

# CHRIST, BREAD OF LIFE FOR THE WORLD

**Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ**  
**May 28, 1978**

*Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a*  
*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*  
*John 6:51-59*

My dear brothers and sisters.

According to the official and world calendar of the Church, Thursday of this past week was the proper day to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi. The bishops of El Salvador, however, together with the Episcopal Conferences of other countries, have asked permission from the Holy See to transfer these important feasts of the Lord to the following Sunday so that all people who assist at Mass on Sunday, and otherwise are not able to attend Mass during the week, are able to receive the precious message of these liturgical feasts. This liturgical feast that has been transferred to this Sunday is called the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Usually we refer to this feast as Corpus Christi which are Latin words that mean *body of Christ*. Therefore, since today is the feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, we are going to entitle this homily: Christ, the living bread that gives life to the world.

We use this title because this is the meaning of the Eucharist. What is the Eucharist? It is a sacrament, a mystery of the presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. A sacrament is a visible sign that our senses are able to perceive. Thus the bread and wine we are able to taste. Our senses are able to understand the reality of a sign but through faith we are able to discover an interior element, the significance of the sign. For example when we see smoke coming from behind a wall, we see the smoke. This is a sign, but with our knowledge we are able to say: *there is a fire; something is burning*. The reality is the fire and the smoke is a sign of this reality. So, too, with the Eucharist, the bread and wine are signs. Saint Thomas says that the senses perceive the taste of bread and wine, but our faith tells us that in this taste of bread and wine we do not have what the philosophers call the substance of bread and wine.<sup>1</sup> In the Eucharist only the accidents have remained, but the substance has been transformed into the true presence of the Lord.

The Body and the Blood of the Lord are the reality that is hidden and enclosed in the visible sign. Therefore, when the priest consecrates the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord, the act of what theologians call transubstantiation occurs. In other words, the substance of bread and wine has been replaced by the real presence of Christ. Christ becomes really and truly and substantially present in the host which continues to have the taste of bread and in the chalice which continues to have the taste of wine. But after the act of consecration we are no longer dealing with bread and wine, but with the real presence of Christ. This is the mystery that we celebrate today.

Hopefully as we reflect today in light of the Word of God, we are able to deepen our faith in the Eucharist this morning and hopefully our assistance at Mass does not become a routine

action. May we come together not because of some custom or out of curiosity but may we be motivated to come to Mass to encounter this great mystery of the presence of the Lord. When we leave the Mass, hopefully like Moses who came down from Mount Sinai, our faces will be transformed by this act of being in the presence of God. (a) Despite the fact that outside, people will attempt to disturb our serenity, yet I beg you to make every effort to reflect on the fact that every Sunday we have the opportunity to be in the presence of God. Today, the three readings speak to us about this reality.

The first reading from the Old Testament prefigures God's intervention. As the people of Israel journey in the desert, we discover the reality that Christians experience and live, the Eucharist. All of this is prefigured in that history of the pilgrimage through the desert. The second idea is the following: this prefigurement, this prophecy of the Old Testament, is fully realized in Christ who becomes present in the host. The second reading and the gospel of Saint John speak to us about this idea. In the third place, the next idea that we reflect on is the fact that this Eucharist that brings us together and around which Christians always congregate, is nourishment and power that binds together this community that we call Church. In speaking about this community that is our Church here in San Salvador, I will mention some of the historical events through which we have journeyed during the past week. Indeed our journey is similar to that of the people of Israel who journeyed in the midst of historical circumstances during their forty years in the desert.

### **God's interventions God through the desert pilgrimage prefigure the Eucharist**

In the first place, the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy from which the first reading is taken speaks about a solemn moment in the history of the Exodus event. Moses, on Mount Horeb, has established the covenant between God and the people and the people have begun their journey through the desert. Now we find Moses on another mountain, Mount Moab. On Moab Moses reminds the people of the temptations and difficulties that they have encountered during their forty years in the desert and as he looks toward the future when they will enter the Promised Land he exhorts the people to be faithful to this God who has accompanied them on their journey. This is the solemn moment in which Moses looks back at the long history of the Exodus event and then looks at the future of Israel's history and it is there that this new covenant of the Old Testament is revealed and where people are reminded of the temptations and the reasons why God put people to the test. Finally Moses speaks about the interventions of God on behalf of this people.

