

THE CROSS IN LIFE

**Twenty-second Sunday of ordinary Time
September 3, 1978**

Readings:

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

My dear sisters and brothers.

We have come together this Sunday in order to give expression to the reality that we are the People of God. The readings enlighten this journey of the People of God as they walk in the midst of the world. I want to supplement the Biblical readings with the following passage from the documents of Vatican II --- a passage that describes the journey of the People of God: *The Church, like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes. By the power of the risen Lord they give strength that they might, in patience and in love, overcome their sorrows and their challenges, both within themselves and from without, and that they might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light* (1).

Within the Church there is a weakness of the flesh and outside the Church there is a series of trials and persecutions. All of these realities constitute the Church's cross. Today, at the conclusion of our reflections, we are going to enlighten the realities that surround us and the intimate life of the Church with the Word of God that speaks to us about the cross. We are going to ask the Lord to make real the words of the Vatican Council that we have just heard. Despite the weaknesses of her own flesh, despite the trials and persecutions that result from the evil and the indifference that surround us, let us continue to be the People of God, faithful to the Lord and faithful to the cross. Let us come to the light --- remember this phrase for it is a synthesis of all that I want to say. The cross in our lives could be the title that is given to my poor words, words that I will share with you this morning. As usual I will develop this theme with three ideas: first, the cross provokes the crises in life; second, only the cross gives meaning to life; third, without the cross life is a failure.

The Cross provokes the crises in life

Before proceeding we might ask: what is the meaning of the cross that is spoken about in today's gospel? I do not want anyone to think that our religion is one of conformity --- be patient, put up with these things and eternal life will come. This is what our enemies call the opium that transports people into a land of fantasy, but the Church is not this opium. Rather the

Church demands and provokes people to live this holy assertiveness that God has given to everyone. As I said in my Pastoral Letter¹ and what I refer to here is an assertiveness that we must learn how to orient according to the will of God --- an assertiveness that does not destroy but builds. The cross implies patience but with courage and passivity and conformity and with human effort.

Because Saint Matthew wants to give echo to the early persecutions, he places the following words on the lips of Jesus: *whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me* (2). The gospel is the fruit of the reflections of the Christian community and this community, like the community of our Archdiocese, could speak about persecution and martyrs. As a result of these reflections the first Christians came to an understanding of the meaning of the word *cross*. With courage they took a stand for Christ and defended the justice of the gospel. All of this implied working and building a better world. And yes, they achieved this! On the pagan columns of Rome the cross of Christ stands as a sign of the triumph and victory of faith. At the base of these columns is the blood of many martyrs. This enabled the Christians to say that the blood of the martyrs was the seed that rejuvenated society. A new world arose as a result of the struggles of the cross.

As seen in today's readings, especially the second reading, the sign of the cross means fulfilling the will of God. My sisters and brothers, let us engrave these words in our hearts: the cross is the fulfillment of God's will. Let us not attribute our laziness to the will of God. Let us not fault God for unjust inequalities! Let us not fault God for the underdevelopment of women and men. God desires none of these realities. Thus when Pope Paul VI modified the meaning of penance for the Christian people (3), he said that there are different ways to understand the meaning of penance in the life of the Christian. Fasting in developed countries where people eat well will be different from the fasting that takes place in the underdeveloped countries where people live their whole lives in fasting. In the one situation, penance is lived by adapting an austere lifestyle when one is surrounded by wealth and also by living in solidarity with those who suffer. In the other case, penance is lived by working for a more just world in those places where people live their whole lives fasting. This is penance --- this is doing the will of God.

These words of mine are supported by Saint Paul and the documents of the Church which interpret for the world the meaning of the cross and also denounce false interpretations of the cross of Christ. When the cross of Hitler was raised on high in Rome, Pope Pius XI said: *In Rome they have raised up a cross that is not the cross of Christ*. Then the courageous Pope left Rome and the diplomatic world said that this act had been the greatest slap in the face that could have been given to Hitler². The cross of the Lord is different from the cross that humanity wants to raise on high because the cross of Christ does not create a fantasy world for men and women. In light of this reality Saint Paul and Jesus tell us: *whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me*. This is exactly what I am saying here in this the first idea of my homily, namely, the cross provokes the most profound crises in our lives.

