

## A PROPHETIC, SACRAMENTAL, LOVING CHURCH

**Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time  
September 10, 1978**

**Readings:**

*Ezekiel 33:7-9*

*Romans 13:8-10*

*Matthew 18:15-20*

My dear brothers and sisters, the Biblical readings that we have heard --- not only with human attention but also with true faith because it is the Word of God --- give me the pleasure of telling you that they coincide with the fundamental theology and pastoral approach of the Pastoral Letter which has been placed before you during these last few days<sup>1</sup>. I hope that this Pastoral Letter becomes the object of study in the communities and that everyone will reflect on this Letter in a profound manner. Unfortunately there were not enough copies last week and the new edition that I had spoken about last week will not be ready until the beginning of this week --- but we will publish a new edition with more copies. At the same time our newspaper, *Orientación*<sup>2</sup>, that will be distributed today contains the complete text of the Letter. When you have the opportunity I ask you to study this document during your meetings, in your families, or in small groups. Study the Letter and you will see that the central idea behind this Letter is to present the identity of the Church, in other words, to present the nature and the authentic mission of the Church that was founded by Christ. The Church's nature and mission is based on the Word of God that we are going to reflect on in light of the Biblical texts. The Church must be very clear about her nature and mission so that all Catholics can also have a clear understanding of all of this. If we have a clear and precise idea about our nature and mission, then without fear we are able to serve the world with all its problems. This is exactly why Jesus has placed his Church in the world, not simply to preserve herself but to preserve herself as she serves the world.

The theme of the Pastoral Letter is the relationship between the Church and popular organizations. This is a service that the Church must provide to the organizations of *campesinos*, workers, politicians and all people who want to organize themselves with the ideal of establishing a better nation and a better world. The Church would be acting badly if she reserved for herself the treasure of her doctrine and her moral authority and did not place this treasure at the service of the world and the nation and their anxious questions and thus in light of the Word of God respond to these questions. I have said many times that the Church is not a popular organization. But we say in our Pastoral Letter that the Church, without identifying herself with the popular organizations, provides a service that has no substitute. We point out in the Pastoral Letter the following:

First, many Christians become aware of the demands of the gospel and of Christian justice because they are part of the Christian community and from this perspective attempt to transform an unjust world. Therefore the Church is not embarrassed that men and women have political and social concerns and are part of the Christian community. The Vatican

Council reminds the Church that one of her most serious obligations is to educate people with regard to their civic and political responsibilities (1). Those men and women who have the ability to participate in these activities should be encouraged and prepared for these undertakings. The Church rejoices in the fact that many politicians and groups and organizations have come into existence because of their reflection on the Word of God. Yet in all of this the Church preserves her identity for she is like that home where the mother educates her children and then her children move out into the world. The mother of this family rejoices because she has given her children a conscience and made them aware of their responsibilities. Now her children go out into the world and search for concrete options --- her children have now become responsible individuals.

From the perspective of her identity and without confusing herself with other organizations, the Church defends the right of individuals to organize. This is a human right. No one can prohibit people from organizing with others as long as their objectives are honest and good --- to survive, to provide food for their families, to better their conditions. The Church has defended this right and continues, thanks to God, to defend this right of people to organize themselves.

Another service of the Church that has no substitute and one that we defend in the Pastoral Letter is her right to support the just demands that any organization might promote. It is not necessary that said organization be called Christian. It is enough that the organization is seeking a just objective. The Church supports these organizations because the Church has an obligation to defend the justice of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, if the Kingdom of God is reflected in some human group, the Church knows that God is present there, asking for a commitment that will come to the defense of the justice that is being sought by said group.

Another service that the Church is able to provide arises from the fact that the gospel is the Church's only source of power. In light of the gospel the Church has an obligation and the right to denounce injustice, evil, and sin that might be found in any organization, even those organizations that call themselves Christian. The Church is not committed to any one organization in order to be able to speak to all organizations and tell them: *This is an evil act! This is sinful! I must denounce this action! I repudiate that action!* Thanks to God, the Church has been able to act in this way. Here in the Archdiocese we have an obligation to defend that which is just and condemn that which is unjust.

