

## THE POPE, CHRIST'S DEPUTY IN HIS CHURCH

**Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**August 27, 1978**

**Readings:**

*Isaiah 22:19-23*

*Romans 11:33-36*

*Matthew 16:13-20*

My dear sisters and brothers, I want to echo the great news that was announced from the balcony of the Vatican Basilica, news that was announced to the world yesterday: *I proclaim great news to you, we have a Pope!* The multitude responded to this news with an applause and I ask that those gathered here in the Cathedral of San Salvador also give a resounding applause as a gesture of our solidarity with the Holy See.

In my homily today I want to tell the new Pope how much we love him because we have applauded him here. I want to tell him about the hands of this people that have applauded him. This has been my continual desire as pastor: to share the light of the universal Church and the gospel that illuminates all people and concretize this light in this beloved people. I want to become incarnate in this people and share with them the divine message. How could anyone not like John Paul I, a son of laborers, and a humble man? He was never mentioned among the possible successors to Paul VI. None of us knew him. Yet in that College of Electors where the majority were not Italian, but men of so many other different countries, the finger of God singled out an Italian --- a man who responds to the longings of the majority of the world.

I believe, as I said to a sister yesterday, that we will understand one another very well. I believe that our people experience a great fondness for this secret, hidden man who lives among the people --- a man who knows what it means to experience poverty and also lovingly understands the great dimensions of this gospel that does not want division or conflicts but rather seeks to resolve conflict through love.

My sisters and brothers, why have we applauded the Pope? What a wonderful way and what an opportune moment to receive the news of the election of a new Pontiff! During this Liturgical Year the gospel of Saint Matthew has been the primary focus of the Liturgy of the Word. Therefore I have offered you an outline of the gospel of Saint Matthew --- an outline that we are sending to you now because many have asked us for this outline. Saint Matthew's gospel could be called a poem of the Church --- a poem written in seven stanzas. The gospel begins with the life of Jesus as a child and at the present time we are in the fifth stanza of this poem-gospel. We have been reflecting on chapters thirteen to eighteen which offer us reflections of the primitive Christian community on the beginnings of the Kingdom of God composed of twelve disciples. In this group of disciples, one of them, Peter, is

singled out as the leader and given to the community as the first fruit of this Church. This Church continues to experience Peter as the center of unity of this nascent community.

In chapters 13-18 of Saint Matthew's gospel we are presented with the rules for living a community life. This is the beautiful community discourse of Jesus. There, in chapter 16, the gospel speaks to us about the Church community that is extending itself through the efforts of a person who was chosen by Christ. Today's reading contains the account of the events that occurred at Caesarea-Philippi, a city located some 30 kilometers north of Lake Gennesaret, at the source of the Jordan River. This city was founded by Philippi ---a Gentile city --- and Jesus had gone there with his disciples because his own people had rejected him. He takes advantage of this opportunity to establish the solid foundation upon which this new community will come to life. Thus in this passage from the gospel we are presented with events and a dialogue that describe in a wonderful way the role of the Pope.

Therefore I have titled this homily: the Pope, Christ's representative in his Church. This is a summary of today's readings that are presented to us one day after the election of the actual Pope who was unknown until yesterday and now, today, he is loved and applauded by the whole world --- a gesture through which you yourselves have shown your solidarity with him. Thanks be to God! This unknown man has been chosen to assume the great inheritance that Jesus gave to Cephas, Simon the son of Jonah, who twenty centuries ago was the first Pope. Two hundred sixty-three men have followed Peter and the new Pope, Cardinal Albino Luciani, the Patriarch of Venice, has taken an original name, John Paul. What is of interest is that under whatever name --- Paul, John, Leo, Pius, etc. --- the new Pope takes on the inheritance of Peter, an inheritance that was proclaimed in this morning's gospel and that is summarized in the title that I have given to my homily: the Pope, the representative, the vicar of Christ. Furthermore we make reference to the words of Saint Catherine of Sienna who used the following phrase: *il dolce Cristo in terra*, the gentle Christ on earth<sup>2</sup>.

In order to develop this thought I will present you, as usual, with three ideas: First, the Pope is Christ's representative because he reflects the presence of God in the Church; second, the Pope is Christ's representative because he guarantees the eternal integrity of the Church; third, the Pope is Christ's representative because he is the principle and the foundation of the universal unity of the Church.