Let us use as an example the model life of Christ. The gospel of Saint Matthew situates us in the life of Christ at a pivotal moment in his mission. Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds with his disciples, separated himself from those who did not understand him. In Caesarea Philippi he had elicited from his disciples the first confession of his being the Messiah --- a message that the disciples were to preach to the whole world. Jesus experiences a certain satisfaction because he feels that the faith that he had planted in the hearts of the disciples is bearing fruit --- they are

maturing in faith. So now the time has come for Jesus to proclaim that there is another dimension to this glorious messianic mission of the Son of God --- the Messiah is also the Suffering Servant, the Servant of Yahweh. Thus Jesus announces for the first time: *[the Son of Man] must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised* (4).

For the first time the Divine Savior speaks about the paschal mystery --- he himself is the paschal mystery and it is this same mystery that gathers us together each Sunday. Each Sunday we proclaim: *Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!* It is this mystery that gives life to the People of God and for the first time Jesus opens this mystery to his disciples (5). He speaks about his resurrection and it is very easy to follow the glorious Christ, the Messiah, the living Son of God, the One who comes on the clouds of heaven to judge all people. But Jesus points out to his disciples that there is another dimension to this life of the Messiah --- a painful and humiliating aspect. At this moment Jesus is enduring the crisis of temptation. One of his disciples, in fact, the disciple who has just confessed that he understood Jesus to be the Son of the living God, will now become an obstacle and a hindrance: *God forbid, Lord! Don't go to Jerusalem! No such thing shall ever happen to you* (6). We heard the harsh response of Jesus, a response that resolves the crisis and the temptation: *Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do* (7).

The cross is a scandal and always provokes a crisis. We can see in the passages cited above that Peter is also in a crisis of faith. Jesus has just told him: *Blessed are you Simon for you have proclaimed your faith in me as the Son of God. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my heavenly Father. So I promise you that you will be my representative* (8). This Sunday in Rome it is John Paul I who is Peter in the gospel passage that we have been reflecting on --- he is Christ's representative. At this solemn moment, when Peter receives a great promise from Jesus he faces a temptation in his own life of faith. It would be as if John Paul I, on a Sunday like this, at the time of his coronation, were to experience a crisis of faith. My sisters and brothers, we never have certainty and we all experience terrible moments of crisis, even the Pope. Therefore, we should not be surprised by these crises of faith. Peter was afraid and wanted to counsel and put pressure on Jesus according to ways of human beings. How horrible are those pressures that attempt to separate us from what God desires and tempt us to act in accordance with the desires of human beings.

But this morning, I am truly moved by the first reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah. I cannot find in the Bible any other words that describe so vividly a person in a crisis with regard to his relationship with God (9). *You have seduced me – he says to the Lord - and I have let myself be seduced; you have said you were sending me to tear up and to knock down, but also to build and to plant* (10); *and from my mouth as a prophet, which wishes to express only what you say, there only comes violence, war, destruction.* Let us imagine how Jeremiah was, a gentle prophet more inclined to love, a prophet of spiritual softness who represents in the Old Testament the gentle face of Christ; a prophet of love and goodness chosen by God to announce to a sinful people the destruction and threat of God if they don't repent. And it pains him! "How many times – he says – have I wished to quieten God's word within me; the word of God seemed to be a fire burning in my heart which obliged me to speak" (11). This is a prophet's crisis: he doesn't want to say what he says, but God orders him to speak.

So that you can see the cross does not mean conformity. Often it demands something against our temperament, against our way of being; this is what Christ is asking of Peter: not to become comfortable or settled in, because they are going up to Jerusalem to suffer; this is what makes the prophet Jeremiah weep, why he finds his mission very hard; it is what I in my first reflection want to say to my beloved Christians, when Christ says to us, no longer to Peter or Jeremiah or the chosen in the Bible, but to all of us, God's people – that Gospel passage describing the conditions for following Jesus -: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and takes up his cross and follow me: he has to lose his life for me.” (12). These are the words that cause crisis.