In order to provide this service the Church must be willing to incorporate these concerns of men and women who seek here on earth --- the Church must incorporate all of this into the great liberation of Christ, the great act of redemption. The Church tells every person and every organization that pursues a noble or just purpose that they are acting well but that is not enough. They must incorporate this work into the work of Christian redemption. If people do not liberate themselves from sin (Christ came here on earth to break the chains of sin), if people do not better themselves to the point of becoming children of God by grace and holiness, then their liberation is incomplete. If people view liberation in a way that dispenses with Christ and trusts only in the ideologies of the earth, then again their liberation is incomplete. The great service of the Church is to serve people and lead them by the hand toward true redemption, toward their true identity, toward their true destiny, toward their integral human calling. Therefore, in order to provide this service, in order to have this relationship with these organizations of the earth and with these groups of men and women, the Church must have complete possession of herself --- she must know who she is. Here we are speaking about the identity of the Church and Pope Paul VI in his first encyclical

*Ecclesiam Suam* (2) compared this to a doctor who was going to a land that was infected with disease. In order to avoid being infected by this disease the doctor must be immunized --- if not, he/she will soon become infected and how can one who is infected with the same disease help others? Therefore, the doctor, like the Church, must be immunized with his own identity. Thus, the Church cannot confuse herself with any ideology or organization of this earth in order to provide these organizations the true service of the Church. This is the same as the doctor who must be immunized in order to offer his healing services to those who are diseased. I am not saying that all the organizations are ill --- this is simply a comparison to tell you that the Church, who provides these services, must first of all define very clearly her mission. This is what we do in our Pastoral Letter.

I do not want to extend this any longer and therefore I will not read to you pages twenty and twenty-one of this document. You are able to study all of this and you will see that our words are based on the Church's teaching (3) that affirms the fact that a group of men and women who believe in Christ and accept his doctrine and manifest their acceptance by incorporating themselves into his Church through Baptism and nourishing their Christian lives with the Word of God and the sacramental signs (confession and communion are sacraments of incorporation and an encounter with Christ) --- such persons are members of the Church. Indeed, this is the Church --- a group of men and women who are nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist. Indeed, you have come here today to celebrate this Mass and to be nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist --- this is the Church.

Those who have listened to me here in Church on Sunday with sincerity, without prejudices, without hatred, without ill-will, without intending to defend indefensible interests, those who have listened to me here cannot say I am giving political or subversive sermons. All that is simply slander. You are listening to me at this moment, and I am saying what I have always said. What I want to say here in the Cathedral pulpit is what the Church is, and in the name of the Church I want to support what is good --- I want to applaud it and encourage it. I want to console the victims of atrocities, of injustice and with courage I also want to denounce the atrocities, the tortures, the disappearances of prisoners, and the social injustice. This is not engaging in politics; this is building up the Church and carrying out the Church's duty as imposed by the Church's identity. My conscience is undisturbed, and I call on all of you --- Let us build up the true Church! The Word of God that we have heard proclaimed today helps us in this matter.

The gospel of Saint Matthew has been offering us guidelines throughout this Liturgical Year. Therefore let us be attentive to the ideas presented in this gospel. Sunday after Sunday we read passages from the gospel of Saint Matthew and in order to understand these passages we also read a passage from the Old Testament which illuminates the gospel. Today we have read a passage from the book of Ezekiel and this enlightens the problem that Jesus deals with in the gospel of Saint Matthew, as well as the situations that are described in the Epistles of the apostles --- situations that can be seen as direct deductions of Jesus' teaching. Thus we can see that the gospel, enlightened by the Old Testament and commented upon by the apostles in their letters is the same gospel that is presented to us and that allows us to see that this Church of the Archdiocese of San Salvador of 1978 is the same Church that Jesus announced in his gospel, the Church that the prophets announced and the Church that the apostles taught to the first Christians. My sisters and brothers, this is a great honor and I am pleased that a positive attitude prevails with regard to my preaching. People have listened to this word with a sincere desire to know and to build among us the true Church of Christ --- to build this Church here in El Salvador during this year of 1978.