Moses reminds the people how they were delivered from slavery. They were Pharaoh's slaves, a people who had been humiliated but because of a divine intervention, Moses led this people out of slavery. The first plagues did not convince Pharaoh --- this seems to be the situation of all tyrants, they are difficult to convince --- but then came the last plague in which the firstborn children of the Egyptians were killed and finally the people were able to leave Egypt. This was the beginning of their difficult journey. Moses reminds the people of this experience: *Remember how you were hungry and blasphemed and wanted to return and eat the onions in Egypt* (b). At that time slavery seemed to be a better alternative. It was difficult for Moses to convince the people to move forward toward their liberation, a liberation which implied that they would have to suffer before entering the Promised Land. Moses also tells the people to remember the thirst that they felt and how they put God to the test, almost blaspheming him: *Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?* (c). They remember the difficulties of the desert through which they have journeyed: what thirst and without a drop of water!

What vermin were encountered in the desert: scorpions and serpents! (d) How difficult was all of this, the temptations and the trials of the journey. Moses explains to the pilgrims the reasons why they have experienced these trials. Why did God permit this? *Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments* (e).

My sisters and brothers, let us not forget today's words for they are the response that must be given to many people who are not in conformity with the present situation or who experience difficult moments in history. Like Moses, we also might raise the same questions when we confront trials and tribulations in society, when we find ourselves on a dead end street: *why does God permit this?* Moses reminded the people: *to test you by affliction... to discover your intentions* (f). Difficulties are the touchstones that enable us to discover the refined gold of true men and women, of true Christians. When difficulties arose, the people blasphemed and spoke against God and his kingdom; they spoke against Moses who guided them and they said they preferred to live in comfort even if that meant they had to live as slaves.

How difficult it is to understand that the afflictions of God and the difficulties of the journey are the ways in which freedom, dignity, and the joy of being free is achieved. Finally Moses tells the people: *Remember how your God has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction... but God was with you* (g). Moses reminds them that he led them out of Egypt. This is a reality, they have left the condition of slavery and when they suffered the anguish of loneliness and the wilderness and hunger and thirst, God was there with them

Here then we are presented with the sacramental signs. Look at how the people seek out the presence of God beneath these sacramental signs. Moses mentions four.

The first of which is the cloud which protects them from the sun. The book of Exodus speaks about a cloud in which God walked, a cloud that protected the people from the heat of the sun. (h)

Moses reminded the people that when they were hungry, they awoke and found outside their tents a mysterious element that made them ask in Hebrew *man hu* which means: *What is this?* (i) Manna is a question, a mysterious element that God sent the people when they were hungry. Manna is a sacramental sign.

When the people were dying of thirst, God commanded Moses to strike the rock with his mysterious rod and water flowed from the rock which then satisfied everyone's thirst, including the animals that the Israelites had brought with them. (j) According to a rabbinical legend, the rock always accompanied this Pilgrim People and each time that they were thirsty, Moses struck the rock and water flowed. This was a sacramental sign of God's presence in the midst of his people.

Another sign is the sea. The sea opens from side to side and the people were able to leave their bondage of slavery in Egypt. (k) When the people had passed to the other side of the Red Sea, the water closed once again and the Egyptian army was drowned. Moses on the other side sang: *Let us sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant and has freed his people* (l).

Here we see the presence of sacramental signs. In the Bible neither the cloud nor the sea nor the rock were important, for these were signs of something much greater: signs of the presence of God. In the reading from Deuteronomy we hear the words that Jesus spoke when he was tempted in the desert: *not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord* (m). This is a classical text in the Bible and expresses a whole theology about the Word of God. When the lector at the Mass reads from the Bible and concludes the reading we hear the proclamation: *this is the Word of God*. When Moses spoke about God's protection during the time when the people experienced hunger, he said: *not by bread alone does man live*. The people did not live because of the food they ate in Egypt or the dough that they kneaded. Rather God speaks a creative word, a word that creates bread, a word that can change the desert stones into bread. God speaks an all-powerful word, a word that becomes a divine person, the Son of God, the Word, and this word is incarnated, is Jesus Christ. (n) In the Bible this is what is most important --- that in these sacraments is the all-powerful Word of God.