I am a witness, brothers and sisters, of how many men and women are in crisis at this moment. And I am pained when they are people who have been very generous and courageous and are now intimidated. But I am happy when I feel the crisis is helping many, like the crisis of illness. The doctors say the crisis of illness is that moment when the sick person is either moving towards death or towards health; for many people this crisis is helping them to find health, while for others it is a step towards death.

It is the Gospel. It is the Cross. Dear sisters and brothers, I invite you not to live a Christianity without the cross. I invite each of you to confront with courage a life marked by the cross. As that poem of *Cristo roto*³ says, each night kneel before the crucifix and kiss it, not with a romantic or superficial kiss; but with a kiss of conviction to tell him you are ready to love him even though it may be by dying like him on a cross; that you wish to kiss his foot, when this Christ you are kissing represents perhaps your worst enemy whom you must pardon. It is not easy. But let us meet this crisis so that our Christianity may be authentic.

You know how the silversmiths prove the authenticity of gold and silver. They use a touchstone and listen to the sound that is emitted from the rock in order to calculate its quality. The cross is our touchstone. Our lives are touched by the cross and we are able to listen to the sounds that are emitted. Are there sounds of cowardice or fear? Are there sounds that one is living according to the ways of human beings or the ways of God? The cross is authentic proof of one's desire to follow Christ. For this reason Jesus says: *whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me* (13).

Only the cross gives life a meaning

My sisters and brothers, in the second place the cross gives meaning to life. Christianity is not some form of masochism or Greek stoicism, a philosophy that praises suffering for the sake of suffering. No ... God has not created us to suffer but rather has formed us to be happy. This is like the situation of a mother who loves her child. Her child needs an operation and she is very aware of the pain that the scalpel will cause to the body of her child but for the well-being of the child she allows the operation to take place. She tells the doctor to cut and to do what is necessary. The mother shares the pain of her child but the child is saved because the operation is necessary.

My sisters and brothers, Jesus announces his passion but says that that he will rise on the third day (14). What a beautiful promise revolves around the cross and Calvary! The

resurrection is the destiny of human beings but because men and women are part of sinful humanity and have offended God therefore it is necessary to pass through the crucible of the cross and suffering in order to obtain the resurrection. As Saint Paul has said: *this is a trustworthy statement; if we have died with Christ, we shall also live with him* (15).

To carry the cross involves the following conditions: if we follow Jesus, we will save our lives and receive our merited reward at the time of our glorification. There is a paradoxical phrase in today's gospel: *whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it* (16). What is the meaning of these words? This is not simply some word game but an expression of the philosophy of Christianity. Those who want to be well situated, who try to avoid suffering in this life, who want to save their lives here in this world --- these persons will lose their life in the life hereafter. For even here, in the present history no one is as happy as those persons who can tell Jesus about their loyalty, commitment and generosity. No one is as free or has fulfilled their lives in such a way as those who have no fear of losing their lives for Christ. Those who fear losing their lives are not free, rather they are fearful and they place conditions on their lives --- Oh, I have this problem and I am facing these circumstances! Here the crisis is resolved by rejecting the cross when in reality the cross alone gives meaning to life.

I want to focus on the divine meaning that Saint Paul speaks about today in his letter to the Romans. He says that a Christian's life, a Christian's body must be presented to God as a living sacrifice that is pleasing to God. (17). Here, you see, the Bible gives our bodies and our lives a meaning of sacrifice and offering --- a divine meaning that is proper to every person, even the lowliest. I would like everyone who is listening to me to hear this message --- I include those who are listening by radio regardless of the situation in which you might find yourself. Those who are listening might be sick persons desperate with pain or perhaps a poor person who is unable to find work and lacks even food to eat or perhaps someone who works and works with no result or perhaps another who has too many comforts and is selfish --- I do not know who is listening, but I am grateful for the wonderful attention that the people who fill this cathedral are giving me. I tell you, sisters and brothers in the faith, that we offer all of this to God --- suffering, work, duty, whatever it is --- and we do so in order to please God, to do the will of God. In this way we become pleasing sacrifices, offerings of pleasant aroma on the Father's altar.