People have told me --- and I am happy to know that many people have heard this --- that they want an outline of Saint Matthew's gospel --- the gospel that is being used for the Sunday reading of the gospel. Do not expect a book but I will be distributing a page that contains this outline. Those who have a copy of the Jerusalem Bible can look at the beginning of the gospels and there you will find an introduction to the Synoptic gospels. Under the heading of Saint Matthew's gospel you will find the commentary that states that the gospel of Saint Matthew is like a drama in seven acts that deals with the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Jerusalem Bible outlines the seven acts and places beside these acts the corresponding chapters of Saint Matthew's gospel. When the fifth act is named, we find that this encompasses chapters sixteen to eighteen which speak about the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth among a group of disciples who have Peter as their head. The rule of life for those who are part of this Kingdom of God is outlined in the community discourse. Today's passage, taken from chapter eighteen, is part of Jesus' discourse about the community.

Remember that the gospels are more than a biography of Jesus. The first communities reflected on Jesus' teachings and the gospels are the fruit of these reflections. Thus the gospels are the result of the community's reflection on Jesus and the gospels also present to us some of Jesus' discourses that the disciples remembered and that are used to achieve the ends of the different gospel writers. Therefore this eighteenth chapter is the fruit of the first Christian community and tells us that the Church sprang forth, like a fountain, from Christ who recently established this Church.

Here we find references to the humility that should be possessed by all pastors. The apostles were arguing about who was the greatest --- this seems to be an on-going argument among the hierarchy --- and Jesus tells the disciples: *he who wishes to be great, become like a child; a servant of all.* (4). Authority in the Church is not giving orders, but service. Among Christians, those who do not become simple as children cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. To my shame, as pastor, I beg forgiveness from you, my community, that I have not been able to carry out the role as bishop as your servant. I am not a master. I am not a boss. I am not an authority that imposes itself. I want to be God's servant and yours.

This discourse about the life-style of the Christian community calls us in this environment to authenticity. From the three Biblical readings I want to present a summary of Jesus' discourse and I title my homily: the Church, a prophetic community, a sacramental community and a community of love. This is the Church. If we do not understand the Church in this way, we do not know the Church of Christ. The three characteristics that I have mentioned are a summary of today's three readings.

### **The Church, a prophetic community**

In the first place the Church that God desired to establish is a prophetic community. The Second Vatican Council spoke about this idea: *The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity* (5). My sisters and brothers, you can see that we are a prophetic people, a people that God has organized in order to spread abroad a living witness to his doctrine. The same Council when it speaks about marriage says that family life is a proper place to develop this prophetic meaning of the People of God (6). As spouses live holy lives in relation to their children, they form a small church and with their virtuous lives, they encourage the holiness of society. At the same time they also repudiate all that is evil and unjust and sinful in the world. Indeed, sinful society can receive no greater reproach than that

which is given by a holy family. Thus the Word of God and the People of God call upon everyone, all family members who are participating in this reflection, to resolve to make their homes, their relationship as spouses and their relationships with their children a model of this witness of love and holiness and justice and charity --- indeed you are encouraged to give this witness in the midst of a selfish, sinful and violent world. At this time of violence and terrorism there is nothing more necessary than holy families and homes that communicate love.

The prophetic mission is a duty of God's people. So when I am told in a somewhat mocking tone, that I think I am a prophet, I reply: *God be praised! You ought to be one also!* For every Christian, all of God's people and every family must develop a prophetic awareness, convey an awareness of God's mission in the world, and bring to it a divine presence that makes demands and rejections. Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization says: *Let us suppose that a group of Christians proposes to live in an authentic way the gospel in which they believe. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one* (7). This is exactly the way in which Christianity began. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that in Jerusalem *the Lord added to their number those who were being saved* (8) because people saw how these Christians loved one another and how they praised God. In this community there was no social inequality and people divided their possession among everyone according to each one's need. No one was embarrassed because of their poverty and no one isolated themselves because they were rich. This testimony of charity and love, this prophetic community proclaimed by their presence what God desires of humankind when they become more sociable. My dear sisters and brothers this is what I find in the readings today.