### **The prefigurement of the Old Testament is fully realized in Christ, present in the host**

My second thought is based on the second reading. As Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he tried to explain to them the same reality that Moses proclaimed to the people of Israel. Moses, however, only knew of Christ as some future promise. Paul also did not know Christ personally but persecuted the Christians. He was converted and discovered who this Christ is. In this beautiful letter to the Corinthians he says: *I am going to tell you about that which I received from those who had the honor to eat and drink and talk with and walk with Christ: he instituted this Sacrament so that the bread might become his body and the wine, his blood.*(o)

All that happened to Moses and his people when they journeyed through the desert, was a prefigurement of the Eucharist, a preamble of things of come, a promise, a prophecy. (p) Now, however, as Christians, we live at a time when this promise and prophecy has been fulfilled. Saint Paul teaches us, above all, that in the two signs of the desert: the rock from which water was made to flow and the manna which satisfied their hunger --- these two signs prefigure the great sacrament of the Eucharist.

The bread and wine of our Eucharist which Saint Paul celebrated.... Paul lived some thirty years after Christ and it was at this time that he wrote the passage that we proclaimed in today's reading. Keep this in mind: thirty years after Christ celebrated the Eucharist, Paul wrote these words that teach us that from the earliest times the Christians, like the Christians today on Sunday May 28 1978, gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist. Naturally they did not have churches like we do, but these men and women were followers of Christ. Paul taught these communities what happens when they gather together to celebrate the Eucharist.

In the first place, the Word of God nourishes us. The Eucharist is always celebrated after the biblical readings and the homily is proclaimed. In the celebration of the Word, the apostle, the bishop, the priest creates a spirit so that later he is able to celebrate this Word that becomes the presence of God: the Eucharist. We have listened to the letter of St Paul today and we have seen how evident is the presence of Christ in the host. The reading states: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ ?* (q) A participation in the Blood of Christ! *And the bread that we share, the host of wheat, does this not unite us all in the Body of Christ ?* The words of St Paul are very clear and teach us about

the Body and Blood of Christ. Keep in mind that St Paul, in this passage that we have proclaimed, describes in a beautiful manner the meaning of the Mass. We have just read a short passage from this letter and I invite you all to read the tenth and eleventh chapter of the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

We are told that the Corinthians had been converted from paganism, from the worship of false idols. We are told that at one time they offered sacrifices to these idols and after their conversion and becoming Christians, they wanted to participate once again in those former sacrifices. This was a terrible return to idolatry. Why? Because they had eaten the flesh of Jesus that was offered to them in the Eucharist and thus they had participated in the life of Christ because Christ is present in the Eucharist. After having done this, to gather around the altars of the idols is to participate and share the life of these idols and since these idols are false gods inspired by the devil, Saint Paul says that to eat the sacrifices offered to these idols signifies that one sits at the table of the devil. (r)

My sisters and brothers, we are able to make a beautiful application of these words to our life today. The idols that the Corinthians worshiped do not exist today: images of gold and animals, images of women, the stars and the sun, but there are other idols that we have denounced on many occasions. Therefore Christians who are nourished by the Eucharistic communion and whose faith proclaims that this action unites them with Christ, how can they worship the idol of money or power or their own selfishness? How can a Christian who receives Communion become an idolater? My sisters and brothers, unfortunately there are many people who receive Communion and are idolaters. In this twentieth century, in this year of 1978, Saint Paul could repeat to the many Christians of San Salvador and to the communities that are reflecting on this Word: if you truly believe that Christ is present and becomes united with you at the time of Communion, how is it possible that you live such immoral, selfish and unjust lives? How is it possible that you worship idols? How is it possible that you place more trust in the realities of this world than in the power of Christ who becomes present in this great sacrifice of the Eucharist?

