

# THE POWER OF MISSION, SPIRIT AND SOCIAL WORK

**Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**August 20, 1978**

**Readings:**

*Isaiah 56:1, 6-7*

*Romans 11:13-15, 29-32*

*Matthew 15:21-28*

My dear sisters and brothers.

It is beautiful each Sunday to experience ourselves coming together as sisters and brothers, especially at this time that is truly a time of being family. We are the family of God that is on a journey on this planet Earth and each Sunday, we come together as a united family to share what each person does during the week and to affirm that these different experiences are of interest to everyone. We are like that family that comes together on the weekend because during the week we have been scattered in different areas carrying on our work. Thus we come together and are united by the power of love and faith and hope; we come together in the midst of a world that offers us so many difficulties. Yet our family becomes more united when the storms outside grow stronger. In this family environment the Father guides and counsels us and speaks with us. The Father is our God, the One whom in a few moments we call Our Father. This Father speaks to us and the priest or bishop who preaches is simply the messenger of God who has been taken from the same human family to communicate the divine message of God.

This message has been organized throughout the Liturgical Year in such a way that each Sunday presents us with something new, with a different dimension of this wonderful family that is called the Church --- the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. How could this be anything else but wonderful since it deals with the Kingdom of God! Even though we experience the limitations and imperfections of women and men who form this institution of the Church, yet we are attempting to be more worthy of this life that God wants to share with us --- a life that we will experience in its fullness when our journey on earth is completed.

Based on this reality I find the main thought that the divine Word offers us this Sunday and as usual, I would summarize this thought in the following words: the missionary, spiritual and social dynamism of the Kingdom of God as it is present in the Church. These will be the three ideas that I will develop in my homily this morning. The Church has a missionary, spiritual and social dynamism here on earth.

## **Notices about our life in the Church**

But before entering more fully into our reflection on this Word, I want to establish a concrete framework and speak about some of the different aspects of the Church of the Archdiocese. Thus I will present some news and announcements about the life of our Church. At the conclusion of all of this I will present some aspects that are not properly

ecclesial but that are part of the political and economic life of our people, of our history. These aspects, however, are not foreign to the Church, rather this dynamic Church must illuminate these realities, because the Church *is*. Philosophy says that one must *be* before one can act. Before all else, the Church has this task: to be, to build herself up.

Above all, I continually invite you, my sisters and brothers, to view this purpose above all in my poor words. I do not try to confront anyone; I am not fighting with anyone. I am helping Christ to build his Church and thus call on all of you who are baptized, who are the Church, to make yourselves aware of what is happening and to work together so that we may make this pilgrim people a torch that truly enlightens the world. So, let no one hear my words with a polemic spirit. I do not want to be an opposition, as was said of me this week. I want to be simply an affirmation. When one says yes to one's conscience, one is not confronting, one is simply affirming oneself. Naturally, some others do not think the same way and thus confrontation arises, but not because one means to seek it.

In our Archdiocese, as in the whole world, the Church that is being built up is presently living in expectation that should lead us to profound prayer. We are experiencing the absence of Paul VI and we love --- without knowing who this person is --- his successor. This is the faith of the Church. How wonderful! Is this not an extraordinary miracle? When there is so much confusion and intrigue and diverse interests, the Church suddenly finds herself in need, but this need is resolved through hope. No one is fighting to be Pope --- there are no parties or intrigue but simply a faith that is waiting and hoping. Send us, Lord, the one who must be sent! This should be a week of great prayer. As you have heard and been informed, on the 25<sup>th</sup> the cardinals will gather together to elect a new Pontiff. We do not know what will be their strategies and the practices that they will carry on in order to present us with the person who is most fit to carry on this responsibility during these days. Some theologians have given us a marvelous insight: this person has to be a man of the Church, a man of great faith, a man profoundly ecclesial and therefore, a man who represents a Church that is open to dialogue with the world. What a wonderful balance!

What evil is done at this time by pastors and Catholics who are close-minded! These individuals believe that they alone possess the truth. They have forgotten that no one person possesses the whole truth. Only God is the truth. This God, this infallible God who cannot err, has transmitted to his Church this gift of infallibility and this gift resides in the person of the Pope. But the Pope is not the only one who is infallible, but the whole People of God when they speak together also possess this gift of infallibility. Therefore we have to live with gratitude and must respect this gift of the Spirit. We must acknowledge that all those who are in communion with this truth, even though they might express this truth in different ways (even in ways that in my opinion may appear to be very unacceptable), but if these people are in communion with the truth then they must be respected. This is what we mean by openness and understanding --- attitudes that lead us to acknowledge that error and truth are realities that are found not only outside the institutional Church. Indeed, the truth in its multiple facets, the firm truth, is found within this pluralism and we must be on our guard to protect this pluralism from error and heresy and lies. Let us have this openness, my sisters and brothers, in our own expectations of the new Pontiff who must be, above all else, a man of ecclesial communion.