The first reading is wonderful. It is said that few people have entered into the mystery of God like the prophet Ezekiel --- he almost seems abnormal. See there is nothing wrong with an individual just because others may view such or such a person as foolish. Ezekiel was seen as a foolish man because he entered into the world of God --- a world that others saw as strange. But who is really abnormal: those who have so separated themselves from God that they see others who are looking for God as abnormal or those who seek to normalize their lives and thus center their lives on the life of God? This is Ezekiel, foolish in the eyes of the world because he proclaims the great mystery that we have just heard today, a parable.

Chapter thirty-three is perhaps the most beautiful description of the prophetic mission that God has entrusted to women and men. The parable is as follows: if God allows a war to be waged against a people, the people will appoint a watchman who will keep vigil for the approach of the enemy (9). When the enemy approaches the watchman will sound his horn -- - it was a custom at that time to blow a trumpet. The people in the city will hear this sound and prepare to defend themselves so that they will not die. The watchman will also not die because he has fulfilled his responsibility. Those who hear the sound of the trumpet but do not heed its call will die and even in this case the watchman is saved because he has acted responsibly. In the parable the opposite is also true: if the watchman does not fulfill his responsibility and does not sound his trumpet at the approach of the enemy, if the enemy enters the city and those who are not prepared are unable overcome the enemy, then the watchman is responsible for his negligence. If because of his negligence other citizens also die in the city then all will be condemned --- the watchman and the people. Then Ezekiel applies this parable to his prophetic mission (10). The prophet is the watchman who keeps

vigil. When God tells the evildoers to be converted, the prophet has to sound the trumpet of God and tell the evildoers to repent. If the evildoers do not repent, then they are lost but the prophet is saved because he has acted responsibly. But if the prophet does not shout out and sound the trumpet, then the evildoer will be lost but the prophet will also be held responsible. For God has said that he will hold the prophet accountable if he does not keep vigil and cry out and sound the trumpet.

We find this same parable in the gospel. Jesus says (11): *if your brother commits an error against you, you will not be held responsible if you go to him and speak to him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, call some witnesses so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he does not listen to them, then tell the Church, and the Church will treat him as a Gentile or a tax collector.* In the language of Jesus both of these parables are saying the same thing: the evildoers who refuse to listen and repent will be excommunicated. Because of their obstinacy they no longer are part of this community.

My dear sisters and brothers I find here an explanation for the Church's prophetic mission. I find answers to the questions: Why must the prophet intervene and act as an intermediary between God and the evildoers? Why is the community called to give testimony? Why must the community separate themselves from those evildoers who refuse to listen? I find here two wonderful explanations and I want you to keep these in mind.

The first explanation revolves around the idea of social sin. Many are scandalized by this phrase and say that sin is personal but not social. The reading from the prophet would certainly affirm the fact that sin is personal: *if you warn the wicked man, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn away from his way, he shall die for his guilt* (12). But the same passage speaks about a co-responsibility of the prophet who fails to fulfill his responsibility. Therefore, all those persons who allow injustice to continue to exist, especially those who could have prevented this from happening, all those families that live selfishly and fail to give a Christian meaning to their lives; all those households that do not make themselves holy as God commands them to be holy --- all these people are living in sin and have been contaminated; they are accomplices and have made social sin a reality. In our present situation in El Salvador a law has been passed to preserve social order, but we ask: what order? Are we not preserving the order of injustice? Are we not saying that we want to maintain this unjust situation? Are we not saying that this situation should not be denounced? And if the Church denounces this situation then we are told that we are meddling in politics. This is El Salvador living in what Medellin has called a state of institutionalized sin (13) (homily interrupted by applause). Thank you. You have just indicated your approval and your attitude has clearly affirmed the fact that the Church cannot be silent in front of these injustices. Your pastors have to speak. We must all be a prophetic people and cry out.