### **The Pope, representative of Christ because he reflects God's presence in the Church**

In order to understand how the Pope is a reflection of God, we refer to the second reading that present us with a grandiose idea of God. As Saint Paul concludes his profound dialogues --- dialogues that we have reflected on during the last few Sundays --- he speaks about the salvific plan of God that was given first to the Jews. Because they proved to be unworthy, this plan of God was presented to the world of the Gentiles. Through the Gentiles, the Jews, envious of the Gentiles because they now possess this inheritance, will be converted when they accept this gift of God. Then these two peoples, converted to the fullness of Christ, will become the glory of God. As Saint Paul concludes this profound analysis he bursts forth in a hymn to the greatness of God --- a hymn that you have just heard: *Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?* (1).

Paul then uses a phrase that is a synthesis of all that I want to say: *For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* (2). He is the beginning, the way, and the goal of the universe. Here God is seen as embracing everything and so without God there is nothing. Regardless of how immense the world of the stars and the seas and volcanoes might appear, nevertheless, this immense world has an origin: God. Even though we might not understand the development of this great drama of creation, the great drama of women and men with the history of their peoples and conflicts and injustices, God continues to be in an incomprehensible way. Why does God allow so many different things to happen? Because after following this way there is also a goal and this goal is also God. God embraces history from its beginning until its conclusion. In his time God will explain why certain things have occurred.

The Pope is a reflection of this God, this great, incomprehensible, and infinite God who in his majesty embraces all of creation, regardless of how immense creation might appear to be. We might say that the Pope is like those mirrors that are able to capture panoramic views, those mirrors that embrace the grandeur that we are unable to behold as a totality. Indeed, the Pope is like an appropriate lens, like the lens of a photographic camera that has a wide lens that is able to reduce to size all that is viewed --- yes he is like a photographic lens, a small and insignificant mirror. Who would have said two days ago that this humble cardinal Albino Luciani would have been chosen by the Lord to be this mirror that would reflect the grandeur of the Lord to the whole world?

Why am I saying that the Pope reflects this infinite grandeur? I am saying this because today's gospel authorizes me to say this. Why is there a Pope? We have heard the answer to this question as we listened to Peter's response. Jesus asks: *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* (3). People have many different opinions: some confuse him with one of the prophets, with other wise men, with other great men. But Jesus then asks those who had been with him for three years: *But who do you say that I am?* (4). The voice of the first Pope responds: *You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In you the grandeur of God has become incarnate. You are the hope of redemption for humanity. You are everything* (5). Jesus responds to Peter and says: *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father* (6). This is faith. We believe and, as you just heard proclaimed here in the Mass, faith is an initiative of God. God gives this gift and gives the fullness of this gift to us. We have discovered God in the midst of humanity. We have discovered this God who is the Son of God, this God who embraces creation, this God for whom all things were made, this God who is the hope of the world. Blessed are those who come to know this God! Therefore Jesus says to Peter: *You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church! This faith that you have just professed is the foundation of this Church. Therefore I am going to organize my Church in order that men and women might continue to profess this faith in the true God and so that throughout the centuries people might continue to proclaim that I am Christ, the Son of the living God* (7).

Notice how the Pope, in the person of the first Pope, Peter, reflects his reason for being. The Pope is the one who guarantees our faith. Jesus has accepted Peter's confession of faith -- this is the title that is given to this passage in the Bible: Peter's confession of faith. This is the same faith that we profess when we are baptized. The priest asks: *Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?* We respond: *We believe!* Then, *Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the*

*Father?* Again we respond: *We believe!* And finally: *do you believe in the Holy spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.* Once again we respond: *We believe!* Then the priest, speaking in the name of the Church, says: *This is our faith, the faith of the Church. Do you want to be baptized in this faith?* Then we respond: *Yes, we wish to be baptized in this faith.* What an honor to be part of this confession of faith whose solid foundational rock is found in the Pope.

The Pope cannot be mistaken in his faith. Thus the Pope rejoices in a great prerogative that is called infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The Pope can be mistaken in matters that pertain to mathematics, astronomy, and other social and human sciences, but in dealing with faith in God and the morality that God demands of humanity, the Pope, when he assumes the power of our supreme teacher to define a truth that must be believed or an obligation that must be fulfilled --- in these cases the Pope is infallible and cannot be mistaken even though we as men and women might not understand this. This gift is given to the Pope not because he is a man but because he receives a special assistance from Christ --- an assistance that has been promised to the one who is the Foundation, the Rock of his people. The Pope cannot be mistaken because God cannot deceive. On this day of the election of a new Pope we reaffirm our faith. The Pope is the reflection of God and guarantees our belief. The Pope is the faith and the hope of our Church.