Let us continue to analyze this presence of Christ as it is proclaimed in today's readings. In the gospel Jesus' presence is brought about by the Father. There is a relationship between the Father and the Son: *I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me* (s). How wonderful is this gift of the Eucharist. When we come forward to receive Communion today, let us listen to these words of Christ: *At this time you, who are receiving the sacred Host, are being nourished by my very life. I received this life from the Father but the Father and I are united together in one single life. In order to come forward and be worthy to share in this divine life you had to purify yourself from your sins, free yourself from your sins. My Eucharistic presence is a great liberating power.*

My dear sisters and brothers, let us not forget that at this time when there are so many forces that struggle for the earthly liberation of humankind, our Christian liberation has its starting point here in the Eucharist, in the redeeming power of Christ. Our liberation is first of all a liberation from sin. If we are not freed from sin, if we have not identified ourselves with the divine power of Christ who unites himself with the Father, the Creator, then we cannot be effective liberators. For this reason the Church identifies her liberation, her denunciations and proclamations with this perspective of Christ's life and faith. If Christians mutilate and separate themselves from this grace of God and this life of communion with Christ, then they are not Christian liberators.

There is another aspect to this presence of Christ, namely, a priestly aspect. Christ becomes present in the host as the priest for humanity. Read, for example, the book of Revelation or the letter to the Hebrews and notice the beautiful descriptions of the cult that Christ, in the name of humanity, renders to the Father. From where is Christ exercising his priesthood here on earth? Christ exercises his priesthood here, here in this celebration of the Eucharist. Christ is exercising his priesthood here in the consecrated Host of the Eucharist that unites this pilgrim people that journeys in the arid desert among the serpents and the scorpions. But this people journeys toward the Promised Land and toward the altar where we celebrate the Eucharist, where the glorious Christ becomes present with our sisters and brothers who have already entered the Promised Land.

How beautiful is the Mass, especially when celebrated in a cathedral filled like ours today, or even when celebrated simply in village chapels with people full of faith, who know that Christ, the King of Glory, the Eternal Priest, is gathering together all that we bring him from the week: sorrows, failures, hopes, plans, joys, sadness, pain! How many things each one of you, my sisters and brothers, bring to your Sunday Mass! And the Eternal Priest gathers them in his hands and by means of the human priest, who celebrates the Eucharist, lifts them up to the Father as the product of the people's labor. United to my sacrifice present on this altar, the people are made Godlike and now leave the Cathedral to continue to work and struggle and suffer. But they are forever united with the Eternal Priest who remains present in the Eucharist so that we can meet him again next Sunday. The Mass is beautiful as a sacrifice and this is not some human invention but a presence that has been invented by Christ --- a presence that we are taught about in this morning's readings.

Christ is here among us as food and communion. Christ is our nourishment. Jesus speaks to those who listened to him in Capernaum and pronounced the sermon that we heard proclaimed this morning. After the multiplication of the loaves, when the people wanted to make him king, Jesus said: *Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you* (t). Jesus offers true life, life that will make our work as politicians, sociologists, business people, professionals, students and laborers effective. Jesus gives us true life. He is the bread that has come down from heaven and those who eat of this bread will live forever. (u)

Jesus was very careful to avoid being misunderstood because there seemed to be an sense of anthropophagy when the people asked: *how can this man give us his flesh to eat?* (v). We are not cannibals and we do not eat people. Jesus said: *I am the living bread. I will rise and this mortal body will be transformed into a spiritual body. I will be present in the Christian communities, present but not distributing my flesh physically, rather I will give people my body. But do not understand these words as referring to my material body, rather I am speaking about my spiritual body, and this is the mystery of the mystical body.* It is certain that when we receive the host we receive Christ. Our catechism tells us that in Communion we receive the whole Christ, glorious as he is in heaven --- the Risen Christ, the living Christ, Jesus the living bread who came down from heaven. Jesus nourishes us and in this sense makes us a true community.