But note the objective and intention of this prophetic mission. If you continue to read the thirty-third chapter you will see that Ezekiel speaks to his fellow countrymen: *Do not be pessimistic! You have said, "God has abandoned us! Who will save us?"* (14). The prophet lifts up their spirit and says: *God says: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live. I am a God of forgiveness, a God who loves those who are just, a God who cries out and yes, a God who punishes. But I am also a God who is willing to forgive* (15). Here I want to remind all of you who have been listening to my words during this past year, a year in which we have seen many abuses -- we have always concluded our denunciation of these abuses with a call to conversion. I have always called upon sinners to repent and be converted. When we celebrated the funeral

of Father Grande here in this Cathedral we said: *hopefully those who assassinated Father Grande are listening. In your hideout we call out to you. Repent for the Lord loves you! The Lord is waiting for you!* The prophet never speaks words of hatred or resentment. The prophetic people must love and not hate. A prophetic people, as today's gospel says, seeks out those who are wrong so as to win them for God. The prophet who speaks of the punishment due the negligent sentinel also praises the mercy of the God who calls all of us. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, especially those of you who hate me, you dear sisters and brothers who think I am preaching violence, who defame me and know that what you are saying is not true, you who have stained your hands with murder and torture and atrocities and injustice --- repent and be converted! I love you deeply. I am sorry for you because you walk on the road to ruin.

### **The Church, a sacramental community**

My second thought is the following: the Church as a sacramental community. In our Pastoral Letter we refer to the mission of the Church and her interest in the affairs of this world. But the Church does not want to lose herself in these affairs of the world because, as the Pope says (16), the Church would then lose her moral force. The Church would not proclaim the true liberation of God if she saw this liberation as simply providing bread to the poor or an education to those who are illiterate or relief for those in situations of misery. If this were all that the Church proclaimed she herself would become a most miserable institution for she must also extend to people the hope of forgiveness and the ability to rise up from their sinful condition.

The Church carries out a transcendent mission and presents a vision of God that cannot be neglected or forgotten --- here I speak about the witness of the community. My dear communities, those that I have had the pleasure of visiting and those that I have not yet visited --- I know that you are living an intense life together as community and I am profoundly grateful to you for this testimony of life. Continue to live with this hope! Continue to be this sacramental sign of the Church! Continue to be communities that struggle for the just demands of this nation! But never forget that the person who gives us this strength and inspiration is God.

Today's gospel provides us with some insight into all of this. What does Jesus say about himself? *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* (17). Thank you, Lord. For where there is a community that begins to reflect on your words with religious sincerity, there are you Christ, the Blessed One, humanity's Liberator. How my heart is filled with hope by a Church where base communities of faith flourish. I must ask my dear priests to create these communities everywhere --- in neighborhoods, in villages, among families. For *where two or three gather in my name* (18) there is the sacramental sign of the Church. Here in the Cathedral is the presence of Christ. The protagonist of this morning's celebration is Christ, our Lord. He is giving us witness that not only the host but you and I together at this Eucharist are forming the community of the Church. Wherever a group is gathered around their radios and reflecting on this Word of God, there is Christ in your midst. Blessed be God that we are not alone!

Thus we can see that the Church is a sacramental community. What is a sacrament? It is a visible sign of an invisible reality. Your faces are visible and many of you are known because of the cordial greeting that we exchange when we leave the Cathedral --- this is a dimension of the visible Church. But there is also an invisible dimension --- the face that we

do not see but the person in whom we believe and whom we discover on the face of each of our sisters and brothers: Christ, our Lord.

There is another reality that we must examine when speaking about this sacramental community. Jesus says: *if two of you on earth agree about anything for which they are to pray, it will be granted them by my heavenly Father* (19). What beautiful words! The community is a sign of God's will because God will grant whatever they pray for and pray for according to his will. When the will of God is reflected upon in community it is much different than the idea that so many people have concerning this concept. Many would like the poor to keep on saying that it is God's will for them to live that way. But it is not God's will for some to have everything and others to have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children should be happy. *if two of you on earth agree about anything for which they are to pray, it will be granted them by my heavenly Father* (Matthew 19:19). How beautiful to know that this morning, our prayer, our Mass will be heard by God because we are more than two. The Cathedral is filled with people who, united with Christ, pray to the Father for the needs of our society. It was for this reason that I said at the beginning of our celebration that we should make our celebration of Sunday Eucharist an hour of hope.