My sisters and brothers, there is another reason that enables to say that the Pope is a reflection of God, namely, he gives witness to the fact that this Church is not built by men and women. Listen to the words of today's gospel: *You are Cephas! You are rock! You are Peter* --- which means --- *upon this Cephas, upon this Rock I am going to build my church* (8). How beautiful. Neither the Pope nor the bishops nor the priests build the Church. Everyone from the Pope to the humble rural catechist is a simple peon, a worker who collaborates with the only builder. Upon this rock which you are, I am going to build my Church (9). This is not your Church, this is not a Church that is built according to the pleasure of men and women --- this is Jesus' Church.

To come to Mass on Sunday, to baptize a child so that he/she might become part of the Church --- these actions insert us into this construction that Jesus has undertaken. The Pope, the humblest of those who build the Church, guarantees us of this fact. The Pope is a servant, the servant of servants, because he knows that Christ is building the Church. It is also Christ who inspires good will in the people, in the Diocese, in the communities, and in men and women who want to work for the Kingdom of God. Let us esteem the bishop and the priests and the catechists. If we do not want to share in this reflection on the authentic Word of the Church then we reject Christ who preaches and speaks through the bishop and the priest and the catechist. The Pope is the first one to experience himself as the Vicar of Christ, the one who represents the work of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

There is a third reason why the Pope is a reflection of God in his Church. He is the depository of certain powers that only God possesses. There are two beautiful images in today's gospel: the keys and the power to bind and loose. *I will give you the keys to the kingdom* (10). What is the meaning of this image?

The first reading sheds light on the meaning of this image. Listen to the prophet Isaiah pronounce a prophecy against an administrator of the king's palace, a person called Shebna.

This administrator, like many others who obtain power, became arrogant and only wanted to favor his people. He became unworthy of his power and, above all, gave bad counsel to the king. This occurred during the time when Assyria was about to invade the Holy Land and the king, who had been ill advised by Shebna and others, wanted to make an alliance with Egypt. Thus Isaiah, inspired by God, tells the king to have no fear of Assyria, to enter into no alliance with Egypt, to maintain neutrality and if the king would do this, nothing would happen. But the king allowed himself to be seduced by Shebna and made an alliance with Egypt and thus came a catastrophe. Isaiah, then, speaks against the evil counselor, again this evil administrator: *I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station. On that day I will summon my servant Eliakin* (11). Then words are spoken about Eliakin, the same words that Jesus speaks to the present Pope. *I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. He will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place the key to the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open* (12). The keys were a symbol, a symbol of power over a house. Even in our own time when an illustrious person comes into the city, he is given the keys to the city. But in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land, the keys are even more symbolic --- the keys are a sign that a person is the administrator of this house and the key opens and shuts the doors to the house.

Isaiah speaks some words here that do not refer just to Eliakim but are a prophecy concerning the future: *I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open* (13). Not even the Pope is able to actualize the fullness of this prophecy because the third chapter of the book of Revelation presents us the figure of Christ speaking to the Church of Philadelphia. Christ says: *The holy one, the true, who holds the key of David, who opens and no one shall close, who closes and no one shall open* (14).

This image of the keys --- announced by Isaiah --- is actualized in the Pope and will obtain its consummation in Christ. The keys that the Pope receives today are the keys of Christ. For this reason a great writer has said: *the keys of Peter are the keys to history. No one will understand the history of the universe unless they believe in the keys that open and close.* The Pope, who holds these keys in his hands, is a reflection of God. Christ gave these keys to the Pope (15) --- he who is the Lord of history has given the keys to another and this one, with this treasure, holds the keys to the universe. But this possession of the keys is not viewed from the perspective that this is merely a man holding the keys but rather that this individual has received a treasure from God. Christ is the one who possesses the keys and he is the truth, the immortal one, the one who opens and closes. But Jesus completes this image with another comparison: *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (16).