### **Christ is the food and power that binds us together as a community**

I now share my final reflection with you: Christ is the food and the power that binds us together as a community. In the second reading today, Saint Paul says: *we though many, are*

*one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (w).* What a beautiful expression of the unity of Christians!

My beloved brothers and sisters, our unity is not based on the ideals of this world. If in this world people are able to express an ideal and ask: *who will follow me to make this ideal real?* --- many will follow but they are living an ideal that comes from a human person and when this person or ideal disappears or is betrayed, everything is thrown into confusion. But Jesus gives us a much more vigorous power, a divine power that no one can destroy. He gives us his Body and Blood, the presence of the Risen One, the life of God. Blessed are those people of faith who discover that Christ is the reason for their being. Blessed are those people who place all their trust in this Christ and receive Communion. All of us who are going to receive Communion this morning are aware of this reality. Even though we are many and may not know one another, even though we have distinct professions and come from different places that might be very distant from one another, nevertheless we are one body because we are nourished by the one bread.

Our ancestors rejoiced in this comparison. They spoke about the grains of wheat gathered from the different mountains, molded together into one bread that later became the one Christ. So, too, we, the men and women of different races and social classes gathered together from different countries, are like those grains of wheat. Gathered together in faith, molded by love and hope, united in Christ-Eucharist, we are no longer separated from one another but we are the one People of God nourished by the presence of the Lord.

This presence of Christ is translated into words for men and women today, for you laymen and women, you who are neither priests nor religious, you who are married, professionals and live in this world. Listen to these words of the Second Vatican Council: *Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers --- whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed. In a word, --- here the Council Fathers refer to a text of the early Fathers of the Church --- "Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body."* (x).

My sisters and brothers, you are going to leave the cathedral today with a faith that has been enlightened by the presence of Christ on our altar. You who have taken communion will leave filled with the spirit of Christ. When will all people who come to the Mass become so united with God and so distant from the sins and the passions and the madness of this world; when will people become so identified with God that when they leave the Cathedral or the parish churches or wherever the Eucharist is celebrated they becomes souls of the world, a Eucharistic leaven in their families, profession, work and social life? We lack many Christians who are like this, who truly live the Eucharist.

The feast of Corpus Christi reminds us of our obligation in this aspect of our faith. If we truly believe that in the Eucharist of our Church Christ is the living bread that nourishes the world, if we truly believe that as Christians who receive the host we are instruments who ought to make this Eucharist present in the world, then we have a responsibility to be a leaven in society and transform this ugly world. Who is going to do this? You! If you, the Christians of El Salvador, do not do this, then we can never expect that El Salvador will become a better place. El Salvador will only be infused with the divine life, with the Kingdom of God, when the Christians of El Salvador propose to live their faith without fear

or timidity or half-heartedness but truly live their faith. As Saint John Chrysostom said: *when you take communion, you receive fire; you ought to leave breathing happiness and the strength that will enable you to transform the world*<sup>2</sup>

Hopefully, my sisters and brothers, our communion on this feast of Corpus Christi will truly transform us into the power of God.

### **Life of the Church**

Since this is the life of our community I want to briefly review some of the events that have occurred during this week, events that have affected this community that lives the Eucharist.

It gives me great joy to receive telegrams from the distant communities such as Las Flores in Chalatenango: *we are celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi and many people have come together for this celebration. We have several processions and are praying to God for some rain. There is a great demonstration of faith and love toward the Blessed Sacrament.* We have received news of this devotion toward the Eucharist from many towns and villages and I personally have witnessed this devotion and love.

The seminary celebrated this feast on Thursday. The seminarians processed and paused at various altars where they developed the following thoughts: *the Eucharist, the life of God in us; the bread of fellowship; the New Alliance; Sacrifice-Sacrament; bread of the poor; social commitment.* I make reference to all of this so that you can see what is being taught in the seminary. This is the heart of the faith of these future priests, a faith that they in turn must proclaim. We have to speak very clearly about this teaching in the seminary especially at this time when people are saying that the seminary is a school for guerrilla fighters<sup>3</sup>. The seminary is a school of apostles where we proclaim the great truth that our strength is found in Christ. This week the seminarians have had a wonderful experience of this Christian education.

