

JUSTIFICATION AND FAITH

Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 11, 1978

Readings:

Hosea 6:3b-6

Romans 4:18-25

Matthew 9:9-13

My dear sisters and brothers.

Today we arrive at the celebration of the tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time and therefore let us not forget the realities that the Church wishes to inculcate into the Christian people during this season of Ordinary Time. While many people find Sunday Mass boring because it is always the same, yet Christians who are consistent in their practice of the faith, know that Mass is not the same celebration week after after week. When one is traveling along the highway, it appears that the markers that signal the number of kilometers that one has traveled are all the same. Yet each marker is different and indicates that one is drawing closer to one's destination. Each marker also has a different number written on it. So, too, throughout the Liturgical Year each Sunday unfolds for us another aspect of the mystery of our salvation. Those Christians who live their faith Sunday after Sunday are like those pilgrims who arrive at a new marker in the highway, for they are filled with a new hope that enables them to continue their journey toward the final destiny of all human life: salvation.

I invite all of you to make our celebration of Sunday Mass conform to the objectives that the Second Vatican Council has pointed out, for they are ways that enable the People of God to be renewed. The Council has indicated the following as the objectives of our coming together each Sunday: to live the community meaning of our Church (1). We cannot save ourselves alone. God wants to save men and women as a people --- a people that worships God. It is good to come together on Sunday and demonstrate that we are the People of God. Secondly, we come together to listen to the Word and participate in the Eucharist. We do not come together out of curiosity but rather we come together in an act of faith --- a faith that is attentive to the Word not because the Word is preached by Father so and so but because the Word is the Word of God. This is primary: the Word of God prepares us to be able to worship Christ in the host, and hopefully to be able to receive the host as nourishment for our pilgrimage. Thirdly, we come together to remember the Passion, Resurrection and Glorification of our divine Lord Jesus Christ. And finally we come together to give thanks to God who has enabled us, through the Resurrection of Jesus, to be reborn to a life of hope.(2) We are able to experience this exuberant, youthful and eternal Christ as he becomes our life. We leave the Sunday celebration of Mass with joy because we have been rejuvenated with a new hope in the risen Lord.

Today's readings nourish these ideas. Therefore I entitle today's homily: Justification and Faith. I am going to present three ideas: First, the justification that God offers humanity; second, the dispositions that humanity ought to have in order to receive God's justification;

third, the mission of the Church and the prophets: to dispose people to receive God's justification.

After I develop these thoughts, I am going to make a concrete application of these reflections, for a meditation on the Word of God that does not apply the Word to the living situation of the people is most dreadful and in no way incarnated in the reality of the people. Therefore, I will conclude my homily by presenting a panorama of the events of the past week. This will enable you to see who is disposed to receive God's justification and who has rejected God's justification or turned their backs on this gift of God. This enables our celebration of the Eucharist to be a sincere celebration of conversion in light of the Word of God that says: *Lord, if at the present time I have turned my back on you, I ask forgiveness. I want to change.* Change is not sinful especially when we change from what is imperfect to that which is perfect. This is the work of our lives: to evolve according to the thoughts of God and not according to our passions.

The justification God offers humanity

We begin then by speaking about the meaning of this justification that God offers us. Just as the gospel presents us with the person of Jesus Christ so, too, we place the person of Jesus before ourselves as the central figure of our reflection (we should not forget that the gospel is always the central focal point of our reflection). Christ is the light who illuminates the human person and our sight should be directed toward Him. At this time we look on Jesus as he calls sinners and then eats and shares a meal with sinners. We see how Jesus is criticized: *why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?* (3). How does Jesus defend himself? He responds to the accusation and denounces it as a form of self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Christ calls the sinner Matthew. The author of the first gospel was a tax collector. Those who study history know that tax collectors were hated during the time of Jesus. The Roman Empire collected taxes from the people who were subject to their rule and in order to collect these taxes that put out bids for this work: who wants to be a tax collector? An individual came forward and bought the job of collecting taxes. This enabled the individual to extort and steal and deceive people --- great fraud was involved in this work. The tax collectors were repugnant. Here in the gospel they are compared to publicans and sinners, to harlots and thieves, evil people.