We are not foolish in thinking that a man says something so that God repeats the same thing. This is not something ridiculous that Jesus wanted to do. Christ is saying the following: *I elect you as my representative. You represent who I am. I am the invisible head of the Kingdom of God, of the Church and you are visible head, the voice of the Mystical Body. You are my will and what you sanction with wisdom and counsel and the discernment of my Spirit, this will remain sanctioned in heaven.*

My sisters and brothers, when we hear so many slanderous words against the Pope, we are saddened because these people are playing with high tension electric lines. What the

Pope sanctions on earth, God will also sanction in heaven. If the Pope excommunicates someone who violently disrespects a priest, it is God himself who is excommunicating that person. No one should laugh at excommunication because such an action affirms the fact that God no longer knows the individual who has been excommunicated. This person remains separated from God forever unless this person repents and becomes incorporated into the Church once again. When the Pope says: *this is licit and that is not*, we are not playing some game of interpretation of words. When the Pope says that a person who has an abortion is excommunicated, let us not go about attributing false interpretation to these words. At the same time, all those persons who counseled another to have an abortion and all those who perform the act of abortion are also excommunicated. When the Pope says in *Humane Vitae* that artificial birth control is not licit (17), let us not look for interpretations that allow us to ignore this teaching. Again Jesus says: *whatever you bind on earth shall also be bound in heaven* (18).

Perhaps because we play so many word games and see so many injustices in the exercise of judicial power on this earth, we think that we can play with the judicial power of God. Judges, especially Supreme Court judges, will receive their merited judgment from the One who sanctions people with true justice and does not tolerate abuse and the injustice of one person against another. For this reason, the teaching of the Popes we should follow is not merely human teaching. It has the full support of Christ. When the representative of God on earth speaks, it is Christ who speaks.

### **The Pope guarantees the permanent consistency of the Church**

My sisters and brothers, in the second place we say that the Pope who reflects the presence of God is also God's representative on earth because he guarantees the eternal integrity of the Church. It is said that the new Pope, Cardinal Albino Luciani, Pope John Paul I, is a very calm man. During one of his last interventions in Venice he said that people tend to speak about the problems of the world as being *immense*. He said: *let us not take on this attitude of viewing problems as immense. Let us look calmly at the horizon and trust in God who is a Father who loves us*. These words assure me that in the highest parts of this Church there is a support beam that cannot be disturbed or surprised by anyone. It is clear why he took the name John when we remember the serenity of John XXIII and Paul when we remember the wonderful prudence of Paul VI.

The Church guarantees consistency. Jesus says to the first Pope: *the gates of the nether world shall not prevail against it* (19). In a more traditional translation we read: *the powers of death that conquered so many empires that no longer exist, this power of death that brings an end to everything, will have no influence over this eternal ship that will continue to move forward in time because its horizons have been marked out by the One who is the origin, the way, and the goal of history*. The Church will achieve its goal and the Pope guarantees this fact. As long as the Pope is steering this ship, then the passengers --- all the pilgrims --- can travel with calmness and faith, because the Pope guarantees the integrity of the Church.

We see that Jesus used an image when he changed the name of the son of Jonah, Simon, and thereafter called him Peter (20). Jesus used the Aramaic word *kêpâ* which means *rock*. Translated into Spanish we would say that *pedra* is Peter. In other words, if there were a translation that signified Peter as rock or a solid foundation, then this would define the Pope. The Pope is the rock upon which the Church of eternal guarantees is built.

## **The Pope guarantees the universal unity of the Church**

Thus the third reason that enables us to say that the Pope is Christ's representative in his Church is the fact that the Pope guarantees its universal unity. It can appear impossible to join these two words together: *unity* and *universal*, especially when one looks at the differences between one people and another, between so many distinct and contradictory opinions, between so many different races. Why did Jesus dream of making one Church for black people and white people, for Chinese and Europeans and Americans? The Church respects these differences and does not go to any people to destroy their values but rather guarantees their truly autonomous values and also guarantees the values of the Church. Look at El Salvador! Who shows greater respect toward the people of El Salvador? Who has identified themselves in such a profound way with the people of El Salvador? --- the Church! As the Church shows this respect for those universal, autonomous and unique values of each people, she is also one and unique. How did Jesus achieve this miracle? The documents of Vatican II explain this: *the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity* (21).

I believe that yesterday the Church gave a witness to the world that no one else could give. Men from different continents --- the majority of whom were not Italians --- and these men came to an agreement and elected an Italian as Pope --- one who responds to the longings of all people. What is this? Surely it is a miracle of God at work in a world that is in upheaval, a world that is so divided and where so much selfishness resides. It is a miracle of God that in such a world the common good should prevail over individual interests. This is the unity of Peter, the foundation that unites all the bishops of the world and yet accepts the individual differences of the bishops. My sisters and brothers, what an honor it has been for me to be able to be near the Pope in my visits to the Vatican and to know that I am not alone, to know that I am simply a representative of all these people in the four Departments of this Archdiocese! What an honor to know that I am the humble recipient of the great wealth of this Archdiocese and that I am able to present to the Pope so many human and Christian values that are deeply rooted in the people of El Salvador! What an honor to be able to contribute to the universal wealth of the Church! We might compare all of this to the movement of the veins circulating blood to the heart and then the heart distributing oxygenated blood to the whole body. The example of the circulatory system --- the heart distributing blood to the whole body --- explains in a certain sense this universal unity.