I also visited other communities where we were able to live the fervor of these communities as we gathered around the altar. It is not true that the faith is dying in these communities. Today more than ever before the Eucharist is being lived as a commitment with Christ and is not seen as some superficial tradition. For example, on May 16<sup>th</sup> in the village of Zonte de Chiltiupán I celebrated the feast of the Virgin of the Abandoned. What great fervor exists in that community!

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> I celebrated the Eucharist in El Carmen in Cuscatlán and blessed the Church that had been renovated. There I saw what it means to be a faithful priest even as one advances in years. The beloved Father Miguel Rodríguez, surrounded by young priests and others offered to the Lord prayers of joy for the completion of this work of the renovation of the Church. Together with his people he received the bishop with respect and love and there we offered the Eucharist, aware of the fact that this is the center and the source of our unity. I want to thank the teachers and the students and the young people and the Christian Association as well as the Parish Committee for their efforts in maintaining this enthusiastic faith in the Eucharist.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> I celebrated Mass in the parish of María Auxiliadora. I rejoiced in the spirit of Don Bosco who combined in his heart these three great loves that he called the three



pillars of spirituality. The pillar of devotion to the Eucharist, especially in reference to Communion --- this flowed from his great devotion to the Church's sacrament of the Eucharist. The pillar of devotion to the Virgin under the title of Mary, Help of Christians, a powerful magnet that attracted the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially in the morning when thousands of young people attended Mass and were nourished by the Eucharist that was celebrated in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. The pillar of devotion to the Church and the Pope, faithfulness to the Pope is also a sign of our Catholicism and we are trying to live this reality in the most intense way possible.

While speaking about the Eucharist, I want to remind you that on the first day of each month, and therefore on Thursday of this week, at 5:00pm we will celebrate a Holy Hour in the beautiful chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital. We will pray for the needs of the Archdiocese and the world. I invite all of you to join us on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June at 5:00pm in the chapel of Divina Providencia Hospital.

My sisters and brothers, in line with this pillar of devotion to the Church and the Pope, I want to invite the whole Diocese to join with us and celebrate the day of the Pope as a true feast of the Church. The day of Pope is celebrated on the day when the present Pope was crowned Pontiff. Our Pope, Pope Paul VI, was crowned on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Therefore at this time I want to be sure to invite all the parishes and communities to this celebration. Begin to prepare enthusiastically for this celebration which will take place on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Later I will give you more details about this celebration.

We want to highlight and announce to the community that believes in Christ the celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. You know that in San Salvador we have a monument of our devotion to the Sacred Heart, namely the Sacred Heart Basilica located on Calle Arce. There on Friday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, we will celebrate the Eucharist at 6:00pm. Hopefully we will see this great church filled with people to celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In line with this pillar of devotion to Mary we invite all the members of the Legion of Mary to come to the Basilica this morning at 10:30am where their annual meeting will be held. They are called ACIES<sup>4</sup>. For my part, my sisters and brothers, I invite the whole community of the Archdiocese to render homage to Mary as we conclude the month of May. This Wednesday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of the month, we will celebrate Mass here in the Cathedral at noon to honor the Virgin and devoutly crown Mary. This will conclude our celebrations that have been so outstanding in many Christian communities. The love of the Virgin and devotion to Our Lady is far from being outdated --- in fact we notice a renewed and loving devotion and we will once again demonstrate our devotion on Wednesday.

This Church that is living these beautiful and encouraging experiences is the Israel of God --- Saint Paul used this phrase (y) --- the spiritual Israel, the People of God that because of the trials of life is also passing through the arid desert, times of temptation and thirst.

### **Events of the week**

Here we also point out the paths that we must walk as we journey through this world. A mysterious silence continues to surround the three abductions<sup>5</sup> and so we unite our voice to those of many other groups that have raised their voices about this situation.