At this moment in the history of the Church when we find ourselves involved in the events surrounding the death and life of a Pope, I want to remind you of the immortal words of John XXIII when he responded to his doctor who had told him that he was gravely ill and that he should rest: *the flesh is an altar and needs a victim to offer to God. So here am I this victim on the altar of the bed.* John XXIII died in the sight of the whole world⁴. I have never seen a more public death than his --- a minute by minute description of life fading away, of the host being consumed. At the final moment, how beautiful is the body! Even though it might be fat and ugly like that of John XXIII, but when the body becomes a pleasing offering through the wonderful Spirit that was breathed into the body and when the body becomes a pleasing offering through the Christian ideology than has been lived throughout one's life --- then there is no despicable body for the Lord.

Unfortunately, like Christ, we are able to say to many people when they look at the bodies of men and women: *you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do. You view*

another's body with eyes of vile concupiscence and not with your eyes elevated (18). But as we view everyone's body, from the most beautiful to the most repugnant or tattered, we should say with Saint Paul (19) that every physical body is a host when it is offered to God, when all its energies, voice, steps, hands, intelligence and work is offered to the glory of God. The cross means that we live according to the will of God.

My dear sisters and brothers, baptism identifies us with the beauty of our Christ. The Second Vatican Council, speaking about the laity (20), states: *The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood* (21), *in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God* (22), *should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God* (23). *Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them.* My sisters and brothers, this is an invitation and hopefully my word gives echo to this invitation for I see this as primary, namely, that we give to our lives this divine meaning of the cross and courageously embrace the cross as our duty. Thus we should not simply view our obligations, no matter how routine, as an opportunity to gain a salary or obtain the applause of others or become comfortable here on earth for none of this remains after we have died. Rather in all things we should attempt to give glory to God, for this is the goal of our life. Indeed, the purpose of our life is God's glory – therefore, however lowly a life is, that is what makes it great.

Without the cross life is a failure

Finally, without the cross life is a failure. What does it mean to reject the cross? What is the failure in life? In the second reading today Saint Paul says: *Do not conform yourselves to this age* (24). To reject the cross is to conform ourselves to this world, to live according to the norms of this world rather than the norms of the gospel. The world says that happiness is found in money and Jesus says: *Blessed are the poor in spirit* (25). Jesus also says that we must forgive while the world tells us to live with the attitude of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (26), to live with attitudes of vengeance and violence and hatred. Do not conform yourselves to the thinking of the world. Indeed we could go on indefinitely describing these two lines of thought that grow further and further apart from one another: conformity with the will of God and conformity with the realities of this world.

How unhappy are those persons who day by day allow their criteria and their way of thinking to become more and more identified with the thinking of the world! The pleasures of the flesh, drugs, prostitution, money, robbery, abduction --- all of these are the paths of the world. Do not conform your lives to the thinking of this world. Jesus says this same thing but in another way when he addresses Peter: *you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do* (27). At this time this morning these words seem to be most apt for they are an expression of what I am trying to say: transform your attitude and live according to the ways of God.

Another phrase of Jesus says almost the same thing: *whoever wants to save his life, rejects the cross because no one saves their life without running the risk of losing it forever.* Then the gospel concludes with words that have converted many sinners and made them holy people: *What profit would it be for one to gain the whole world and then forfeit life itself* (28). There is a

legend and many people believe this legend: some people have made a pact with the devil and when things go well for this person and he possesses great material wealth, people say the devil has helped this person but later on the devil will possess his soul. This legend is not a truth of our faith but it is certain that there are many people who are only concerned about accumulating goods in this life ... and they are going to lose all these things. We have all seen this happen --- people inherit great quantities of money, money that they never worked for and in a very short period of time they have wasted and thrown all this money away! We must add here that money is also sacred when one knows how to place this wealth at service of God's way of thinking.

My sisters and brothers, this reality is also characteristic of the Church. Read once again the thinking of the Council which I referred to at this beginning of this homily. This Church is not some abstract reality but is composed of us, you and I. We are the Church. So as we accept the cross we also raise up the Church and as we reject the cross we separate ourselves from the Church and leave the Church with no meaning.