In the third place the Church is community of the presence of God who accepts or rejects. If after calling the attention to the sinner, either alone or with witnesses, the sinner does not heed the call, bring the case to the community and if the sinner does not listen to the community then excommunicate the sinner --- separate the sinner from the community (20). Here Jesus speaks the same words that he spoke to Peter: *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven* (21). Notice my sisters and brothers that the power to bind and loose is not just the Pope's prerogative, something that is for his exclusive use. God has given this same power to the People of God, but the Pope is the highest expression of this privilege. Jesus spoke the above cited words to Peter in an exclusive way: *whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven* (22). Now Jesus speaks to the community and tells them: *you who are united with your Pastors, whatever you consider to be error, is error --- you are infallible*. The Pope will pronounce his judgment but all the People of God rejoice in this prerogative when they --- the community --- are in communion with their Pastors. This must be kept in mind so that we are aware of the fact that in each Diocese the bishop, in communion with the Pope, is a sign of this unity and truth.

### **The Church, community of love**

Finally my dear sisters and brothers, let us say a word about today's second reading which speaks about the community of the Church as a community of love. When the Council speaks about the People of God it states: *That messianic people has Christ for its head ... The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Its end is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God Himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time* (23). We could not use any more beautiful words than these to describe the identity of our Church which should be characterized by love. This is as though we were speaking about the Constitution of our nation which should be respected because it is the soul of our nation. The Constitution of the Christian is summed up in one word: love.

Saint Paul says: *the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill, you shall not steal; you shall not covet,"*



*and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (24). If there were love of neighbour there would be no terrorism, no repression, no selfishness, none of the cruel inequalities in our society, no abductions and no crimes. Love sums up the law. Not only that, love gives Christian meaning to all human relations. Even those who call themselves atheists, when they are humane, they fulfill the essence of the relationship that God wants among human beings: love. Love gives plenitude to all human duties, and without love, justice is only the sword. With love, justice becomes a brother's embrace. Without love, laws are arduous, repressive, cruel, mere policemen. But when there is love security forces would be superfluous; there would be no jail or torture, no will to beat another person.*

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church. For this reason we must build this prophetic community, this sacramental community, this community of love. This is the essential point of my preaching. But my preaching would be all theory if I did not also focus on those events that are occurring outside of the Church --- but we do so from the perspective of the Church's reality, this reality that we have just examined, for this is the framework in which our mission as Church must be developed if we are truly going to present ourselves as a prophetic Church, a sacramental Church and a Church of love.

### **Life of the Church**

In this sense I look at the interior life of our Church and I rejoice at the celebration that was realized in our Archdiocese on Tuesday. I want to thank the beloved priests who participated and the communities who were present because this allowed us to express our solidarity with the new Pope.

We must also be in solidarity with the intentions that the Pope indicates. For example, this week the Pope has asked us to pray for the leaders of the Middle East who are going to meet with the President of the United States. He asks that we pray for peace in this part of the world<sup>3</sup>. We do not know what will be achieved in this meeting in the United States but the prayer of Christians, of this People of God is able to obtain grace from God so that these leaders might find the path to peace.

We also rejoice with our brother, Bishop Rivera Damas, who will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his priestly ordination on September 16<sup>th</sup> and celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving in the Diocese of Santiago de María at 10:00am. I am very pleased to be able to participate in this celebration.

I want to speak some more about the Church because the meeting last Sunday of the Salvadorian Foundation of Development and Minimum Housing on the tenth anniversary of its foundation is a sign of the new paths that our Church is traveling --- paths of prophecy and love and sacramental paths. I had not been aware of the depths of these people's understanding of community. Father Ibáñez said: *We do not only try to resolve the housing problem and build houses, for in the same way we could make hats and shoes. What we are interested in is creating love and community. We experience ourselves as one family and we rejoice with those people who now have new homes, but above all we are happy because we are able to love one another as a new community.* These are testimonies from our Church. Blessed be God!

I also rejoice with the testimony that the Catholic people of the parish of El Rosario de la Paz have given on behalf of Father Rafael Barahona. They have stated that he is dedicated exclusively to the realization of his pastoral ministry. Those who know this priest know that

he is not a subversive. They know that the reports that appeared in the newspapers were an attempt to slander him.