For this reason, my sisters and brothers, Jesus tells Peter that he is the cement of this building process (22). No matter how complicated the work of construction, there will be no integrity or wholeness to the edifice unless there is a solid foundation upon which the weight of the building can rest. The Pope, in his primary role, is this solid foundation upon which rests the pluralism of the world. All feel as though he is our father, the bishop of our Diocese, the pastor of our parish church, the catechist in our village. In him we all experience that movement of blood from the heart of the Pope that stretches to the most remote part of the world where people believe in the Catholic faith. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I asked at the beginning of this homily that we extend an applause to the Pope. But now I ask: who are these people and what hands are extending this applause? This is why I always insist that I am not meddling in politics when I refer to events that are so uniquely ours --- so uniquely a part of our history. I am not looking for conflicts but I am simply

saying that I must give myself to this history, to this Church that asks me to cleanse the blood of this Diocese.

It is to this Church of the Archdiocese, together with the Church of the Diocese of Santiago de María, that I have the joy of presenting a Pastoral Letter that I offer as a humble service of illumination because the theme of this Letter is of vital importance. This Letter is entitled: *The Church and Popular Organizations*. We attempt to respond to the concerns of many people, especially the *campesinos*. What is the meaning of popular organizations? FECCAS (the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants), UTC (the Union of Rural Workers), FAPU (the United Popular Action Front), etc. ... these different political groups that we speak about in our Letter are referred to as phenomena that the Vatican Council calls *the signs of the times* (23). The Church has an obligation to illuminate these signs with the light of the gospel. I do not want you to just read this Letter but I invite you to reflect on this together, in your communities. This is a theme for profound reflection that can help us to understand the relationship that we should have with these groups. I hope that you will embrace this work, this pastoral effort, with the same warmth that we offer to you. This Letter has three parts:

The first part explains the situation of the popular organizations in El Salvador. In this section we defend the right of people to organize. We support their just aims and we describe and denounce the ways in which this right to organize is violated in El Salvador. We provide reasons that make it legitimate to organize and also explain those situations when this is not licit. We are not defending every organization. When an organization is formed for criminal activity, for abductions, guerrilla warfare, for unjust activity, then we explain the moral reasons why these actions are prohibited.

In the second part we find the central theme: what is the relationship between the Church and the popular organizations? We propose three basic principles that ultimately describe the mission of the Church. What type of service must the Church provide to the people, especially in their effort to achieve their just demands? Here we remember the words of Paul VI that provide us with a true witness: *accompany your people with the kindness of Pastors and always illuminate them with the light of the gospel*. As a third principle we refer to the fact that the Church endeavors to obtain the universal salvation of Christ through the efforts of all the vital, liberating forces of humanity. The Church says that efforts to achieve economic, political and social liberation will be incomplete unless these efforts become part of the great liberation that we sang about when we entered the Church today: *The people who journey await a great liberation*, a liberation from sin, a liberation that will give us a share in God's eternal glory and freedom. One, however, must work for the liberation of the earth with this same hope. The Church is not indifferent to temporal matters, but she also does not want to lose herself in these temporal affairs.

The third part deals with a very difficult theme and I ask you to study this very carefully. This section deals with the Church's judgment concerning the violence that is present in our country. It is true that the Church seeks ideals of peace, but she discerns different kinds of violence. In my pastoral letter I recall how, on the peak of Mount Tabor, five men appeared next to the transfigured Christ --- Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John. These men were violent men and had committed terribly violent acts. Moses killed an Egyptian (24); Elijah put to the sword the prophets who did not adore the true God (25); Peter drew his sword against Malchus to defend Christ (26); James and John begged Jesus to rain fire on a town that would not give them lodging (27). But I say here what Medellin has said: *Christians are*



*peacemakers, not because they cannot fight, but because they prefer the force of peace* (28). So I invite you, let us be careful about our use of the energy that God has given our Salvadoran people --- that energy that is like a torrent of water --- let us be careful with this energy so that we do not place this energy at the service of bloodshed or of violence. We have nothing to fear when Salvadorans put all that aggressiveness that God has given them at the service of building true justice, of building the order of things that truly ought to be defended. Hopefully you will study this material very carefully and form your own criteria with regard to the Church's reflections.