This is my greatest concern, namely, to build with Christ, to build a Church according to the heart of Jesus. The other things, that which I am going to say now: some news about the Church and the events that have occurred during the week that I attempt to enlighten --- these are all accidentals, things that have happened and the history of the past week. Therefore in my homilies I have stated that it is part of my prophetic mission to enlighten this news but I ask you to focus on the effort of this poor Pastor to build the Church according to the heart of God. This is the affirmation that I am repeating and I do not want this affirmation, this understanding of the Church as the true cross of Christ --- I do not want this to be confused with some type of political opposition or some type of fantasy that brings me fame or opportunity. No! My role is like that of the prophet Jeremiah for I am pained to have to say these things. But these are realities and I am obliged to speak about the sins of the world so that they might be destroyed in the way that God wants the People of God to destroy them.

Life of the Church

Thus, my beloved sisters and brothers, with this desire to build the Church and enlighten the realities that surround us, I invite you to rejoice with me at this time when Providence has given us a new Pope. I also want to express my gratitude to the media: what a great help when (as the Pope has just said) they serve that which is good and true. Thanks to the press and television and radio the whole world knows the good character, the ecclesiastical spirit and the true heart of the Pastor, Pope John Paul I. In about an hour, at 10:10am (you have time so there is no reason to be concerned) you will be able to see on television the coronation. But the Pope does not want to have this ceremony called a coronation --- this is one of his beautiful characteristics. He has broken centuries of tradition so that he can present himself humbly before the world. There are many tiaras in the Vatican and there are also many *sedes gestatoria* but the Pope has said: *No! I will not use these! I will enter with the people, walking as a pilgrim on this earth and so we will not call this ceremony a coronation ceremony but rather the celebration of the Mass of the Bishop of the World.* Thus in a little while the Pope will celebrate the first Eucharist to consecrate his work to God. What a beautiful characteristic!

In his first message to the world⁵ he insisted on the establishment of a social order that is more just, a social order with a more stable peace and with sincere cooperation among all people. He affirmed the meeting of the bishops in Puebla. He told reporters to work with love for the

truth and to respect human dignity and focus less on trivial matters and more on essential matters⁶. Look at this beautiful and most opportune light! In his meeting with the Diplomatic Corps the Pope outlined the mission of the Church and said that his relationship with government is one of evangelization --- always in the line of Jesus, always in the line of the Church of the cross. He highlighted the fact that the Church, respecting the fundamental principles that guarantee authentic civilization and fraternity among people, will continue the work of forming people's consciences as well as shaping public opinion⁷.

I am truly happy to see the new Pontiff walking on the paths of John XXIII and Paul VI. The previous Popes had not wandered afar, but walk on the path of goodness and the present Pope will continue to walk on this path. Yes, there have always been deviations and we all must work to rectify these deviations. The Pope has outlined the essential path of the Church and we see where we are going and thanks to God we find ourselves walking with the Pope on the same path. Blessed be God!

I want to thank the enthusiastic acceptance that the People of God (and those who are not part of this People of God) have given to the Pastoral Letter that was written with Bishop Rivera and is entitled: *The Church and Popular Organizations*. Since this is a new theme, it is an invitation to reflect. We have not spoken the last authoritative word on this subject. Rather as Paul VI said in *Octogesima Adveniens* (29) --- we invite people to reflect and in light of the gospel message to engage in dialogue.

At the same time that our Pastoral Letter was published, the four other bishops of El Salvador published a statement on the same theme, but with a distinct focus⁸. The statement of the four bishops⁹ has been printed in the media¹⁰ as a statement of the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador. Our Secretary of Communications quickly clarified this situation and said that the statement was signed by some bishops of the Episcopal Conference but was not a statement of the Episcopal Conference. He then offered a summary of the Pastor Letter that Bishop Rivera and I wrote¹¹.