I want to thank the group of Christians in the Municipality of Santa Fe, Department of Ocotepeque, Honduras who are listening to me at this time --- thank you for your visit last Sunday and thank you for the beautiful letter from Don Rafael Humberto Pinto, a Leader of the Celebration of the Word. You have given much encouragement to the mission of the Church in this Archdiocese.

As Church we cannot distance ourselves from the problems and the persecution that is occurring in our sister Church in Nicaragua. The Government has expelled Father Pedro María Belsunigui and Father José María Pacheco. Another soldier brutally beat the chaplain of the Army, Father Dortaldo García. The National Guard entered the Church of Santa María de los Angeles in Managua and opened fire against the front wall of the school of the Salesian Community and arrested two members of their Congregation. The Church has threatened those involved in these actions with excommunication.

Those who believe in the Church do not laugh at the reality of excommunication. We have just said that among the sacramental signs of the Church is this power to separate sinners from the community if they do not repent. The community that expels one of its members, that one is also expelled from this community by God. The people impose this punishment and expel from their midst persons who abuse the Church. We have spoken about this here and have also had similar cases in our Diocese.

### **Events of the week**

The International Commission of Jurists has just published their conclusions about their investigation concerning the violation of human rights in El Salvador. They have given a sincere testimony and in their conclusions they state: *During 1977 and 1978 the International Commission of Jurists has received numerous denunciations from reliable sources that relate hundreds of cases of the violation of fundamental rights and liberty. In almost all the cases, the victims have been men and women who are union or political leaders, leaders among the campesinos and workers. The accusations include assassination, rape, torture, arrest and the disappearance of persons who have been detained (in these cases the local authorities deny having detained these individuals)*<sup>4</sup>. Their document is a very lengthy report and because of a lack of time I will not go into other details here. Their report, however, points out the commitment that is needed in our nation.

The Senior Minister of Justice has stated that the Government is unwavering in its decision to guarantee the freedom of expression and has left it to the directors of the media to censure themselves<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps we could say with the poet: *What a shame that such great beauty should be so untrue!*

A report (the homily is interrupted by applause) ... A report from the Department of Education points out that more than 1.5 million people in the country are illiterate. That is equivalent to 37% of our population.

How can the Church remain indifferent in face of the floods that have resulted from the torrential rains this week? These floods have affected Monserrat, América San Esteban, Costa Rica, San Juan, Centro América, Barrio San Miguelito, Concepción, Santa Lucía, Urbanización Universitaria, Reparto Santa Fe, Colonia San Fe. If we have said that our

Church is a community of love and charity then I ask you to help in these areas during this time of urgent need.

I also invite you to read *Orientación* and on the *Solidaridad* page you will find an explanation of why we desire to be united with all those persons who suffer.

When people speak about the danger of communism, which I admit we must be careful about when we see what is happening in Nicaragua --- yet we want to remind you, my sisters and brothers, we are not Marxists. By reason of the gospel we are anti-Marxist. We also want to remind you that the true struggle against Marxism consists in eliminating the causes that engender Marxism. Thus we must offer an alternative that serves as a substitute for the Marxist form of development. It is easy to shout out against Marxism! It is easy to point out Marxism in every part! Certainly the danger in Nicaragua is great but I also say to you my sisters and brothers that these are idols, idols made of dust and in time hopefully we will apply the medicine to the roots. A more just society, a society that does not create the right environment for Marxism to exist --- this is the best form of anti-Marxism (the homily is interrupted by applause).

We are saddened and we rejoice at the abduction and the reappearance of Gloria Magdalena Querlet<sup>6</sup> Batarsé in Santa Ana. The Police rescued her but her parents had to pay 15,000 colones<sup>7</sup>.

Once again we express our solidarity with Mrs. Matsumoto and her anguish. She is offering 50,000.00 colones for information concerning the whereabouts of the body of her husband. She is offering this money for religious reasons because according to her religion the body of the deceased must be cremated in order for one to be considered dead. She has also stated that she does not want to return to her country without bringing with her the remains of her beloved husband<sup>8</sup>. Please understand this situation! Do not act so cruelly! Someone must have information about all of this --- perhaps the one who knows the answer to all of this is listening to me. If so, please give us information.