Many ask: We, the Church of Latin America, are preparing for a significant event, we are preparing for a meeting of the bishops in Puebla --- what are the implications of the Pope's death in this matter? Until now we have traveled a legitimate path and we can continue on

this path. In order for the meeting of the bishops of a particular region to be hierarchically valid and in communion with the Pope, the Pope must convoke such a meeting and he himself or his representative must preside at the meeting. Pope Paul VI had convoked this gathering of the Latin American bishops in Puebla. Because he has died, naturally, he cannot preside over this meeting. The new Pope has to ratify the decision of Paul VI, that is, he has to convoke this gathering anew or affirm the decision that was made by Paul VI. He can preside over this gathering or send someone to represent him in the Presidency so that the bishops who come together are seen as being in communion with Peter. Therefore, the meeting in Puebla will go forward but must await the consent of the new Pope. Let us continue to pray for the realization of this event.

Speaking about the intimate ecclesial life of our Archdiocese --- and excuse me my sisters and brothers for speaking about myself here but I want to express my profound gratitude for the many expressions of solidarity on the occasion of my birthday --- these expressions of solidarity arrived from many communities as well as many individuals. I also want to thank the clergy for the lunch at Domus Marie where we had the pleasure of extending our hand in friendship to Bishop Chávez. I am also grateful for the opportunity to have celebrated the Eucharist on that same night. I was filled with great comfort and was happy to see the presence of so many persons and communities from our Archdiocese. May God reward all of you!

How is our Pilgrim community and our Church? Let me share with you some news about our ecclesial communities.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Eucharist to conclude a mission that was preached by Father Luis in the area of Zacamil that is called San Ramón --- a new community in our Archdiocese.

On Wednesday evening, the 16<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of the patronal feast of Barrio San Jacinto which is under the care of the Vincentian Community, we celebrated the sacrament of confirmation for a wonderful group of young people. How wonderful is the celebration of confirmation when the young people are prepared for this sacrament! Today we will celebrate the sacrament of confirmation in the parish of San Juan Cojutepeque where Father Brizuela has also understood the power of this sacrament. I invite you to help me give proper value to this sacrament and that we not confer this sacrament on children who do not understand the meaning of this sacrament. Indeed, this sacrament is intended to be conferred on young people who understand the need for a new strength and power, the power of the Spirit that is given as gift in the sacrament of Confirmation.

Thursday of this week there will be a religious celebration in Arcatao. The Guadalupana Sisters who work in this distant area with great zeal and kindness are preparing for the feast of Saint Bartholomew. We will have a celebration there at 10:00am. We want to congratulate the community and wish them much success. I will have the pleasure of joining them in this celebration. Another community, the parish of Tejutla, on Saturday at 10:00am will celebrate the first anniversary of the assassination of the catechist Felipe de Jesús whom all remember with great admiration and kindness. The community of El Paraíso in Chalatenango is flourishing little by little. There the Hermanas Betlemitas have prepared studies that have given some life to the social and industrial dimensions of life there (the people there seem to be discouraged) and there the Church, as we will explain later, has a social dynamism that is concerned about this type of development.

We have spoken about the life of our Church and, therefore, my sisters and brothers, let us love this Church and let us love the religious life. The Spanish missionary Carmelites who are ministering in the Polyclinic and who also minister to the pastoral needs in Plan del Pino and in La Laguna de Chalatenango, will celebrate twenty-five years of ministry here in El Salvador. This will be marked by a celebration of the sacrament of confirmation in Plan del Pino where a group of young people are being prepared with much enthusiasm.

The Jesuit community, which has been very visible in our Church --- many admire and love them while others disparage them and slander them --- is offering us a wonderful work. This week, with Father Sáenz, I had the opportunity to visit the construction site of a beautiful building that will be called Centro de Loyola where the Jesuit charism will be developed through spiritual retreats and reflections to make our people more aware of the meaning of Christianity. Anyone who wishes to see this wonderful work that is moving forward can visit Lomas de Morazán<sup>1</sup> which is near the Central American University. Within about one year we will have a center of spiritual reflection that will be available to every sector of our people.

Also my sisters and brothers, the Catholic Schools are important instruments of the pastoral ministry of the Diocese. This week there was much activity but we are saddened and we want to express our solidarity with the members of the leadership team of the Federation of Catholic Educational Centers who were involved in an automobile accident in the Diocese of Santa Ana where they were working on some problems of their organization. Thanks to God they are feeling better and their suffering has been in the name of a good cause.