This has been a week of many biased and evil slanders. I want to repudiate the attacks against my brother bishop, Bishop Aparicio. I also want to express my solidarity with and my repudiation of the biased suspicions that have been leveled against certain priests who work in communion with me. We are also saddened by the torture that was inflicted on Father Francisco Mejía Alvarado and other abuses that occurred in the convent of Cinquera and that were caused by the National Guard. They said that Father Francisco was no longer a priest because he had been suspended. I want to state here that a priest, even when he is suspended, still maintains his priestly character and that the suspension is a disciplinary penalty that depends on his own bishop. We pray to God that this situation of our brother priest in the Diocese of San Vicente might be quickly resolved<sup>6</sup>. The priests are always priests and the soldiers who tortured Father Francisco are excommunicated because all those who violently inflict hands on a priest are excommunicated by their very actions.

Another biased news item revolves around the young man Estefan Turcios<sup>7</sup> who has been pointed out as a seminarian who is close to ordination and was captured committing terrorist and subversive acts. We have stated that this young man was a seminarian until 1972 and what has happened to him, whether or not he is a seminarian, is unjust. He was captured on April 14<sup>th</sup> while he was collecting donations for the victims of San Pedro Perulapán. This is what he was doing: collecting donations. He was imprisoned for a month before he was handed over to the courts, at which time, it was very clear that he had been brutally tortured. The newspapers have published the fact that he had to be hospitalized for 10 days --- this is the truth.

The publication of ORDEN against terrorism is a slanderous statement against the Church<sup>8</sup>. We want to repeat here that the Church, as it points out the roots of the evil in our society and defends the rights of people, is neither terrorist nor in connivance with terrorists but is rather simply fulfilling her evangelical obligations. Those groups that want to manipulate the Church, whether to slander her or take advantage of her, these people are abusing the mission of the Church. The mission of the Church can coincide with the demands of justice that other groups seek, but these groups are independent of the Church. The Church seeks justice from the perspective of the light of the gospel. I want to remind all groups, all political groups, subversive and governmental, please do not manipulate the Church for your own objectives. Maintain respect for the autonomy and the evangelical perspective of the Church.

I am happy to see that the statements of the Church concerning the causes of our evil situation coincide with the words of the United States ambassador who spoke to the Rotary Club during this past week. He said: *If change has to come, then it is prudent that we try to channel it in a positive and constructive manner. Resisting this change will achieve nothing positive. A stubborn resistance to inevitable change can lead to violent and destructive results. When this occurs, everyone loses*<sup>9</sup>. We are in accord with the Ambassador and this is the position of the Church: we point out the need for change because there are many deaf people who do not want to hear about the need for change. But change that is necessary will not be achieved by *putting up with the situation* or by saying *wait!* Even less will this change be brought about by repressive force --- we must call violence what it is: violence. As the ambassador said change will only come about by constructive and positive measures.

Therefore we want to express our solidarity with and at the same time we thank the Universidad Centroamericana for their support and we join with them in their invitation. They call upon all professionals, cultural institutions, and civil and community associations to

engage in a serious reflection on the social and moral commitment that we have and to reject the institutionalized use of force as irrational and anti-human. Let us join together our efforts to resolve the problems of our country<sup>10</sup>.

My sisters and brothers, we conclude precisely where I want to conclude. For having spoken about our journey this week, a journey that is similar to that of Moses, a journey through the arid desert filled with serpents and scorpions, yet God is present with us. God is present here in this Eucharist.

We are going to celebrate our Mass with the same love and confidence that the people of Israel had when they experienced hunger and thirst, when they experienced the heat of the desert sun and hopelessness, when they were tempted to blaspheme God and doubt God. That we should have these same feelings is very natural. But let us also listen to the Church that is present as a sign of God's protection, the rock from which water flows, the bread that God shares with us, the sea that opens for us, the cloud that shelters us, and above all, the Eucharist, the bread and wine, that gifts us with Christ's presence. Let us celebrate this feast of Corpus Christi and renew within ourselves this trust in the Church which does not find support in the powers or the idolatries of this world but in the power of the Lord who will never deceive us or let us down.

