with whom he wanted to share as in a family. So we understand how the earth groans beneath the weight of sin (b2) because humanity has not understood that creation is for the happiness of all, rather than installing themselves in comfort.

The God of Paul

Finally, my dear sisters and brothers, let us talk about the God of Saint Paul. Let us feel, like Paul, the great Christian, just one thing, namely, that this God is the God of our community. If our God is a God who is involved in our history and our lives, a God who is present in our Church, then we can ask ourselves: what is this God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit doing? Certainly this God is not involved in some conversation and living a happy life in heaven unmindful of what is happening here on earth. Our God is not like three great and distinguished individuals who are most happy and give no importance to the caravan of pilgrims that they have created. No, the opposite is true. God turns all his attention to this community that he wants to be the Church and this Church is called to be the leaven of the community and all humanity.

Look at what Saint Paul says: *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you* (c2). These words appear to me to resemble the words that we heard in the first reading: *Having come down in a cloud, the Lord stood with him [Moses] there, and pronounced his name, "Lord"* (d2). This is the Church, a Sinai upon which God has descended and remains with us. Ah! If we could only feel this presence my sisters and brothers! The Church is Sinai upon which the Blessed Trinity has descended with three gifts that are mentioned by Saint Paul in today's reading: *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (e2). The Son was the messenger and through him we know that which is primary. He gave us the gift of grace. Grace means the forgiveness of our sins and signifies that we have been made children of God. Grace also signifies baptism through which a child of the flesh becomes a child of God. Grace can also be seen in the symbol of the hand of the confessor who, when we are burdened by sin, absolves us. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is also symbolized by my hands which within a few moments will distribute Communion, the Body of Christ, the life of God. My words are not mine but rather they are God's words and if these words touch the hearts of many who need light and comfort and hope, then it is God who touches these people, it is God, who through my words, communicates the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything originates in the love of God, the love of the Father. (f2) My sisters and brothers, God so loved the world that he redeemed the world. (g) We were not redeemed because some individual existed who was so worthy that he was able to attract God and bring forth God's pardon and reconciliation. Everything originated from a divine initiative. When we feel that we are better than others we should not become proud because everything proceeds from God. If you have not fallen into crimes, then you owe this to God. The sinner who has fallen into a deep void should be aware of the fact that redemption depends on God and not on him. Ask for God's mercy. Thus at the beginning of the Mass we say: *May God have mercy on us*¹. God takes the initiative. It was God's initiative and because of the Father's love the Son was sent into the world.

And when the Father sent the Son and the Son redeemed the world by dying on the cross and then when the Son returned to heaven, as Saint Paul says, from that heaven comes the fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Fellowship, a common life --- this is a bond that unites the life of God with the life of humanity. This fellowship is like an electrical current that moves from God to humanity and from humanity to God. This is our religion and this is our Church.

Therefore in the Church we experience these energies: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Look at how the Blessed Trinity is able to create among men and women this fellowship, this community. The Council states that: *the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument, that is, a communion with God and a unity among all people.* (12). My sisters and brothers, when I think about this community of men and women and when I think concretely about our beloved Archdiocese, I feel so deeply the presence of the divine that I know that it is God's initiative that gathers us together and that it is the grace of Jesus Christ who gives us the gift of faith and that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit binds us together and comforts us and gives us joy. I think of this present moment of the Archdiocesan community that is on pilgrimage in the four Departments, this beautiful and elegant Archdiocese that comes alive in the base communities of faith where men and women and young people become more aware of and feel in their hearts this love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that I insist that we create more base communities of faith. This is not some invention that has occurred in recent times, but is a great need for all people so that they might know and love and live together with a greater awareness of this divine energy.

Life of the Church

Here I want to express my joy for having been able to experience during this past week some very joyful moments, such as the celebration of Seminary Day. Many people have offered prayers for the seminarians and also offered much assistance. Though we have not received all the help that is necessary, I want to express my gratitude to the Voluntary Sacrifice Group who through Refugio Alvarez offered 1,000.00 colones to the seminary. This amount symbolized the fruit of their sacrifice.