The Colegio Santa Cecilia in Santa Tecla presented us a wonderful spectacle during the celebration of the Fourth Annual Youth Celebration. Young people have been brought together in order to communicate to them the gospel message. On Monday I spent time with these young people and more than a thousand young men and women filled the theatre to inaugurate this week that is dedicated to young people.

In the Instituto Ricaldone the Salesians celebrated the 163<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the birth of Saint Don Bosco with a Mass in the Church of María Auxiliadora. Saint Don Bosco was born and baptized on August 16, 1815. We attempted to communicate this message of Don Bosco to the young men and women and we will do the same tomorrow in the Colegio Don Bosco where we will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the first Salesian schools in the country. Besides the Colegio Don Basoc there is also the Colegio San José in Santa Ana.

We were greatly consoled by the visit of some students from the Colegio de la Divina Providencia who presented us with a folder that contained a summary of their reflections on marriage preparation. It is interesting that these young men and women who are in high school have given serious thought to this theme and realize that they are not dealing with some foolish adventure and therefore do not want to prostitute such a great gift like sexuality and marriage. Rather in light of some recordings that are at our disposal they have reflected on some concrete dimensions of this precious theme.

We, and especially I, are happy with the life that is developing in our seminary --- a place that according to the documents of the Church (1) is the pupil of the eye of the Diocese where the hopes of our people are being formed, the hopes of people who journey through this

world and are guided by the priests. As we announced in the meeting of the clergy, we are going to initiate with great intensity in all the parishes of the Diocese a program for vocational promotion. We call upon all parents and Christian families and priests to seek out those young men and women whom the Lord has gifted with this precious gift of a vocation so that this vocation can be discerned and then developed in the Seminary. One of these young men is nearing the completion of his studies. I have great comfort in knowing that Rafael Urrutia has nearly completed four years of Theology in the Seminario de Guatemala and has asked me to ordain him here in the Cathedral on Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, at 11:00am. We will have the pleasure of imposing hands on this young man who, like the many young men in the Seminary, gives witness in the midst of a difficult situation that Christ is alive and can rely on these young people who desire to follow him in such an heroic way. In this same line of thought --- and now I direct these words to you lay men and women --- the Sierra Club, a lay organization, is going to hold their convention on September 15-17 and will share with their members information about the different seminaries. This is a lay organization that collaborates in providing encouragement to this ministry of vocational promotion.

There is more news. I have received the following information from San Miguel, news that has made me most happy: Radio YSAX is now heard in San Miguel! They were able to listen to this broadcast before but had many difficulties with the reception. I hope that now you are able to listen to these broadcasts with greater clarity and also hope that with the same clarity you will receive these humble words that you love so dearly.

Many people have asked about the Pastoral Letter<sup>2</sup> that I announced on August 6<sup>th</sup>. I am happy to see that this awakened such interest and I am embarrassed to have to tell you: please wait a little bit more --- within a few days it will be published and circulated. With the help of God we hope to have it ready by next Sunday.

Together with this news about the Church I want to speak about some false interpretations that have been given to my words last Sunday. In the *Diario de Hoy*, in a very small column (in fact if someone had not told me about this I would not have known this) some words of my homily were distorted. The paper stated that I was grateful to the Legislative Assembly for have proclaimed three days of mourning on the occasion of the death of the Pope and then added: *the good relations that exist between the Catholic Church and the State belie the slanders that have been directed toward the clergy*<sup>3</sup> --- I did not use those words in my homily. You are my witnesses and you know that I did not say this. I simply maintain the position that I am not trying to confront anyone and I am attempting to serve the people and thus those who are in conflict with the people will also be in conflict with me. My love is for the people and by simply looking at the people one can see, through the light of faith and through the responsibility that God has given me to lead the people along the paths of the gospel --- one can see who are those people that are with me and who are those people that are against me. You can see this by simply looking at my relationship with the people.

Be very careful, my sisters and brothers, with this news that I share with you. I know that there are some people going around and gathering signatures asking the Pope --- not Paul VI but the new Pope --- and the bishops who will gather in Puebla to condemn Marxism. There is no problem with this but Marxism has already been condemned and so there is nothing new in this. Pope Pius XII published a document in this regard and if you are not familiar with this document you can search for it<sup>4</sup>. What concerns me here is that those who are signing this petition are also asking for my removal as Archbishop. I have no problem with being removed nor do I have any ambition for power in the diocese. I simply consider this ministry

as a service and as long as the Lord, through the intermediary of the Roman Pontiff, asks me to continue in this service, then, I will continue to be faithful to my conscience. I attempt to preach in light of the gospel --- nothing more and nothing less.