But Christ called one of them: *Follow me* (4). Matthew left his customs post; profit and extortion were no longer important to him and he followed Jesus. Thankful to Jesus he prepared a banquet, a supper. Naturally he invited his friends, people who were also from his social class, thieves, publicans, tax collectors... Who else would the poor invite? Jesus does not reject Matthew's invitation despite the fact that he lived in the self-righteous environment of the Pharisees who forbade the Jews to mingle with people who did not fulfill the Law and as a consequence were called sinners. The Pharisees did not relate with these people nor did they extend their hands to a tax collector or a publican, even though in their hearts they did worse things. But the Pharisees had to preserve an appearance. Christ did not fear criticism or the environment and so he ate a meal with those "sinners". The Pharisees saw this as an evil action. They spoke to Jesus' disciples and asked: *why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners* (5). Jesus hears their question and defends his position(6): *those who are well do not need a physician but the sick do... I have not come to call the righteous but sinners. I am the Savior of the world. Remember this: this is the will of God: I desire mercy*

and not sacrifice.(7) *You received your reward because of your appearance in your cult and in the Temple. You glorified yourselves because of your legal purity. You do not relate with sinners. You are like whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Hypocrites! I desire mercy. How are your intimate relationships with God? Are you truly honest? Hypocrites!* (8).

Jesus turns the accusation of self-righteousness into a denunciation of the hypocrisy of the society in which he lived. The Divine Teacher reveals to the world God's thinking. Jesus' words to Matthew and his companions (Matthew is revived by Christ's call) are a direct reference to the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus words: *I desire mercy, not sacrifice* are found in the prophet Hosea and we have read this passage today. (9)

Therefore in order to understand this God that is revealed in Jesus, we must return to the Old Testament, to the rest of the Bible. God's thinking is revealed there: *I desire mercy, nor sacrifice*. One must return to the time of the prophet Hosea who experienced the destruction of Israel --- that part of Palestine that was separated from Judea. The Northern Kingdom had a great king when Hosea began to preach: Jeroboam II. But during this glorious time of the Northern Kingdom, just as there were moments of great success and prosperity so too there were great abuses: social injustice, abuses of authority, etc. Read the book of Hosea and see how he denounced all of these injustices. You will also see that the homilies here in the Cathedral are short in comparison to the eloquence of the Prophet who spoke before the kings and the powerful people of his time and confronted them with their abuses and injustices.

After the fall of Jeroboam, he was followed by a series of cowardly rulers who accommodated the Covenant and sought to form alliances with other people. Hosea denounced these cowardly kings who had forgotten the covenant that God had established with the people and looked for support from people rather than God. Hosea criticized the politics of the Kingdom. The prophet must preach against the politics of his time when the political policy is contrary to the law of God. Hosea defended God's law. From the perspective of his prophetic mission he denounced the errors, the idolatry, and the misplaced confidence of the politicians of his time. This then is the God that Hosea proclaimed in an environment that was as difficult as our own situation. The people of Israel had fallen into idolatry and worshiped Baal (Baal was a fertility god). The people believed that the harvest, the rain, and the sun depended on the god Baal. They combined this idolatry with the biblical God. Hosea defended the purity of the Bible, of God's revelation and preached against this idolatry that was mixed with the practice of true religion.

The denunciation of idolatry has always been a dimension of the prophetic mission and the Church's mission. Today people do not worship Baal but there are other great idols of our time. We have the god of money and luxury and power and lust. How many gods are enthroned in our situation? Thus the voice of Hosea becomes real in our own time and he says to Christians: *Do not combine these idolatries with the adoration of the true God. You cannot serve two masters: God and money.*(10) *You can only follow one God.* As Matthew was converted from his idolatry of money and followed the one Lord, Jesus Christ, so too people must desire conversion in order to purify the practice of true religion.

The God that Hosea proclaims... look at how the word of Hosea is incarnated in the reality. Hosea takes the language of the idolatrous rituals of Baal, the hymns that were sung to the rising sun and the rain and attempts to orient this idolatrous language toward the true God. He speaks to the people about a God who was like the early rain that made the earth

fertile, a God who provided water for the earth and made it fertile. (11) This is the true God. Baal is not a true god. He spoke to the people about a God who is faithful like the dawning sun that rises every morning and who is clear and lucid like the sun that brightens the day. With this language that was used by the idolaters to offend God, the prophet Hosea proclaimed the true God and with their own language he denounced the untruthfulness of their worship.