The Archdiocese has the pleasure of offering, through the offices of the Central American University, a wonderful work that is titled *The Latin American Bishops between Medellin and Puebla*. This is a collection of twenty-three documents that have been published by the Episcopal Conferences of Latin American and that have analyzed the present economic and political situation of difference countries. These documents were published by the bishops in Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama. These documents enlighten our reality and show that the pastoral guidelines of the Archdiocese of San Salvador have not departed from the gospel demands. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I invite you, beloved priests and sisters, Catholic institutions and all faithful, to study in light of the gospel the present situation of Latin America. This light of the gospel is not only proclaimed by the Archbishop of San Salvador but is proclaimed by the bishops of various Latin American countries. There can be no mistake about this for the gospel obliges us to follow faithfully the words of Jesus: *I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me* (29). To betray this liberation is to betray the very gospel. This collection of documents can be obtained here in the Chancery.

### **Life of the Church**

Visiting the communities I gather together an immense treasure from our Archdiocese and am able to present this to the Pope. For example, last Sunday in San Juan Cojutepeque a group of young men and women received the sacrament of Confirmation.

In the house of Bishop Chávez in Rosario, Cuscatlán, the bishops met and this meeting filled me with great satisfaction.

On Tuesday of last week I was present in Aguilares where we evaluated the leaders of the pastoral ministry in that area. We met with Father Cruz and the Sacred Heart Sisters and we were able to appreciate the wonderful ministry that is being carried on there with so many different people who collaborate with the pastoral ministry of our Diocese.

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>, celebrating the feast of St Bartholomew, patron of Aguilares, I received the deep joy of a people who, as the sister welcoming me put it, do not despair in spite of their poverty but have much faith and hope. At the offertory they brought up with devotion a beautiful basket full of local products and with the names of the different cantons. It is a richness of the earth which El Salvador produces for the happiness of all.

Yesterday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, the community of Tejutla celebrated the first anniversary of the death of Felipe de Jesús Chacón. As I said during previous visits, I realized yesterday that our land offers the Pope the gift of martyrs. How terrible when people told me about the way that Felipe's face had been disfigured. What is worse is the way that he was slandered in

the press and depicted as a thief when we all know that he was a courageous catechist who knew how to live the gospel even in the most dangerous and difficult situations. There in Tejutla, at the time of the Mass for Felipe de Jesús, the pastor of Aldeíta made a most courageous denunciation when he pointed out persons who pretend to be our friends but are going about collecting signatures against the Bishop and the Christian communities. This is the type of betrayal and stab in the back that the Church is experiencing in many places.

Our Diocese is also able to offer the Pope a very rich religious life. Yesterday the men and women religious gathered together to study a document that provides all of us with much hope<sup>3</sup>. This document deals with the relationship between bishops and religious --- they should not appear to be living in two separate worlds but from the perspective of the Kingdom of God that we all seek, bishops and religious should join together their efforts and charisms. So many things can be accomplished when there is unity among the different living forces of the Church. We rejoice with the Augustinian community who tomorrow, the feast of Saint Augustine, will celebrate the feast of their patron and founder. We rejoice with the Salesian community who celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of their schools, Colegio don Bosco and Colegio San José de Santa Ana. We can certainly say to our Pope that the spirit of Don Bosco, which is also the spirit of the Church, is firmly rooted in our nation. The religious Sisters of the Assumption allowed me to see in Barrio de Lourdes the promotional work that they are doing. This also occurred in La Colonia Utilia of Santa Tecla where the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Joseph are doing wonderful work in their center of human development.

We can also offer the Pope a Diocese in which the clergy are very concerned and sensitive to the social situation of our nation and for this reason are also frequently misunderstood. On Wednesday I had a wonderful dialogue with a group of priests and on Friday we celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Priests Cooperative which attempts to help the priests with some of their financial problems --- problems which many people are unaware of. Many times the priest is the poorest person in society. Today there are a number of priests in Guatemala participating in a course on spirituality. We can see the different efforts that we are making in the Diocese

This is the Diocese that we offer to the Holy Father. At the same time we say: *Holy Father, this is a Diocese with a rich pastoral plan but a diocese that finds itself in very difficult situations.*

### **Events of the week**

This week we have also defended two priests who were slandered. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, *El Diario de Hoy* published an extrajudicial statement of José Belmoris Martínez Herrera that implicates Father Fabián Amaya, Father Rafael Barahona and Dr. Antonio Morales Carbonell in terrorist activities that are linked to the Popular Revolutionary Bloc<sup>4</sup>. The Chancery has been very concerned about unmasking these lies and has expressed its confidence and trust in these priests who have been slandered.