Here we enter into matters concerning my office and my fulfillment of this office and I want you to know that I study the Word of God that is going to be read on Sunday. I look at my surroundings and at my people and I illuminate these realities with this Word. I attempt to synthesize all of this so that I can communicate this Word to you and thus make this people a light to the world so that they are guided by the criteria of the gospel and not by the criteria of the idols of this world. It is natural, therefore, that the idols and the idolaters of this world are disturbed by this Word and so they have great interest in silencing and destroying and killing this Word. Saint Paul said: *I am suffering even to the point of chains, like a criminal; but the Word of God is not chained* (2). There will be prophets, priests or laity --- and in fact there are many people who understand what the Word of God expects from people.

### **The Church has a missionary dynamism**

In the Word of God that we have proclaimed today who can not discover the three dimensions that exist in this Word --- indeed you can discover these dimensions if you read these passages carefully. There is no need for me to comment on these readings. Jesus guarantees that this Kingdom of God has a missionary, spiritual and social dynamism.

When I speak in the first place about a missionary dynamism, I look at Jesus in today's gospel, his goodness, his movement toward the limits of Palestine in order to see the boundaries of the Gentile world. A Gentile woman, a Canaanite, approaches Jesus in search of the power of God that Jesus brought to the world. The dialogue of Christ the Savior with the representative of the Gentile world appears to be harsh. Those, however, who enter more deeply into the lives of these people and their environment better understand the situation and discover that there is no harshness here. *It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs* (3). Look at the difference in the Jewish mentality. They --- the Jews --- were the children and other people, the gentiles, were the dogs (we must see that we were included in this groups of Gentiles). Yet the humility of the Canaanite woman wins over the heart of the Redeemer. *Please, Lord* (4) is a typical Middle Eastern phrase, for they were a people who were very astute in understanding what was being said and were able to respond with a joke or in some other wonderful way. The Canaanite woman demonstrates this ability to Christ and Christ shows that he lives in an incarnate world, with the customs and idioms of his people and his time. The Canaanite woman says: *Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters*. Jesus then responded: *O woman, great is your faith!* (5).

Before Christ appears in the window of the Gentile world, the first reading tells us that God also places no limitations on people. Isaiah speaks about some foreigners whom God brings to the Holy Mountain because *my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples* (6). This is God's plan. God wants to save not only the people of Israel but wants to enter into an intimate relationship with these people so that they become so in love with God, so illuminated by the light of God that they bring this light to all people. This is God's strategy. Indeed, God's plan is to save all people. How beautiful is the Council document that explains this missionary dynamism of the Church (7): *The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father*. The meaning of

missionary is taken from the Latin verb *mittere* which means to send. As the Father sent Jesus and made him a missionary (8), so too Jesus sends us forth and makes us missionaries. The Council says that the Father sent his Son as his missionary and after the Son accomplished this work he returned to the Father. (9). Then, the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit as a missionary to encourage the Church. Thus the Church, the fruit of this mission of the Father and the Son, is truly missionary and has a universal dynamism.

Jesus speaks of his strategy and says: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (10). He was unable to leave and in fact did not leave the confines of Palestine. But he told his disciples: *You will be my witnesses in Samaria and Jerusalem until the end of time* (11). Then after he had been raised in power and majesty, he sends his Church into the world and gives them all the power of heaven and earth: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved* (12). Thus we can see that the missionary dynamism of the Word is highlighted with the coming of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I invite you, my sisters and brothers, to reflect on the second reading in your homes and notice the strategy that Saint Paul describes --- it is very dialectical but very effective. He says that God gave preference to his people but the people were not worthy of this gift of God. Only a remnant, a small group of people remained faithful. The others rejected Jesus. Twenty centuries have passed and the Jews have still not accepted Jesus. This pained Saint Paul. Remember the reading from last week where Saint Paul said: *I could only wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my sisters and brothers, my kin according to the flesh* (13). Because the people did not accept Jesus, the disciples shook the dirt from their sandals (14) and traveled to the lands of the Gentiles. Jesus encountered the Gentiles through the Canaanite woman but he did not travel through Gentile territory because in fulfillment of the promises that had been made in former times, he had been sent to encourage the people who in turn ought to be missionaries, that is, Israel. But the people did not accept him. So the apostles go out and preach and in his letter Saint Paul says (15): *I am a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin but the Lord has chosen me to be an apostle to the Gentiles* (16) *and since I continue to love my people Israel, I preach salvation to the Gentiles in the hope of provoking zeal in my fellow countrymen* (17).

This is the strategy of the gospel: first, to proclaim the Word to the Jews. But because they rejected Jesus, then the Word was proclaimed to the Gentiles. When it was learned that the Gentiles accepted this Word, the Jews would then become jealous. Look at how the Gentiles are taking advantage of the grace that God offers them and through them the Jews will be converted. Saint Paul tells us that the obstinacy of the Jews and their rejection of Jesus brought salvation to the Gentiles. Therefore how much more will be this torrent of life when the Jews are converted and filled with the Spirit of God!