The second reading presents to us the God of the New Testament. My sisters and brothers I recommend that you meditate deeply upon this second reading, but not only on the passage that was read this morning but on the entire chapter for Saint Paul elaborates on the thoughts that were presented to us last week. After having been taught by Christ himself, Saint Paul says that the human person is not justified by his/her own efforts. Neither the Gentiles with the light of natural reason nor the Jews with their Law that was revealed by God are able to justify themselves. The Law alone does not justify nor does the natural reason of the human person. A person can be very honorable... (and thanks to God there are people who have no faith but are very honorable. They are honorable because the light of reason has shown them what they must do and what they should avoid doing). But even when a person is most perfect humanly speaking, without faith that person lacks that which is primary. Saint Paul says: *true justice, that is, true justification, is the intimate activity of God and this God, through his gracious initiative, calls people to this intimacy ... The only people who are justified are those who are thankful to God for allowing them to participate in this intimate life of God. The only people who are justified are those who have no sin, those whose sins have been pardoned by God* (12).

We are not dealing with a justification of appearances. Here Luther was mistaken and many of our separated sisters and brothers follow this doctrine, but thanks to God, not all of them. The followers of Luther understand justification as though God covers over the evil of humanity, but humanity continues in an evil state. The doctrine that Saint Paul presets here is different. He states that humanity is justified, that is, humankind is justified not only in appearances but in reality the sins of men and women have been taken away --- their past has been removed and they have been purified from every stain of sin. We have the example of Matthew's encounter with Jesus. Jesus calls him and he is no longer a sinner; he has responded to Jesus' call. Jesus has gifted him with justification and he is now a saint. We also have the example of the famous prostitute Magdalene who repentant, arrived at a banquet in order to anoint Jesus. Those who were eating with him continue to single her out as a public sinner. But Jesus says: *Now she is no longer a sinner; she is justified because she has loved much. She has embraced repentance and therefore, all her faults are forgiven her* (13). This is God's justification and it is a justice that cannot be achieved through the Law or through human effort. This justification is rooted in God and is a gratuitous, tremendous gift of the Lord.

This is the justification that the Pharisees did not understand ... They believed they were superior to Matthew and the publicans because they kept the Law but Paul tells them: *This is nothing. This is only an appearance and while in human terms this might be very worthy but God wants mercy and a profound sense of commitment to him. God is interested in justice which he gives to humankind and which humankind receives as a freely-given gift.* The justification that God offers makes us participants in his Divine life and sisters and brothers of his only Son, Jesus Christ. We become heirs and participants in his eternal glory. This is the intimate satisfaction of sinners who have been forgiven. When I visited the Holy Land I had the pleasure of visiting the burial place of Abraham which is called *El Kalil* which means

friend. Abraham is God's friend because God justified him. Everyone who is justified by God can be called *El Kalil*, the friend of God, for even though they were sinners, God has justified them. (14) This, then, is the justification that God offers. It is not a justification that results from human effort or the Law, but is a free initiative of God who justifies whoever he wants and not just those individuals who in their pride want to be with God. Impossible! God alone calls people to justification.

But we are able to encounter this God. This is indeed marvelous: God became man and walked among women and men so that they might encounter him. One finds God's justification in Christ, for Christ is the God who pardons and justifies; the God who has come *not to condemn the world but so that the world might be saved through him* (15). Jesus is the shepherd who searches for the stray sheep so that they might become one flock --- the destiny of those who are justified. No one is excluded from this flock for as Jesus said: *I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead and they will hear my voice and there will be one flock, one shepherd* (16). This is the heart of Jesus, the heart of God that beats in a human heart. This is the infinite love of God that searches all the different paths of life for each of us. God searches and looks for us --- the greater our pride and idolatry, the more we have lost our faith, the more we have strayed from the paths of righteousness, there is God offering us justification and telling us: *All your money and power and luxury are worth nothing unless you repent and convert. If God does not give you justification, then you are the most poor of all the miserable people. Without God's justification everything is simply an appearance. This is the intimate justice that God offers you.* In modern language we might say: Jesus is offering us the grace and forgiveness and reconciliation of God, and even though we might be living apart from God, there is no difficulty in becoming reconciled with God.