Having said all of this I invite the whole community: make every effort to come this afternoon at 4:00pm and render special homage to our Lord, present in the Blessed Sacrament. Please stand.

<sup>1</sup> See St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 q.75, a.10.

<sup>2</sup> See St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Gospel of St Mark*, 82, 5.

<sup>3</sup> A statement signed by the *Comité de Apoyo a la Nueva Iglesia Católica* accuses Mons. Romero of supporting the occupation of churches and embassies from the Seminary of San José de la Montaña. See *La Opinión*, April 1978.

<sup>4</sup> ACIES is a Latin word meaning "an army drawn up for battle" which the Legion of Mary uses to name its main celebration in the year when its members renew their consecration to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>5</sup> Mons Romero is referring to the kidnappings denounced in the previous homily. The silence had not been total since, on May 24, the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) claimed through an announcement responsibility for the kidnap of Mr Fujio Matsumoto and demanded for his freedom the following conditions: the release of 38 political prisoners, the repeal of the Ley de Defensa y Garantía del Orden Público, and a general amnesty. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 May 1978.

With regard to the other two people kidnapped, Ernesto Sol Meza and Luís Méndez Novoa, there had been total silence which was broken on 22 June 1978 when the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL) claimed responsibility for both and set them free after their conditions had been met which were the payment of a large sum of money and the publication of a statement in the principal newspapers of Central America. See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 22 June 1978.

<sup>6</sup> On 27 March 1978 a group of three hundred priests from all over the country sent a letter to the Papal Nuncio in El Salvador, Mons. Emmanuel Gerada, which questioned his political action which showed little solidarity with the Church or the people of El Salvador. As a result, Mons. Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio Quintanilla, Bishop of San Vicente and President of the Bishop's Conference of San Salvador, suspended as parish priests ten priests of his diocese who had signed the letter to the Nuncio. One of the suspended priests was Fr Francisco Mejía Alvarado who eventually offered his pastoral services in Cinquera, Cuscatlán. See "La Iglesia en El Salvador", *Orientación*, 16 March 1978.

<sup>7</sup> *El Diario de Hoy* published on 23 May 1978 a note under this heading: "Capturan a seminarista acusado de terrorismo".

<sup>8</sup> In a statement titled "Facing violence: our principles and the fatherland", the Democratic National Organisation (ORDEN) stated the following: "Because it is intolerable that this wave of violence has found a 'breeding ground' in some priests who use their preaching to foment hatred instead of evangelizing; to pit brother against brother instead of promoting understanding. It is to be condemned that some priests like Fabián Amaya, Rutilio Sánchez, Benito Tobar, David Rodríguez, Barahona and others, influenced by 'communist

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theology' and inexplicably tolerated by the church hierarchy, use the pulpit to spread with shouts a Marxist-Leninist message of salvation which aims to destroy religion". *La Prensa Gráfica*, 25 May 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Address of Frank J. Devine, Ambassador of the United States in El Salvador, to the Rotary Club of San Salvador. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 25 May 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Statement by the teachers and instructors in the departments of Economics, Letters, Philosophy and Political Sciences and Sociology of the Central American University José Simeón Cañas (UCA), 11 May 1978. See *Orientación*, 28 May 1978.

*Margin References* (a) Ex 34,29-30: (b) Ex 16,3: (c) Ex 17,3: (d) Dt 8,15: (e) Dt 8,2: (f) Dt 8,2: (g) Dt 8,14b: (h) Ex 13,21: (i) Ex 16,15: (j) Ex 17,6: (k) Ex 14,21-22: (l) Ex 15,1: (m) Dt 8,3: (n) Jn 1,14: (o) 1Cor 11,23: (p) 1Cor 10,6: (q) 1Cor 10,16: (r) 1Cor 10,21: (s) Jn 6,57: (t) Jn 6,27: (u) Jn 6,51: (v) Jn 6,52: (w) 1Cor 10,17: (x) LG 38: (y) Gal 6,16.