It is true that as an Episcopal Conference we felt it was necessary to state that FECCAS (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants) and UTC (Union of Rural Workers) were not organizations of the church. I have repeated this statement in my homilies and this fact is made very clear in the Pastoral Letter. But the redaction of the statement that goes much further is the work of the four bishops who signed the statement. This was never discussed in a plenary session of the bishops and such statements should follow that process before being signed and published. Because of the serious defects in the process, defects which any collegial body can notice, this document cannot be attributed to the collegial body of the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador. Unfortunately our clarifications were distorted or mutilated or silenced in the media. This created confusion and, as the Pope has just stated, the people were denied access to truthful information about of this. This whole situation has been most unfortunate and I, in solidarity with the hierarchy of El Salvador, ask pardon for this bad example that plays into the hands of the Church's enemies. I earnestly beseech you, my beloved priests and the communities of the Archdiocese, to judge with mature criteria that which is good in both statements and not foster commentaries that might only deepen our divisions. The people have a great instinct for these things, an instinct that has been given to them by the Holy Spirit and that Jesus referred to when he spoke these beautiful words: *the sheep know the voice of the Pastor who loves them and is willing to give his life for them* (30).

We are thankful for the enthusiastic acceptance of the Pastoral Letter. We have run out of copies of the first edition quicker than we thought. Next week we will have another edition with a greater number of copies. Also next week our newspaper, *Orientación*, will publish the complete text of the Pastoral Letter. I remind you again that I am not simply asking you to read this letter, but to study it and reflect on it in your community. Send me your reactions, your commentaries and your criticisms. Our radio YSAX has been transmitting some very interesting commentaries on the Letter.

The Church of the cross is celebrating today ten years of benevolent work with the Salvadorian Foundation of Development and Minimum Housing. We extend our congratulations and prayers to Father Ibáñez and his collaborators.

I also want to congratulate and call your attention to the initiative of the pastors of the Vicariate of Asunción which comprises the parishes of Flor Blanca, San José de la Montaña, San Benito, Colonia Roma, Corazón de María, Cristo Redentor and La Ceiba. In order to better organize the administration of the sacraments and enable people to come to a greater understanding of their Christian significance and in order to encourage people in their faith, this vicariate is organizing a theological institute.

I rejoice with the Vicariate of Chalatenango because the religious who work in that Department, the Carmelite Missionaries, the Sisters of the Assumption, the Guadalupana Sisters, the Oblates of the Divine Love, the Oblates of the Sacred Heart, and the Betlemitas came together for a two day evaluation of their work and supported Father Fabián Amayan, the Episcopal Vicar. They defended him at this time when he is being slandered and accused of being an accomplice in seditious activities. The religious there have affirmed the fact that Father Fabián is fully involved in the pastoral ministry there and all the communities of the Department can testify to that fact.

In Colonia de Autuxtepeque we celebrated the Eucharist to make amends for the sacrilegious robbery that was perpetrated there.

A group of young people from the Instituto Ricaldone gave me great joy when they arrived at the Chancery and told me that they were on pilgrimage to the Bishop. I was surprised by this statement but nonetheless it has made me reflect on their words. To go on pilgrimage means to seek in a specific place strength and unity and faith. I felt that I reclaimed this responsibility as bishop for I am a pilgrim for the whole diocese and I must be the center that enlightens this unity and truth. I thank them for this meaningful visit that expresses a kindness that is much greater than this group of young people from Ricaldone.

I also want to thank the Legion of Mary who presented themselves and offered their services to the hierarchy.

I rejoice with the community of Ateos where the main parish of Tepecoyo and Sacacoyo will be located. Yesterday we offered a Mass there to inaugurate this new pastoral initiative.

I was very pleased with the development of a lively community in San Ramón where the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Theresa are ministering --- this work gives glory to this Church of the

Cross and this Easter Church. The action of the offering of gifts was very impressive. They exhibited the fertility of the land there (they brought fruits, grains, and flowers) and offered these gifts as an act of thanksgiving to the Lord. I was able to greet very briefly the Mother General of the Carmelites of Saint Theresa who has been in El Salvador during these days. She is visiting the communities of her Congregation.

We want to unite ourselves with the sorrow of Father Eduardo Orellana on the occasion of the death of the person who was like his mother.