The disposition humanity should have to receive this justification from God

My second thought is the following: the difficulties that human beings have in disposing themselves toward God's gift. Yes, God is willing to give, but sadly, men and women are not open to receive ... In today's readings we discover three indispensable dispositions. Without these God is unable to justify anyone because women and men are free. Last Sunday we were told: *I place before you two paths: one that involves a blessing, justification, faithfulness to your God and the other involves a curse, unfaithfulness and idolatry, the repudiation of God and the rejection of his gift of faith* (17). What are these three dispositions that are pointed out by today's readings? --- faith, conversion and mercy.

FAITH. The second reading presents us with the example of Abraham, the prototype of faith. Who was Abraham? He was a poor *campesino*. He was not aware of God's revelation. He was not circumcised nor was he a Jew. He was a man of the world. But God called this elderly, sterile man and his wife who had been unable to bear him a child. God promised: *A child will be born to you and he will be the father of many nations. From his descendents will come the Redeemer of the world* (18). These words appear to be foolishness --- an old man and woman, both of whom are sterile, will now bear the father of many nations! (19) Scripture says that the body that appeared to be dead, a desert to humankind, elderly and sterile, this body will be rejuvenated like a garden. Abraham believed. He believed. What does it mean to believe? To believe is to accept the Word of God even when God speaks the impossible. To believe is to be convinced of the truth and the life of this word of God. Faith is to give oneself over to the one who speaks. To believe is to be without doubt. The action of Abraham is heroic --- I would even say divine. He understood that

everything came from God's initiative. The condition of the human person is not important: old and sterile and appearing to be dead. But God raises up the dead and gives life to the desert. From sterility and death and old age and death, numerous nations arise. Above all else, the Redeemer of humankind will be born from this people and he will give all people eternal life.

In the second reading Saint Paul says: *Now we assert that faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness* (20). Abraham was justified. At that moment Abraham began to be the friend of God because he handed himself over to God. God took the initiative and offered him justification. As a condition for this justification he asked: *Believe! Have faith!* Abraham could have laughed and said: *This is foolishness! You are thinking the impossible.* But as Mary believed in the possibility of a fertile virginity, of conceiving a child and remaining a virgin, so too Abraham and Sarah and all the children of the Old Testament are products of this faith.

How many people in our own time have conceived a child because of prayer? Who knows if these people who have given birth to a "miracle child" as the result of insistent prayers, who knows if they are listening to me ... they should give thanks to God for this gift. On the other hand we are also aware of those people who have destroyed the fertility that God has given them --- they have not allowed their wombs to bear fruit, the fruit which God gives to them as a blessing. These campaigns that revolve around the use of contraceptives and the use of abortion are sins against the faith of Abraham and against God who bestows upon men and women this gift of fertility.

My sisters and brothers, not the Law, nor human effort, but faith is necessary. It is necessary to believe in God. This is the first disposition in order to be justified by God. But it is not enough. The prophet Hosea and Jesus, as he speaks with the Pharisees, point out another condition: Conversion.

By conversion we mean putting behind us the evil that we have done and living a good life. To convert means to change one's way of thinking. Why are we scandalized when a person changes his/her way of thinking, especially when this change is necessary and when this change is for the better? One can be deceived and adore false passions or feel comfortable in the present situation or remain attached to the advantages of this world. One might be like those in the gospel who did not want to lose their life because they placed more value on the advantages and the profits of this world. (21) But when God calls one to conversion, to change one's way of thinking, then it is necessary to repent and be converted. This explains why Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites. He referred to them in this way not because of their effort to fulfill the Law but because they made everything revolve around this human institution as if in the Law one would find the perfection that God wanted.