I have here the testimony of Father Fabián --- a letter that has given me great satisfaction and joy. Father Fabián writes: *Bishop, (I make this statement of my innocence and where I was when others have said that I was involved in guerrilla actions. I was involved in pastoral work and there are many witnesses). I make this statement so that you have*

*something in writing and not because I believe that I have to give you testimony about my life and behavior. I also understand that this is something that has been prefabricated and perhaps done so for some more serious reason. I thank God for this trial and want to tell you that I am not afraid, for I believe the Lord accompanies those who place their trust in him. This is the way that people act when they work on behalf of the truth and do not fear lies. Father Barahona has done the same. He published his defense and stated before the Second Criminal Court that all of this is a lie<sup>5</sup>. He stated that others have made these declarations because they were tortured<sup>6</sup>. This is the kind of justice we have... a justice that slanders others.*

We also speak about this Diocese that weeps as a result of the crime of abductions and that rejoices when one of these incidents is resolved, such as the case of Mr. Bjorek who has been set free<sup>7</sup>. But we still are pained by the mystery that surrounds the abduction of Mr. Matsumoto and saddened by those who have tried to cloud this situation. This situation must be clarified and Mr. Matsumoto's wife is waiting for some word that will state the truth about all of this.

The abduction of Mr. Monedero in Santa Ana must also be clarified<sup>8</sup>. Those who are holding him hostage have put two conditions for his release: 1) the distribution of \$100,000.00 among the families of those whose loved ones have disappeared and those accused of violating the law of Public Order; 2) the publication of four statements in the media. Because I am part of the commission that is distributing the \$100,000.00 I can verify the fact that we have received from his family this sum of money and this money has been deposited in the Bank. Tomorrow, Monday, we will determine some of the details that will guide us in the distribution of this money to the families that the abductors have listed. But with regard to the second condition, we are sad to have to say that the family of Mr. Monedero has been unable to fulfill this condition because the government has given orders to the media prohibiting them from publishing *these unconstitutional statements that violate the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order*. We received this statement on August 24<sup>th</sup> from the Secretariat of Information that is connected to the Presidency<sup>9</sup>.

In this same regard I am happy to tell you that the Human Rights Commission has called upon the government and stated: *we ask for the prompt liberation of Mr. Monedero and we point out the serious responsibility of the government of the Republic that has prohibited the media from publishing certain statements that they have classified as "subversive" yet in previous situations when other citizens have been involved in similar situations, they adopted an attitude of tolerance, knowing that people were trying to save the life of another human being. In consideration of these rights and in light of a extremely delicate situation to guarantee the physical welfare of Mr. Monedero, we invite all the active forces of the country to seriously reflect on the need to work together and do so quickly to resolve very real situations that if left as they are will enable the violence to continue and even more, allow this violence to escalate.* They conclude by saying that they hope that this prohibition will not result in a fatal conclusion.

I ask: *Why do they not prohibit the publication of news that is slanderous and defamatory? Is this constitutional? Why are the constitutional rights against torture, arbitrary arrest and exile not fulfilled? We raise our voices for the freedom of Mr. Monedero. Hopefully those who are holding him captive are listening to my voice and are aware of the*

injustice that they are doing. We do not want to see a greater injustice committed. His family has done all that they could and it is right that he should be returned to his family.

Arbitrary transfer from one prison to another is a form of psychological torture. Professor Pedro Bran Arévalo, Salvador Sánchez Cerón<sup>10</sup>, Olando Cordero, Miguel Antonio Ramírez, and Stefan have been transferred from the prison in Santa Tecla to the prison in Santa Ana and others have been transferred from the prison in Santa Ana to the prison in Gotera. Families are unable to locate their loved ones and this is a form of moral torture --- and there is no right to act in this way.

Immorality and torture! Witnesses have spoken about the tragedy that occurred on the night of August 19<sup>th</sup> in El Paraíso, Chalatenango. These people have denounced the immorality that is occurring as a result of the establishment of a new police headquarters in this area, a place that has now become a dungeon of torture and threats. On the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> these people saw peaceful people of this area beaten by the police.