On this the four month anniversary of his death, we remember with kindness a friend from San Miguel, Don Carlos García Prieto and I ask you to pray for him.

Yesterday I not only wanted to greet Father Pedraz on the occasion of his birthday, but also extend my gratitude to all those working at Radio YSAX who are providing a wonderful service as they make the thinking of the Church more widely known.

I want to announce to the priests and all the communities that next Tuesday at 12:15pm we will have a concelebrated Eucharist here in the cathedral. I have the pleasure to preside with my beloved priests at this concelebration in honor of the New Pope. Hopefully all the communities can be present to express here in the Cathedral the solidarity that we communicated to John Paul I in a telegram from the Archdiocese.

The meeting of the clergy will take place at 9:00am and the meeting of the religious in the Diocese will occur on the following day. I ask those in charge of bringing these groups together to advise the priests to be at Domus Marie at 9:00am on Tuesday and the religious at 8:30am on Wednesday.

Events of the week

I also want to let you know that that we have received information that almost everyone has heard, namely, that Mr. Monedero¹² has been set free. We rejoice and at the same time, as a member of the Commission in charge of distributing the money that was given by his family to fulfill the demands of those who held him captive --- we are completing the details for the distribution of this money and hope to be able to begin this process of distributing funds next week. I want to ask the Government to provide guarantees to the families that will receive these benefits that they will not be the victims of reprisals --- many of these families have expressed such fears.

I also want to denounce here the fact that two women who, in my name, were distributing food and clothing to *campesino* families were arrested and brought before the National Guard who then asked them for money. This is very dangerous because there is fear that the money made available by the Monedero family and that is to be distributed to families designated by the persons who held Mr. Monedero captive --- there is fear that this process will meet with interference. Help us please so that this money can arrive at its destiny.

We also bless and pray to God for the thirty-five workers who left for Saudia Arabia this week and whose number will soon rise to five hundred. They have told us that they are sad to have to leave the country because here there is not a just social order in which they can find

work. We have said that if this form of emigration were permanent then this might be a solution for our demographic problem.

The buildings of the Catholic University were searched and the Police seized personal belongings of Father Juan Deplancke who was absent from the country.

There have been many transfers of prisoners who were processed under the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. This anomaly has caused many inconveniences to the family members of these prisoners, especially when they are not informed about the transfer or when the whereabouts of their loved ones is not communicated. I have respectfully asked the Minister of Justice who is in charge of the prisons to put some order into this situation and to follow the rules so that these anomalies might cease.

In the village of Mogotes, Tacachico Martín Cartagena Sánchez was arrested while on his sick bed. He was beaten and taken to an unknown destination.

The case of Alejandro Beltrán Peña continues to be clouded in mystery. His mother knows that he is in one of the police stations and that he has a broken collar bone. She asks for mercy for her son and some information about his whereabouts.

In this week's edition of *Orientación* a study is presented that unmasks the slanderous accusations against Father Fabián Amaya, Father Rafael Barahona and Brother Morales. They have been accused of participating in seditious activities and in this article you are able to see the various means that are used in order to discredit people¹³.

We are also saddened by the events that occurred in Talnique where the National Guard who were looking for two catechists, abused Elvira Fuentes and her children. When the National Guard found that they were carrying the Bible and the text of the Medellin Documents they confiscated these and told them that this was a criminal offense. Hopefully the Guardia were informed about my words for I have said that the Bible and the documents of the Church in Latin America should make them reflect on the injustice that they are inflicting on others.

We lament events that have occurred in the area of labor relations: the Union of Mechanical and Metal Workers denounced anomalies that had been provoked by the owners of the companies Corínca, Conelca, Aroc Ingenieros and Corcho y Lata. The union at the Fabrica Inca has been destroyed in just three months because all the workers who were members of the labor union were fired and yesterday the last union worker, Guillermo Rivas González was killed with his companion Julio Padilla near the Plaza Colón de Santa Ana. More bloodshed! The Secretary of the Labor Union in Empresa Indeca was captured. We are seeing how people are denied the right to organize --- a right that all people have in order to defend their just demands and rights, a right which we have defended and spoken about in our recent Pastoral Letter where we made reference to the Church's teaching on this matter. This is an abuse of power.