God is life and evolution and newness. God walks in the midst of the history of his people and the people who believe in God should not become attached to traditions and customs especially when these customs and traditions become an obstacle to belief in the true gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We must always be attentive to the voice of the Spirit. Be converted and walk in the peace of this gospel, in the peace of this calling of the Lord! All those who feel secure and believe there is no need to change are like the Pharisees, hypocrites, whited sepulchers (22) --- they are so sure of themselves, but their conscience reprimands them. This is the docility that is necessary to become converted to the Lord. Abraham was living quietly in Ur of Chaldea when the Lord told him: *Go forth from the land*

of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you (23). Abraham left, walking like a man in a dream, hoping the Lord would tell him where he was to go. Years and generations passed, until at last Abraham's descendants returned from Egypt to the Promised Land. God has eternity before him. Only God has security. We are invited to follow humbly wherever God wants to lead. Blessed are those who stay faithful to the ways that God inspires them to travel and who do not, in order to please others, live with an uneasy conscience in the place where others believe security is to be found. Leave your kindred! Cast off your false security! Be converted to the Lord! This is the endless road of our pilgrimage of faith.

In order to receive the grace that the Lord offers us, one more thing is necessary. Again we hear the famous phrase: *I desire mercy, not sacrifice* (24). What beautiful words! God does not reject the sacrifice of our Mass (yes, this is a sacrifice) but rather he is telling us: *Your Mass, your sacrifice is worth nothing if you offer this sacrifice while your hearts are void of mercy. I prefer mercy.*

What is mercy? Mercy is the most adequate expression of love. Love is commitment, forgiveness, justice, and understanding other people. Mercy is not the pride of the Pharisees who despised the poor and those living on the margins of society, but the embrace of God, who though he was rich, came into this world to seek out the poor and those who did not want to sit down and eat with them. Mercy is goodness expressed in action and not simply in words. Mercy... each one of you understands this because I believe we have all performed some small act of mercy for others and above all, we have all been the object of mercy. If God had not been merciful to us when we fell into sin, where would we be? If God had not been merciful to us and forgiven us before he died, where would we go? Perhaps in our relationships with other people we have performed many acts of mercy or perhaps we have received great mercy from others. Blessed are those who have performed many merciful acts. This is what God desires!

Therefore, when the Church preaches social justice and Christian love, we understand all of this because we are sisters and brothers. When the Church rejects violence as the solution to our problems, when the Church does not accept bribes and abductions and so many other realities that seem to be becoming so popular these days and that we are sadly becoming accustomed to --- she does so because all of these realities are a rejection of mercy. The Church can never accept these realities.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Your prayers that arise from your hearts that are so filled with resentment do not please me. Do not pray to me or offer me Masses if you come before me and are filled with injustice, if your hands are stained with blood and hatred and violence. I want mercy (25). How beautiful are these words of our Lord and how opportune for our present situation. Jesus and the Church continue to tell us that the realities of our nation will be resolved not through repression or power or unjust and arbitrary laws, but rather all of this will be resolved when the hearts of women and men cry out what God desires: *I desire mercy*. Nothing else! That which justifies the human person and resolves all of our problems is precisely this way of mercy, this path of God.

Mission of the Church and the prophets: dispose humanity to receive God's justification

Finally, my sisters and brothers, I arrive at my final point. What is the mission of the Church? What is the mission of the prophets? We find these answers in Hosea, in Jesus who

is in the midst of sinners and in Saint Paul who places before us the example of Abraham. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the marvelous works of God's mercy. This is her primary mission. But together with this there is another dimension: to call people to faith, to conversion and to mercy. And in the third place, to denounce sin that separates humanity from this relationship with God, from this relationship of faith and truth and mercy --- to denounce all those realities that do not allow us to dispose ourselves toward God's coming.

The mission of the Church is that of John the Baptist: (26) to prepare, in the hearts of men, those paths of justification. Thus John the Baptist denounced the sins of society, the sins of authority and the sins of the family --- this is no easy demagoguery. No one finds it harder to speak about the evils of his own people than I, who have the pastoral duty of saying what is sin and what must not prevail, by talking about the ways to walk: conversion, faith, mercy. I have received this pastoral duty through the mandate of the gospel and of Jesus Christ. (27) This is what I have always preached. Only unworthy and vile slander can find anything else in my words. The word of Hosea, the word of Paul, the word of Christ, and the word of the Church is what I want to echo and to proclaim to all my dear people --- without exception --- to sinners as well. For when Christ corrected those of his time, he did not hate them. He loved them, because he wanted to snatch them from the claws of idolatry and of false positions so that they might seek the true way where they can find the mercy God offers. He wanted to forgive them and make them just.