The celebration of our Independence Day is drawing near. *Orientación*<sup>9</sup> has published on their *Solidaridad* page ninety-nine cases of people who have disappeared and now five more names have to be added. The Committee of Political Prisoners, the Mothers of Political Prisoners and the Disappeared want to celebrate this Independence Day in a special way and are asking for the granting of an amnesty. The Church has expressed their solidarity with these groups and also wants to celebrate Independence Day in a way that provides freedom to the many homes that lack any form of well-being.

I also want to clarify some news that was published in *La Prensa Gráfica*<sup>10</sup> that has caused some alarm. I am referring to the distribution of 100,000 colones that the Monedero family has given to the families of those persons who have disappeared and the families of political prisoners. The Commission charged with the distribution of this money is almost finished with their study and will begin to distribute a just portion of these funds to each person who has been singled out by those who have abducted Mr. Monedero. It has been stated that the Committee of Mothers is going to receive a certain amount to create a common fund. This does not mean, however, that they are going to receive everything. I want you to be clear about this.

Speaking about the question of amnesty, we rejoice with the people of the Dominican Republic where this week the Government granted an amnesty that will benefit 200 prisoners.

The Government also repealed three anti-communist resolutions and has opened the door for the return of those who are living in exile. The President of Mexico has proposed a law that will benefit one thousand political prisoners, “disappeared” persons and persons living in exile who have been denounced in Mexico. Twenty-six thousand people have signed a petition and have asked the Pope to intervene with the government of Argentina (where the World Soccer Championship was played), requesting that the Government grant amnesty to political prisoners.

Labor conflicts continue to inflict wounds and abuse those workers who are trying to organize themselves in accord with the right of free association.

My dear sisters and brothers, the Church neither wants to scandalize nor to put on some spectacular show, but the prophetic Church must speak about the situation in which she finds herself. This is her obligation. If the prophet does not raise his voice: *Sinner, repent!* then the evildoer might perish and the prophet will also perish because he did not raise his voice. So we are now going to celebrate the Eucharist and ask the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Prophet, to give us the strength to continue to live as a Church that becomes more and more inserted into the present reality. We ask the Lord to enable us to live as a true sacramental community, a prophetic community and above all, a community of love that is united to the Lord. In the Eucharist we find the nourishment so that our community will never be confused with any other organization. May our community, our Church, continue to serve every organization while at the same time preserving her own prophetic, sacramental and loving identity! So be it.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, Third Pastoral Letter of Mons. Oscar A. Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, and first of Mons. Arturo Rivera Damas, bishop of Santiago de María (6 August 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See *Orientación*, 10 September 1978.

<sup>3</sup> See “Pray for the Middle East and the whole world”. Sunday Allocution of John Paul I (10 September 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 17 April 1978.

<sup>4</sup> “Revista de la Comisión Internacional de Juristas, n° 20”, *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 8 September 1978.

<sup>5</sup> See *El Mundo*, 5 September 1978.

<sup>6</sup> In some publications the surname is Querlat, in others Queralt.

<sup>7</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 9 September 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Comunicado de Asako de Matsumoto, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 5 September 1978.

<sup>9</sup> See *Orientación*, 10 September 1978.

<sup>10</sup> See “Monedero crearán fondocomún”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 9 September 1978.

*Marginal References* (1) GS 75: (2) EG 58: (3) EN 13+23: (4) Mt 18,1-5: (5) LG 12: (6) LG 13: (7) EN 21: (8) Ac 2,47: (9) Ez 33,1-6: (10) Ez 33,8-9: (11) Mt 18,15-17: (12) Ez 33,8: (13) M 2,15: (14) Ez 33,10: (15) Ez 33,11: (16) EN 32: (17) Mt 18,20: (18) Mt 18,20: (19) Mt 18,19: (20) Mt 18,15-17: (21) Mt 18,18: (22) Mt 16,19: (23) LG 9: (24) Rm 13,8-9.