Many, however, have come to believe that the end of the world will occur when the Jews are converted, but the Bible does not say this. The Bible states that when the Jews are converted there will be fullness of life in the Jewish people (18), the same reality that occurred when the Gentiles converted. Today, Saint Paul presents the universality of salvation by placing the Gentiles and the Jews in an antagonistic dialectic. Therefore Saint Paul concludes this section with the words: *for God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all* (19). Salvation supposes sin. The Jews have sinned by rejecting Christ and the Gentiles have sinned when the Jews proclaimed the true God and they did not accept this teaching. Now the Gentiles have accepted this teaching. God has extended his mercy to them and forgiven their lack of faith, their disobedience. Then when the Jews

become jealous of this reality they will return --- those who disobeyed will return and be saved.

My sisters and brothers, what a beautiful lesson: we are all caught up in disobedience. All those who want to point out the sins of a brother or sister and do not look on themselves as sinners are not worthy of God's salvation. When people throw the sins of the Church in the face of the Pope or the bishops, they are forgetting the great strategy of God. God wants to use sin and disobedience and the stained Church in her human elements in order to save men and women with his mercy. The only thing that is important here is God's mercy that must be accepted in faith.

### **The Church has a spiritual dynamism**

This then is the second idea of today's readings. I want you to keep the following in mind because there are many people --- as you will see in our Pastoral Letter --- who want to manipulate the Church in order to apply her dynamism to temporal redemption. The Church does not reject these temporal redemptions. In my Pastoral Letter I state that the Church will be a gracious ally in the search for just objectives and the rights of any organization of men and women. No one can take away from the people the right to organize themselves in groups that seek to achieve just causes.

We do not defend criminal associations in any sector of our society --- we do not accept abductions, robberies or assassinations. These people have lost their rights. But to come together in order to survive, to eat and to defend their human rights --- every person has the right to act in this way. Forming groups is a right when the objectives are just. The Church will always defend the right to organize and the right of organizations to seek the realization of their just causes. But do not ask the Church to be exclusive in the exercise of this dynamism.

I base my reflections in this homily on the words of the Second Vatican Council --- words taken from the Bible (20): *Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself comes a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place produce the need, she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings.*

Here the Council places before us the two dynamisms that I want to explain now. The first is the spiritual dynamism. The specific mission of the Church is religious. In other words, the Church wishes to unite men and women to God, she wants men and women to enter into a relationship with God. Today's readings express various elements of this religious dynamism.

For example, the first reading states: *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people* (21). I have always reminded you, my sisters and brothers, that our power is found in prayer. If Christians do not pray, they cannot rely on this spiritual dynamism. Thus we see that the Canaanite woman is praying and God, through the intermediary of his Son, Jesus, is moved by her prayer.

Second, in the second reading and in the gospel faith is praised. Jesus says to the woman: *great is your faith!* (22) and Saint Paul says: *for God delivered all to disobedience, that he*



*might have mercy upon all* (23). Faith is like an obedience or an acceptance of God. Without faith it is impossible to belong to this Kingdom of God. The spiritual dynamism of the Church is derived from this faith. I am saddened when I listen to a Catholic say: *I do not have faith!* At the same time I greatly rejoice during this time when I hear people say: *I have recovered my faith in the Church.* Let us recover our faith. This is what gives us strength to mutually support one another.

Faith, prayer and humility are unknown realities in our world and nevertheless when one listens to the Canaanite woman who, instead of becoming resentful at Jesus' harsh words when he refers to her as a *dog* (24), simply smiles and says: *even the dogs eat scraps from the table of their masters.* Jesus could have added: *What great humility!* Humility is the truth and arrogance is antagonistic. The worst foolishness of the human being is to believe -- to believe in an irreplaceable God. We all ought to be humble in the sense of being truthful, in recognizing our limitations and our smallness.