For this reason then, the Church will continue to fulfill her obligation and the Church cannot preach the Word of God unless it is incarnated in the reality in which we live. The Church must point out (and you are able to analyze all these events of the past week) who are those persons who are walking on the paths of faith, and conversion and mercy. At the same time she must also speak about those who are living lives that are contrary to faith and mercy and conversion. In all of the events of this week, a week that we might call a very gray week, we see that there are many people who are walking toward salvation. Blessed be God! But there are also many people who do not want to accept God's gift of justification and turn their backs on God, thus offending the Lord.

Events of the week

On May 23rd, the United Nations began a meeting of the General Assembly that will continue for five weeks. Eighteen heads of State and forty-two Ministers will participate in this meeting that will deal with the arms race and the expenses involved in all of this. Each year the nations of the world increase their military spending budgets. You have read about the astronomical figure of 300-400 trillion a year --- in fact I have forgotten how to write a trillion dollars. I had to write this number on paper: so many zeroes to make a trillion --- twice as many as a million. This means that each day the world spends one trillion dollars in military spending. For this reason Pope Paul VI has sent a representative to this meeting of the United Nations (I say this for those who say that I am meddling in politics when I speak about these concerns). Through his representative the Pope explains why he must speak during this Assembly. He does so not because he is a world power or has political power, but rather because he cannot hide the timeless character of the Church and therefore he desires to provide a moral support to this effort of humanity¹. With his moral authority he wants to raise his voice in order to clarify this process. Tomorrow may be too late. The Pope speaks the same words that he proclaimed when he addressed the Assembly in 1965² and when he was in India³ and stated that these large military expenses were madness. Since a great part of the world is in a process of development so much good could be accomplished if this

money were directed toward this development. Who can say that the Pope is meddling in politics? With his moral authority he speaks against the abuses of humankind.

We also rejoiced when the news reporters announced⁴ that the President of the new Assembly stated that among the pending matters before the Assembly was a petition for a general amnesty for political prisoners, the dissolution of the Law of Public Order and other matters that merited their immediate attention and a favorable resolution. Blessed be God that the Assembly has become aware of the cries of the people! I would add to this list the petition of the Bishops of El Salvador made to the previous Assembly concerning the abortion legislation. We have received no response to this matter. Hopefully all these rights that the people of El Salvador demand to be respected and that have become lost in bureaucracy will be dealt with. Hopefully the President of the Assembly will see the justice of these demands and the Assembly, as servants of the people, will attend to these matters.

At the same time we raise the question of where we are headed. The National Guard undertook a police search in Mejicanos and took as prisoners, among others, a mother and her six-month-old child. As the *Crónica* stated: *from our point of view, the arrest of a recently born child is a violation of the most elementary norms of our juridical process*⁵. We are also saddened by the arrests that were made in El Tablón, El Jicarón and El Paisnal.

We are also saddened by the fact that in the prison for women there is a woman who is suffering attacks of hysteria as the result of the torture that was inflicted on her and her husband because of their participation in the conflict that arose in Central Azucarera. Their two children, one four years old and the other six years old, witnessed the torture of their parents and are in a state of extreme depression.

The campaign of terror and fear continues in the village of San Pedro Perulapán: Román Martín, sixty years old, was assassinated leaving behind his wife and six children and Alfonso Mendoza, sixty years old, was arrested in his house while he slept⁶.

We want to congratulate the news reporters on the occasion of the celebration of the Day of Freedom of the Press. The President of the Republic sent them a telegram assuring them that he will continue to guarantee them this right of freedom of the press. We read in *La Crónica*, a valiant publication⁷, the denunciation of the illegal economic aggression by the state that has continued since 1972 and that has caused great economic harm to this newspaper. They state that this economic aggression is aimed at the destruction of the work of the newspaper that is carried out on behalf of the interests of the people.