My sisters and brothers, in this framework of the life of our Diocese I want to speak about some of the labor conflicts. Workers continue to be fired from their jobs in the factories INCA and INSINCA --- this is occurring to those persons who are union workers. The Workers Union of Industries (the union that represents workers in factories that produce soft drinks, water, ice and other similar products) has stated that their union has been able to obtain the approval of a new work contract with Empresa Tropical, S.A. and were able to obtain some benefits, such as an increase in salary.

Finally, this Diocese that is greeting the new Pope also cries as a result of the suffering that has been experienced. Several hundred people had to sleep outdoors last week because of the high tides that occurred in Acajutla.

From June of last year until July of the present year 4,196 persons have died as a result of diarrhea<sup>11</sup>. This is a very sad statistic because diarrhea continues to be the cause of the greatest number of deaths in our country. This is a symptom of our underdevelopment and of the unhealthy conditions in which the majority of our people live. This is also a sign of the malnutrition of so many people.

More sad facts and here I want to call people to a careful analysis. Dr. Osmín Antonio Magaña has stated that forty percent of the workers in El Salvador have fallen victim to the disease of alcoholism<sup>12</sup>. This number continues to increase. Be very careful here my beloved workers! Do not let your situation become worse! I invite you to take advantage of those groups that provide salvation to people in this kind of situation, namely, Alcoholics Anonymous. Take hold of this offer of salvation and do not become caught up in the great ocean of alcoholism that can ruin our country.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is the Diocese and the historical and concrete framework with which we greet the New Pontiff who is probably aware of all of this. He is not a spiritual person who is disconnected from the events of this world. I am very happy to greet a Pope who is able to identify with the realities of the world of the workers and who, in simplicity, is able to share his life with people. This is precisely what we desire: pastors, who, like the recent Popes, give us an example and invite us to understand that the gospel and the spirituality of the People of God cannot leave aside this concrete framework that calls out

to all of us, rich and poor, and invites us to find effective solutions. The Church has no desire to make denunciations. I, more than anyone else, experience a repugnance for having to speak these things --- but I believe that it is my duty to do this, my duty to speak the truth. Thus we must keep our eyes wide open, our feet firmly planted on the earth and our hearts filled with the gospel and God, so that together we can seek solutions to our problems --- not immediate, violent, foolish, cruel or criminal solutions, but solutions based on justice. Only justice can enable peace to become a reality. So be it.

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<sup>1</sup> Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, was elected Pope on 26 August 1978 and took the name of John Paul

<sup>2</sup> Works of St Catherine of Sienna, Spanish edition in BAC, Madrid 1955, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup> See The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Criteria for relations between bishops and religious in the Church* (14 May 1978).

<sup>4</sup> See “Señalen a dos sacerdotes como dirigentes del BPR”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 25 August 1978.

<sup>5</sup> See “Padre Barahona refusa los cargos de dirigir el BPR”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 26 August 1978.

<sup>6</sup> See *El Mundo*, 26 August 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Kjell Bjork, kidnapped by the Armed Forces of National Resistance, was freed on 24 August 1978. See *El Mundo*, 24 August 1978.

<sup>8</sup> The Revolutionary Army of the People claimed the kidnapping of Armando Tomás Monedero. See *El Mundo*, 23 August 1978.

<sup>9</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 25 August 1978.

<sup>10</sup> The second surname of Salvador Sálvador Sánchez is Cerén.

<sup>11</sup> See “Memoria anual del labores del Ministerio de Salud y Asistencia Pública”. *El Diario de Hoy*, 24 August 1978.

<sup>12</sup> See “Alcoholismo cause grave daño al economía del país”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 26 August 1978.

*Marginal References* (1) Rm 11,33-34: (2) Rm 11,35: (3) Mt 16,13: (4) Mt 16,15: (5) Mt 16,16: (6) Mt 16,17: (7) Mt 16,18: (8) Mt 16,18: (9) Mt 16,18: (10) Mt 16,19) (11) Is 22,19-20: (12) Is 22,21-22: (13) Is 22,22: (14) Ap 3,7: (15) Mt 16,19a: (16) Mt 16,19b: (17) HV 14: (18) Mt 16,19b: (19) Mt 16,18: (20) Jn 1,42: (21) LG 23: (22) Mt 16,18: (23) GS 11: (24) Es 2,11-12: (25) 1K 18,40: (26) Jn 18,10: (27) Lk 9,54: (28) M 2,15: (29) Mt 25,40.