At this time we are living this spiritual meaning. When the Lord says: *I will bring them to my holy mountain and everyone will call my house a house of prayer. There I will receive their sacrifices and holocausts* (25) --- with these words we can discern a liturgical meaning. To come to Mass and participate in the Eucharist is to serve. The meaning of the word *liturgy* is service. The Protestants rightly call their gatherings a service. We can also call our Mass a service in the sense that we come together as servants to present to the Lord bread and wine, symbols of the sweat of our brow and the different forms of work in which we serve the Lord. We bring these gifts so that they become the body and blood of Jesus that nourishes the world. We all act as servants when we come to Mass. We all collaborate in this service, even the poorest person who comes and says: *Lord, I have no work. I spent the whole week looking for work. I can only offer you my anguish. I do not have work!* This is also a service. This is also an offering, a holocaust, and a sacrifice. The mother who comes to offer the illness of her child or the suffering she has endured as a result of the disappearance of one of her children --- she also collaborates in this service. So also does the person who has been tortured and comes to offer this cruelty to the Lord: *Today I suffered imprisonment and I offer you my beaten and battered back.* So also does the one who bears the moral pain of slander, like the person in a town of Chaltenango who was mentioned in a letter that was sent to me --- a person who was the victim of slander. I say to you now if you are listening to me: *Your moral situation should not afflict you if your conscience is clear.* How beautiful is the holocaust of the Mass when we are able to say to the Lord: *Lord, you know that I am innocent and even though the whole world singles me out, I offer you this holocaust.* This is the service of the priestly people. This is the mission of the Church: to awaken people, like I am doing at the present moment, to awaken people to the spiritual meaning of their life; to awaken people to the divine value of their human actions. Do not lose sight of this, my sisters and brothers, for this is what the Church offers to all the different organizations, to the arenas of politics, industry, commerce, workers, the women in the marketplace --- to all those people the Church brings this service of promoting the spiritual dynamism. Can not everyone offer to God the great effort to develop their spiritual life?

I also find another spiritual element in the readings: conversion. The whole second reading is a poem concerning the need for conversion that so many Jews and Gentiles need. (26) No one is able to glorify themselves but can only await the mercy of God who forgives our universal disobedience. Be converted! We point out the sins of men and women, the sins of the government, the sins of the capitalist, the sins of the bishops among whom this servant of yours is also found; we point out the sins of our priests and the sins of parents --- who does

not sin? --- we also point out the sins of young people and mature adults and even children who have just reached the age of reason --- for they too disobey. *God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all* (27). I repeat that when we point out the sins of men and women, we do so in order to call all people to conversion. Jesus came for this very reason and has sent his Church to do the same. The Kingdom of God is aware of the great spiritual dynamism that is called conversion.

My sisters and brothers, think about those moments when the world needs to satisfy social and political demands. Think about those moments when the world needs profound and bold changes: who is going to make this happen? Medellín says: *new men and women* (28). New men and women renewed by conversion. Those who want to maintain old and tired systems, those who want to preserve through repression and crime and sinful situations that cannot be sustained, these people are not going to renew the world. Indeed, the world will never be renewed in this way. To renew the world it is necessary that politicians and those who are not politicians, people with power and people from the towns and village --- all of us must attempt to renew ourselves by this interior conversion.

Hopefully we can live this week in the light of God's Word and thus be able to discover where the evil is in our Republic. We will discover that the evil resides in our own conscience. When one of their members is killed, the other members of one of the indigenous tribes pass in front of the dead man's body and extend their hands saying: *I am innocent*. In this way the person responsible for the murder is soon discovered. I believe that we, all of us, have to pass in front of the bloodied body of our country and repeat the words of the poet who spoke about the crucified Christ and said: *Let us all, men and women, tremble; for we have all laid hands on him*.

This is the spiritual movement of conversion. Like the electrical current that is transmitted from a central power station and moves outward and supplies energy to so many towns and villages, so too the person in the highest position to the one who occupies the lowest position must allow their veins, their souls and their hearts to be energized by the meaning of today's Word, energized to engage in that process of conversion that will make us new men and women. As Paul VI of happy memory said: *The Church considers it to be undoubtedly important to build up structures which are more human, more just, more respectful of the rights of the person and less oppressive and less enslaving, but she is conscious that the best structures and the most idealized systems soon become inhuman if the inhuman inclinations of the human heart are not made wholesome, if those who live in these structures or who rule them do not undergo a conversion of heart and of outlook* (29). Therefore, before changing structures, or perhaps it is better to say, the change of structures must be accompanied by a change of heart.

### **The Church has a social dynamism**

Thus, and this is my third idea, I am speaking about the social dynamism of the Church. I am not inventing this. I am taking all of these ideas from the Word of God that was proclaimed today.

The prophet Isaiah states that God will gather together all foreigners, but with one condition, that they *guard what is right and do what is just* (30). What a beautiful promise. Let us hear these words as a promise and a hope that is extended to El Salvador. God's

victory will be revealed. God must triumph. The evil one, who instigates sin, will not triumph, but the God who instigates renewal must triumph.

The meaning of renewal is explained in these few words: *guard what is right and do what is just* (31). You can see that this is not merely some whim of the Church nor has the Church set aside her mission in order to become involved in politics. The Council has stated that the Church's mission is not political (32). The Church has a religious mission and as a result of her relationship with God she derives the strength and the dynamism to become a force in political, social and moral renewal without forgetting her religious role.