I take advantage of this opportunity to state that in the name of freedom of the press, agents of ORDEN make Radio YSAX appear to be an underground station, so much so that many *campesinos* have to listen to this station in secret. And in the name of what freedom of the press is our newspaper *Orientación* treated as some organization that had committed a crime, and therefore has to be arrested and molested?

Blessed be God! I want to remind everyone that respect for the freedom of the press must be guaranteed and this is one of the primary obligations of the Government and arises from their duty to provide for the common good: to assure the people that they have a right to be informed of the truth. The means of communication should not be operated from some ideological tendency which today is so clearly evident.

At the same time there is also a right to be attentive to the morality of our publications. Not everything should be published. What right and in the name of what freedom are offensive pamphlets published with official approval? How is it possible that members of ORDEN are permitted to distribute in postal boxes and in public, papers that slander the Church? Hopefully a true sense of freedom will prevail so that the government, as well as the servants of public opinion, will respect this right that they have an obligation to defend.

And you my dear sisters and brothers, may you know how to use this freedom with wisdom and discernment. Not everything that comes into our hands is true or moral. Therefore Christians must know how to discern what is a lie and what has been ordered to be published. One must be able to say this is not the truth; this is a lie, this cannot be tolerated.

Pope Pius XII said: *When you enter a movie house, you buy a ticket to enter and you are giving your vote to the show that will be presented there. If it is a pornographic movie, you are giving your vote in favor of pornography. The same could be said about the other means of communication when they are not used with a true sense of freedom but used to portray lewd and amoral conduct --- they are an abuse of true freedom.*

In this same line of thought, the press informed us⁸ that the police in Guatemala detained a religious sister, Raimunda Alonso, for the bloody actions that occurred in Pantoz. She was accused of indoctrinating the *campesinos*. We have had the opportunity of speaking with this Sister and her provincial. We celebrated a very emotional Eucharist in the convent in Santa Tecla where Sister Raimunda was preparing to leave for Spain. According to statements of Sister and her provincial, Sister Raimunda had no relationship with the *campesinos* who suffered the repression in Pantoz. She worked in Cahabón, 90 kilometers from Pantoz and there she dedicated her time to pastoral work. Because she was unjustly detained, imprisoned and expelled, the provincial has sent to the newspapers a clarification of the facts --- I hope that with this freedom of the press her statement will be published. As the provincial concluded her report she asked the press to publish her words and said: *The truth of the case is this: I know the problems of the area where Sister Raimunda worked and I am also aware of the problems in the other three areas where Sister previously worked. The problem is not whether Sister Raimunda is involved in politics or not. This is not our mission. I know how Sister developed her work, which as a religious woman she was called to undertake on behalf of humanity. She worked in this way during her eight years in Cahabón. Her mission is to proclaim the Word of God to the people in the area of Quetzí. When this Word is communicated and received, it transforms and commits people. This has been the case with our people: they have matured in their faith and this has led them to change their lives. They have begun to think for themselves and to make decisions to better their situation in life and to integrate their indigenous culture into that of the country. To accompany and encourage these people is a process and this was and is the work of all of our Sisters. Is this politics? This is the way in which Sister Raimunda worked for eight years in Cahabón and where she proposed all of these things to her people as she called them. She learned the language Quetzíl which helped her to identify with the people of this area and to live their problems⁹.*

On June 6th the workers at the Instituto Regulador de Abastecimientos in San Martín and Usulután were attacked and repressed.

A statement in the name of the Committee of Laity was published. I want to clarify that this is not a group that is dependent on the hierarchy. The laity have a right to form their committees and to speak freely, in accord with Christian principles, about these matters. This does not involve the intervention or the thinking of the hierarchy.

In view of these sad events and such great poverty in our rural areas we are restructuring *Cáritas* so that it can truly assist those who need our help. In the name of Christian charity I come before you with my hands extended and ask you to help us with your donations of grains and clothing, especially clothing for children. We also need medicine and money to help all of these people.