We also want to ask your prayers and moral support for the people of Nicaragua who are involved in the midst of a very dangerous and bloody struggle¹⁴. We pray that this will not end in more and more bloodshed.

We are happy that the government of El Salvador contributed to the re-establishment of relations between Panamá and Guatemala. Hopefully what El Salvador has been able to achieve for other countries can also lead to the re-establishment of relations between Honduras and El Salvador¹⁵. Far too much time has passed and this breaking of diplomatic relations makes absolutely no sense.

This, my dear sisters and brothers, is the Church of the cross. The Council (31) speaks about this Church when it stated that in the course of history the Church continues and develops the mission of Christ who was sent to proclaim Good News to the poor. The Church, impelled by the Holy Spirit, ought to walk on the same path as Christ, the path of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice, even unto death, for Jesus through his resurrection emerged victorious over death. The apostles walked with this hope, even though they experienced trials and suffering which completed what was lacking in the passion of Christ (32)--- all of this was done for the benefit of Christ's body, the Church. Many times their blood was the seed that led to the increase in the number of Christians¹⁶. We have spoken about the Church of the Cross, this cross that gives meaning to life and without which life becomes a failure.

My sisters and brothers, we are now going to celebrate the Eucharist, the living reminder of Christ's cross. Let us identify ourselves with this cross and leave this Mass in the Cathedral or leave from those places wherever people have come together to reflect on the Word of God with the bishop --- let us leave together with the strength to continue to be worthy of the Lord's cross. So be it.

¹ See conclusion of *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978).

² When Hitler went to Rome on 3 to 9 May 1937, Pope Pius XI retired to Castelgondolfo: and there, on 4 May, in an audience to newly married, said: Sad things happen and among these that which it is not considered inopportune to raise in Rome, the day of the Holy Cross, a cross which is not that of Christ". See A. Fliche and V. Martin, *History of the Church*, Vol. XXVI (2), pp. 434-435.

³ "Mi Cristo roto" is a poem of the Jesuit priest Ramón Cué.

⁴ See A. Fliche and V. Martin, *Historia de la Iglesia*, Vol. XXVII (2), pp. 320-321.

⁵ See First message of John Paul I to the Church and the world (27 August 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 3 September 1978.

⁶ Meeting of John Paul I with journalists (1 September 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 10 September 1978.

⁷ See Allocution of the Holy Father to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See (31 August 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 10 September 1978.

⁸ Declaración del episcopado de El Salvador sobre algunas organizaciones políticas populares (28 August 1978), *ECA* 359 (1978) pp. 774-775.

⁹ The declaration was signed by Mons. Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio, Mons. Benjamín Barrera, Mons. José Eduardo Álvarez and Mons. Marco René Revelo.

¹⁰ See "Obispos previenen contra agrupaciones FECCAS-UTC", *El Diario de Hoy*, 29 August 1978.

¹¹ See Boletín n° 44 de la Secretaría de Comunicación Social del Arzobispado de San Salvador, *Orientación*, 3 September 1978.

¹² Armando Tomás Monedero was freed on 1 September 1978. See *El Mundo*, 1 September 1978.

¹³ See "Nueva calumnia en contra de la Iglesia y de un bachiller", *Orientación*, 3 September 1978.

¹⁴ On 22 August 1978, a unit of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, led by "Comandante Cero" took the National Palace in Managua. A week later a general strike was called and there were confrontations in the main towns of Nicaragua.

¹⁵ Since the war of "one hundred hours" in 1969, El Salvador and Honduras had broken off diplomatic relations.

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50, 13: PL 1, 534.

(15) Rm 6,8: (16) Mt 16,25: (17) Rm 12,1: (18) Mt 16,23: (19) Rm 12,1: (20) LG 10: (21) 1P 2,4-10: (22) Ac 2, 42-47: (23) Rm 12,1: (24) Rm 12,2: (25) Mt 5,3: (26) Mt 5,38-39: (27) Mt 16,23: (28) Mt 16,26: (29) OA 40: (30) Jn 10,14-15: (31) AG 5: (32) Col 1,24.