In this same line of thought and as a visible sign of this community that is the Diocese, that lifts up this temple, the Cathedral ... because this Archdiocese is a sign of the Church, it must also be the focal point of contradictions, the object of much murmuring but also the object of very generous collaboration. When you leave Mass this morning, I invite you to look up and notice the work that has been accomplished in the construction of the cupola. Let us be encouraged to help in this work since the construction of a church has to be the product of all people. It should not be simply an official work that is given support and subsidies but should be the result of everyone's effort, the effort of all those who feel that they are members of this Church that is represented on a local level by this Cathedral.

I experienced great joy as I visited La Laguna, Comalapa and La Junta. These are three very scenic communities in the far distant Department of Chalatenango. What great love for the Father exists in the hearts of these people! How apparent is the grace of Jesus Christ --- a grace that leads them to greater holiness! What communion in the Spirit is there in the love of these people! --- a love that enabled them to be one in heart and soul during the Masses that I celebrated there and also during the meetings that I had with the pastoral ministers.

I also experienced this communion in the Spirit last night when I visited Morazán and the Assumption sisters and those who support the work that is taking place there. This is a very poor area but their love for one another makes them very happy. Speaking about missionaries, I want to express my gratitude to the Carmelite Missionaries who are the heart of the ministry that is occurring in the zone of Chalateca. I want to congratulate the Franciscans of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who celebrated their 50th anniversary of ministry here in El Salvador. Bishop Belloso y Sánchez installed them in their ministry in Zacatecoluca and they now flourish in all of Central America and have many vocations.

I also want to announce to the Archdiocesan community that next Sunday we will celebrate with much enthusiasm the feast of Corpus Christi. Thursday is the proper celebration of this feast but as I have told you previously, these important feasts are often transferred to Sunday. Therefore, next Sunday at 4:00pm I hope to see all of you here in the Cathedral so that we can celebrate this solemnity of Corpus Christi and thus give homage to Christ who is the soul of our Church.

Events of the week

My sisters and brothers, from the perspective of this community that is encouraged and strengthened by the Spirit of God, this community that is like Israel in Egypt that must journey through the world, we feel that our own journey is now passing through some very difficult times. I want to point out here some of the terrorist attacks that occurred during this past week. The Supreme Court of Justice was riddled with machine guns². Don Ernesto Sol Meza, Don Luis Méndez Novoa³ and Fujio Matsumoto⁴ were abducted. Once again we raise our voice and say NO to violence. We remember these three individuals and their families who are now suffering as a result of this violence. We also call to mind the fact that during these days Pope Paul VI has reiterated his NO to violence in light of the abduction and assassination of the politician and Christian, Aldo Moro. Because of a lack of time I am not going to read you the whole message that the Pope wrote to the abductors when he told them⁵: *I do not know you but you ought to have some human feelings toward a person who in no way merits such a fate but rather deserves all of our respect.* My sisters and brothers, we can say that violence can never be justified and that it is always useless and causes greater evil. While Catholic morality allows for a just war in certain situations, yet this is permissible only after all reasonable and peaceful means have been exhausted.

In this list of repression and violence, we must also mention the occupation of the Red Cross by the Committee of Mothers of Political Prisoners⁶

We mention here the fact that the army has repressed a demonstration of *campesinos* in Zacatecoluca and as a result there have been two deaths (two people were pursued and persecuted in the village of El Espino)⁷.

We remember that one year ago the area of Aguilares was attacked and occupied. We remember that the parish church was profaned and three priests who ministered in this area were expelled from the country.

When speaking about the violent atmosphere that exists in our country, we must also mention the outrage and abuse committed against our beloved Father Francisco Mejía⁸. We also remind all those who abuse our priests in such a violent way that through their actions

they have excommunicated themselves from the Church. Even though they may not believe in this reality of excommunication yet we proclaim that excommunication is a way in which God separates those who commit such grave sins from the communion of his love and from the communion with the larger community of believers.