My sisters and brothers, I am very conscious of this reality and those who have followed me closely know that I have never used this Cathedral for politics. I am very aware of the Church's religious mission and I have fulfilled this religious mission of the Church in a way that has enabled me to derive from it --- as the Council states (33) --- the dynamisms and the strength to be able to build a society according to the heart of God.

Thus when people ask me to dialogue with the government, I say: this is too little. It is not I who have to dialogue, but rather all the different forces of the country, the political parties and those groups that are sensitive to our social situation. The government has to open up democratic channels so that all the different sectors of our country can enter into dialogue and contribute to the future direction of our nation. This is what it means *to observe what is right and do what is just* (34). The prophet Isaiah has said this, the gospel has said this and the Church says the same thing.

The practice and the realization of that which is right and just will not be achieved by a dialogue between the Bishop and the President. Rather the government of El Salvador will achieve this for it must become a moral force. The Council states (35) that governments should not be despotic powers but moral forces that respect the dignity and the freedom of all people and all organizations and is willing to dialogue with all these entities so that better situations can be created. They are the technical experts. I am not an expert in this field and I am not a sociologist or a politician or a member of one of these organizations. I am simply a humble pastor who is speaking to technical experts: be united and place all your knowledge at the service of the people. Do not become closed but allow people to make their contribution. Then if we observe what is right, justice will become a reality.

### **Events of the week**

What I am going to say now, my sisters and brothers, is not politics. Our Chancery office has put together a very detailed study of those who have disappeared<sup>5</sup>. Ninety-nine cases have been carefully analyzed. In each case we have listed the person's name, age, date of capture, legal resources and the number of times that their mothers have approached us in search of their loved ones. I am a witness to these ninety-nine cases. Therefore I feel I have the right to ask: *Where are they?* In the name of the people who experience so much anxiety over this matter I say: *Bring them before a court if they have committed some crime. If they have unfortunately been killed by the security forces, then find out who is responsible for this and punish them --- whoever they may be. If they have been killed then someone should be held responsible. I believe this is a just demand.*

Another study has been elaborated that analyzes the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. This study outlines the false presuppositions of this Law. The social-political

context of El Salvador does not merit the application of such repressive actions. This study demonstrates the unconstitutionality of this law which places the Law of Public Order on a par with human rights and our Constitution. A series of violations are evident. We studied recent concrete cases where this law has been applied and we see that this law is becoming a strategy that is used against those people who are poor. A poor person spoke to me about this matter and used a phrase that I will never forget and one that I believe you will also remember: *This law, bishop, is like a snake for it bites only those persons who are not wearing shoes.* As we listen to these voices, we hear statements that repudiate this law. These voices of the people must be heard! Enter into dialogue with them! It is for this reason that I say that it is necessary to open authentic political channels so that when a demand is placed before the Assembly to change this law, this group can be called and heard. There are also distinguished persons, lawyers and others who understand the law --- why are they responded to with silence? Why are they not heard? In this report that I have spoken about there is a list of persons who have been imprisoned for having violated this law. Some are recent cases, such as that of Adrián Serrano Peraza who was captured in Portillo del Norte, Antonio de Jesús Hernández, a social worker in the Diocese of Santiago de María who worked in the Christian Social Secretariat, José Neftalí Gutiérrez, Salvador Alejandro Beltrán whose mother Vicenta de Jesús Beltrán has reliable knowledge that her son is being held by the National Police and that he has a fractured collar-bone. The Police have denied this fact. Many petitions to produce cause are not processed. Who gives these authorities the right to deny a lawyer access to investigate these petitions that are made by family members?

Also through reliable sources, we know that ANDES (National Association of Salvadorian Educators) is seeking the release of Pedro Bran and Salvador Sánchez Cerón<sup>6</sup> since the reasons for their imprisonment are not valid. The supposed delinquent whom the Police were pursuing and who was used as an excuse for entering the offices of ANDES stated before a judge in the Hospital Rosales that he was shot in the Plaza Zurita.

There is distortion in the news that reported that a committee of students from the Colegio Externado (a Jesuit school) is attempting to obtain the freedom of Pedro Arévalo, a professor at this school. It is also said that since the Jesuits are unable to intervene in this case, the students have formed a Legal Aid group to help them. All of this is false. Professor Arévalo worked at this school but for more than a year he has not taught there. The Legal Aid committee is an office that is dependent on the Church and began their work three years ago when they contributed their legal services to the Colegio Externado to serve those in need. This is not some new entity. These lawyers have attempted to remain faithful to these ideals for the past three years and have intervened in legal matters on behalf of the poorest sectors of our country. They have served these people without any regard of where they are from. I am a witness of the self-sacrifice and generosity of this Legal Aid group that has contributed so many services to the poor. This entity is not something that is unique to El Salvador. There are similar organizations in Chile and Uruguay that have defended prisoners, especially those who are poor. I also state that the report that attempted to connect this Legal Aid society with AGEUS (General Association of University Students) is also false. AGEUS is in no way connected with this group of lawyers. You can see how the news is distorted and you can also see why it is necessary to have criteria when reading the newspapers.