I also want to mention here that a Japanese reporter visited me to become better informed about our situation and to understand our thinking on the matter of the abduction of Mr. Matsumoto. He told me that he had never been interested in the Church or Christianity but as he experienced our situation and saw that the Church was committed to the needs of the people and the suffering of humanity, he wanted to visit me and see what I thought about all of this. I told him, Blessed be God! This is the Church in which nothing human is foreign. He asked me if I would be willing to mediate the case of Mr. Matsumoto if I were invited to do so. I told him that the Church is always willing to provide this kind of assistance, especially when it involves providing help to those in need and those who suffer and are in need of comfort.

Life of the Church

This week we install Father López as the new pastor in Comasagua. He will take possession of this parish on Thursday, at 10:00am. I invite the whole vicariate of the Department of Comasagua to be present at this celebration on Thursday at ten o'clock in the morning.

This morning at 11:00am we will consecrate the new church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Los Planes de Renderos. I want to congratulate the Franciscan Fathers and invite everyone to honor this popular saint and see the new church that will be consecrated.

At the same time I want to ask your help so that we can continue the work on our Cathedral. I want this work to be the product of our faith and effort which, thanks to God, is becoming stronger with each day that passes. On July 2nd we will celebrate the day of the Pope. This celebration will take place on Sunday and it is felt that it will be better to have this celebration on Sunday. Therefore, in two weeks we will celebrate the 8:00am Mass in honor of the Holy Father. God willing, we will have the presence of a Latin American bishop who is working in the United states. This will give a sense of universality to our homage to the common Pastor of the Church whom I will have the honor of greeting and manifesting my fidelity to when I travel to Rome. I ask you to pray for me as I make this trip to Rome.

My sisters and brothers, having meditated on the Word of God and illuminated some of the events of our reality with this Word, I ask you: Who are the people who are allowing themselves to be saved and justified by God? Who, in the vortex of our nation, are doing the opposite --- turning their backs on God and disobeying his laws, abusing the image of God that is revealed in the human person? Knowing the paths that God wants us to travel in order to be justified I conclude this homily by orienting us toward the Eucharist. We have come together in this Mass to participate in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let us be mindful of his words: *I desire mercy, not sacrifice* (28). Hopefully all of us who are going to gather around this altar of the divine Savior of the world are aware of the supreme value of charity, love and mercy. So be it.

¹ See Message of Paul VI to the General Assembly of United Nations (24 May 1978). This message was read to the plenary assembly by Mons. Agostino Casaroli, 7 June 1978. See *Osservatore Romano*, 18 June 1978.

² *A message to humanity*. Address of Paul VI in the General Assembly of United Nations (4 October 1965).

³ *Message to the world*. Allocution of Paul VI in Bombay to journalists of the international press (4 December 1964).

⁴ See “Asamblea hace inventario de los asuntos más urgentes”, *El Mundo*, 6 June 1978.

⁵ *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 10 June 1978.

⁶ See “Solidaridad. ORDEN continua reprimiendo impunemente a los campesinos”, *Orientación*, 18 June 1978. In the report of *Orientación*, Román Martín is called Román Matías.

⁷ See “Carta abierta del director de *La Crónica* al señor presidente”, *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 8 June 1978.

⁸ See *Diario de Hoy*, 9 June 1978.

⁹ Message from Sister Nieves Martínez, Provincial of the Dominicans of the Assumption, about the capture and expulsion from Guatemala of Sister Raimunda Alonso, *Orientación*, 18 June 1978.

Marginal references (1) SC 106; (2) 1P 1,3; (3) Mt 9,11; (4) Mt 9,9; (5) Mt 9,11; (6) Mt 9,12-13; (7) Mt 9,13; (8) Mt 23,27; (9) Ho 6,6; (10) Mt 6,24; (11) Ho 6,3; (12) Rm 3,21-24; (13) Lk 7,36-50; (14) St 2,23; (15) Jn 3,17; (16) Jn 10,16; (17) Dt 11,26; (18) Rm 4,18; (19) Rm 4,19; (20) Rm 4,18,22; (21) Mk 8,35; (22) Mt 23,27; (23) Gn 12,1; (24) Mt 9,13; (25) Mt 9,13; (26) Lk 3,4; (27) Jn 1,29; (28) Mt 9,13.