This week, the last phase of the Educational Reform was completed and we congratulate the representatives of the Church who raised their voices and spoke about the criteria that should guide this reform. I hope that the words of these representatives will be kept in mind by the governmental and educational authorities. The Church speaks to the people with a sincere love and for this reason has participated in this seminar.

As promised, our beloved Archbishop Chávez y González received an award as a Distinguished Citizen. I was unable to attend this ceremony since, as I already stated, I was visiting the area of Chlaltenango. Two weeks ago, I expressed my thoughts on this matter.

I also want to mention here that Bishop Revelo blessed the initial work of a building that will be used to help the victims of the recent fires. This has been a way in which the Church has been able to be present with a group of people who deserve the Church's support. Therefore I ask you to see in this gesture the presence of a Church that cannot separate herself from those who suffer.

This, my sisters and brothers, is the reality of our actual pilgrimage through life. But let us not forget, however, that as we journey in the midst of so many changes we are accompanied by the God of Moses, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are accompanied by this God who is present in our community because this God is the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Let us now proclaim our faith, a faith that is purified of all those false ideas of God. Let us believe and let us be grateful for the presence of God among our people. Today we will sing our proclamation of faith.

¹ Roman Missal, penitential act.

² The attack, carried out on 15 May 1978, caused material damage and was attributed to the guerrilla organization Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP). See *El Diario de Hoy*, 18 May 1978.

³ Two important business men kidnapped 14 May 1978 as they were leaving the El Salvador Sheraton hotel. Ernesto Sol Mesa was involved in several firms, including the bottling plant *La Tropical*, and Luís Méndez Novoa was a prominent trader.

⁴ A Japanese citizen and president of Industrias Sintéticas de Centroamerica (INSINCA) who was kidnapped 17 May 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 18 May 1978.

⁵ See "Letter of the Pope to the men of the Red Brigade seeking the release of the deputy Aldo More", *Osservatore Romano*, 30 April 1978.

⁶ The 17 of May 1978 The Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners and Disappeared in El Salvador occupied the centre of the Red Cross and began a hunger strike for the freedom of political prisoners and clarification about the disappeared. See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 17 May 1978.

⁷ The victims were Oscar Gabriel Caminas Rójas and José Natividad Arévalo Rodríguez. This demonstration was carried out by FECCAS and UTC 17 May 1978 on the occasion of the first anniversary of the military occupation of Aguilares. See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 17 May 1978 and *El Diario de Hoy* 18 May 1978.

⁸ Fr Francisco Mejía was captured and tortured by the Guardia Nacional in Cinquera. See "Notas al margen. Sigue la persecución", *Orientación*, 11 June 1978.

Margin References (a) Jn 4,21-24: (b) Mt 23,27: (c) Mt 21,13: (d) Lk 18,11: (e) Lk 18,14: (f) Lk 10,29-37: (g) Mt 22,36-39: (h) Es 3,13: (i) Ex 3,14: (j) Dt 6,4: (k) GS 11: (l) Ex 3,14: (m) Ep 1,17: (n) Jn 3,16: (o) Lk 17,21: (p) Jn 3,18a: (q) Jn 3,18b: (r) Gn 22,2: (s) Jn 3,16: (t) Jn 3,18a: (u) Jm 2,19: (v) Lk 1,38: (w) Jn

3,18a: (x) Jn 14,26: (y) Mt 3,17: (z) Mt 3,16: (a2) Mt 17,5: (b2) Rm 8,22: (c2) 2Cor 13,13: (d2) Ex 34,5:
(e2) 2Cor 13,13a: (f2) 2Cor 13,13b: (g2) Jn 3,16: (h2) 2Cor 13,13c: (i) LG 1: (j2) 2Cor 13,13.