This morning, my sisters and brothers, in light of this message that speaks about the social dynamism of the Church and the Church's concern for the welfare of the world, we cannot help but be saddened by the abduction of the general-manager of Erickson, Kjell Bjork<sup>7</sup>, as well as the mystery that surrounds the disappearance of Armando Monedero and

Mr. Matsumoto. All the reports that surround this last case have very dangerous implications and I hope that they are not used as a pretext for further abuses.

I want to express here my admiration for the calm spirit that Mrs. Matsumoto has shown during this experience. I must ask for her forgiveness for I referred to her as a widow and she told me: *I am not a widow. I believe my husband is alive and will continue to do so until I have some news about his whereabouts.*<sup>8</sup> I congratulated her and said: *I can only hope that such integrity could be found in all people for it is right to disregard rumors until one is convinced that the truth has been spoken.*

We also rejoice, my sisters and brothers, in some good news. Negotiations have begun for a new labor contract in the glove factory, Eagle International. I am also happy to have been informed yesterday by the Legal Aid group that a lease contract was signed that provided land to fifty *campesino* families --- this land is part of an estate in Suchitoto. The commentary on this event is most significant: *It is important to point out this event because it demonstrates that when the campesinos are given an opportunity that favors their interests, they fulfill their obligations.* The problem resides in the fact that there is a lack of communication with this large sector of people who have been dispossessed from their land.

Thus, my sisters and brothers, we will continue to advocate for the just causes of those who need to be defended --- rich and poor. My sisters and brothers, with this dynamism that the Church instills in our missionary, spiritual and social undertakings, let us leave this Cathedral strengthened with the Body of the Lord and with our liturgical celebration. May this celebration lead us to the conviction that Christian spirituality does not mean that we raise ourselves up to be close to God and then forget the realities of the world. Rather our spirituality resides in a dynamic balance of seeking salvation for all people: a missionary dynamism. Through prayer, humility, faith and Christian virtue, let us unite ourselves with the transcendence of God and from this union with God's transcendence, let us draw upon the strength of our courage and integrity in order to defend the rights of those people who need to be defended, those people who await and trust in the people who believe in God and in the truth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

At the last minute I have been informed that the young man, Porfirio Cristales, got off the Route 36 bus in Mejicanos and was captured by three municipal police officers. We hope that this is not another case of unjust abuse. If a person is captured because of some criminal activity and this is proven in court, then such a person deserves to be punished. We are not in agreement, however, with those judges who through their own initiative punish those who are not guilty of any crime.

May the Lord enlighten all of us this morning so that we can live this beautiful message of conversion and thus seek union with God --- the reason to live and to hope.

---

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to "Lomas de Cuscatlán".

<sup>2</sup> *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978).

<sup>3</sup> *El Diario Hoy*, 15 August 1978.

<sup>4</sup> See *Decree on communism* (30 June 1949), of the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office, which was approved by Pius XII on 1 June 1949.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Secretariado de Comunicación Social, Boletín n.º 5, Arzobispado de San Salvador, August 1978. The names of 99 disappeared people can also be found in the section “Solidaridad” of *Orientación*, 10 September 1978.

<sup>6</sup> The second surname of Salvador Sánchez is Cerén.

<sup>7</sup> Kjell Bjork, a Swede, was kidnapped on 14 August 1978. See *El Mundo*, 15 August 1978.

<sup>8</sup> The *Diario de Hoy*, in its edition of 15 August 1978, published a news item under the heading: “Creen que Matsumoto está sepultado en El Cocal”.

*Margnal References* (1) ACS 51: (2) 2Tim 2,9: (3) Mt 15,26: (4) Mt 15,27: (5) Mt 15,28: (6) Is 56,7: (7) AG 5: (8) Jn 20,21: (9) AG 4: (10) Mt 15,24: (11) Ac 1,8: (12) Mt 28,18-19: (13) Rm 9,3: (14) Mk 6,11: (15) Rm 11,1: (16) Rm 11,13: (17) Rm 11,14: (18) Rm 11,25-26: (19) Rm 11,32: (20) GS 42: (21) Is 56,7: (22) Mt 15,28: (23) Rm 11,30: (24) Mt 15,27: (25) Is 56,7: (26) Rm 11,32: (27) Rm 11,32: (28) M 1,3: (29) EN 36: (30) Is 56,1: (31) Is 56,1: (32) GS 42: (33) GS 42: (34) Is 56,1: (35) GS 74.