

THE CHURCH, A COMMUNITY OF LOVE

Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 17, 1978

Readings:

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

My dear sisters and brother and esteemed radio audience.

We have listened to three passages from Sacred Scripture: one is written by a great expert who has knowledge of Israel's wisdom, namely, the author of the Book of Sirach; the other passage is composed of Jesus' words, his parable on forgiveness and lastly we heard a commentary by Saint Paul that was directed to the Christian community.

We are in that section of Saint Matthew's gospel that offers us a profile of the Christian community --- we are still in the eighteenth chapter of the gospel. One of the characteristics of those who gathered together as followers of Christ in the Church is precisely this characteristic of forgiveness. Forgiveness is strength, not weakness. Saint Paul presents us with a conflict that had arisen in the community --- a conflict between the weak and the strong --- or in modern times we might translate this as a conflict between progressives and conservatives. Reflecting upon these conflicts: in the conflict between forgiveness and the violence of hatred and the conflict between tradition and progress, one reality, according to the Bible, ought to reign supreme: love. We have used words to entitle this morning's homily in a way that was similar to last week's: the Church, a community of love. The three thoughts that I want to develop are the following: first, the problem of violence and forgiveness; second, the conflict between traditionalists and progressives; third, the key to the solution: the transcendence of love.

In order to better understand, or perhaps I should say that I want to create a framework for these timely thoughts so that we as the Christian community of 1978, so that we who are members of the same community that Jesus created twenty centuries ago, members of this Christian community that travels through history in the midst of the conflicts and realities of the world --- so that we can come to a better understanding of this Word of God. I have no obsession to go outside the teaching of the gospel but rather want to create a framework for the gospel, for the Word of God, so that you will be mindful of two characteristics of our present reality: the Church herself is built up by the various experiences of our local Church, of our communities here in the Archdiocese as well as the experiences of the universal Church; the Church has always been built up with modesty, love, and sincerity as she confronts the various concrete realities. Indeed, the Church has viewed herself within the framework of the events that surround her. The Church is the yeast that leavens the mass of wheat and therefore she must always be concerned about maintaining herself as this leaven, this leaven of the mass. Jesus has placed the Church here in the midst of the world to be a

light that illuminates the world's darkness. So her two great concerns should be these: to maintain herself as a brilliant light, then shine in the darkness

The Church cannot exist just to take care of herself, like those people who are only concerned about their health and never have time for anything else because they are always taking care of their health. The Church takes care of her health but not in some selfish way, but rather she does this so that she might be strong and healthy and able to serve. The objective of the Church is to serve: *As the Father has sent me into the world, so I send you into the world. Go to all the people and serve them --- help them in their problems, illuminate their difficulties, strengthen them in their weakness, and in light of the gospel help them to resolve their problems* (1). Thus my sisters and brothers, during this week the Church has been building herself up. I do not say that what follows are the only events that have taken place in the Church, but I simply present some aspects of the rich spirituality of our Church, some simple examples that allow us to affirm that the Church is alive and on pilgrimage through the world and we are not a cadaver, not a dead institution.

Life of the Church

Therefore, I am able to inform you that during this week the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Central America met in Costa Rica. I do not yet have any information about the results of this meeting but I am sure that they were concerned for the Archbishop of Managua and the serious problems that Nicaragua is experiencing. With their competency as members of the hierarchy, I am sure they analyzed this situation. They did not come together to treat political or diplomatic matters but rather to analyze events with the pastoral light of faith. Indeed, the Church must be leaven and light in Nicaragua.

This week we celebrated in the Diocese of Santiago de María the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas' priestly ordination. Next week there will be another celebration in San Esteban Catarina. I had the pleasure yesterday of sharing in the kindness, prayers and gratitude of the people of that Diocese for their pastor. As the Bishop proclaimed the Word he said that if the Church lives and preaches today in the world the same doctrine as Jesus, then she can call herself a faithful follower of Christ --- and this happens because of the grace of priesthood. The priesthood that was instituted by Christ is a bond between the person of the risen Christ, Jesus who lives in the Church and the local Church that preaches about the needs of the people. Thanks to the priesthood, this eternal doctrine becomes a concrete light in every situation and the priest is a witness to the reality that Christ is present in the community of the Church.

During this week I had the opportunity and the joy of visiting various religious communities. On September 14th, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, I visited the Passionist Sisters who minister in the Colegio de la Divina Providencia. I thanked them for the ministry that their Congregation has undertaken in the Colegio Santa Gema in Santiago de María and in the Pastoral Center in San José Villanueva. I encouraged them to continue to be faithful to their charism of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ because while the cross is painful, it is the secret of success, the secret of Easter and the Resurrection.

On the same day I celebrated the religious consecration of some new members of the Sisters of the Holy Cross --- a branch of the Congregation of the Good Shepherd. These Sisters are giving life to our local Church through the power of their prayer and sacrifice and penance. In the name of all of you I thanked them and encouraged them to continue to be this

power and strength for our ecclesial life. And one more thing --- during my visit there I experienced that these Sisters gave true witness to the meaning of penance and love of God and I want to communicate this fact to you. In few places have I experienced such joy, such an effusion of joy, as I experienced with the Sisters of the Holy Cross. I know that they are listening to me and so again I say: *Congratulations and greetings because your joy is a sign of the living God and you have shared with me words of great encouragement when you said that you saw in my serenity a sign of God.* We give thanks to God for this joy and serenity and peace that accompany the conscience of those persons who realize they are fulfilling their obligations. I would like every one of you to have the same joy as the Sisters of the Holy Cross.

This week I also visited the parish community of Panchimalco where on September 14th the people celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross but under the title of the Holy Cross of Rome. I told the people there I was very happy to celebrate the vigil of our Independence Day there in that colonial church where three great lines of our national identity seem to converge: the indigenous people, the colonial church (Spain with her faith brought Christianity to this land) and September 15th which reminds us of our life as a nation (we should not refer to this as Independence Day because this day is simply a starting point that leads us toward true independence). At the conclusion of the celebration we sang the National Anthem and I tell you that very few times have I ever experienced such a profound sense of patriotism as the people who filled the Church sang: *Let us salute the Motherland, proud to be called her children...* I asked the Lord for that holy pride in being Salvadorians! I asked the Lord for the dawning of that day when we have a nation in which all people who have had the privilege of being born here can be joyful and happy!

In Colonia Dolores where the people celebrated the feast of the Sorrowful Virgin on September 15th, we offered our prayers to the Virgin and to the Cross for our nation and the devout parish community of Dolores. Dolores is the name of another parish that has scheduled their celebration for today in Apulo. Greetings and within a short time we will participate with you in this devotion of popular piety.

Last Sunday in Cuscatancingo we participated in the joy of the life of that community where Father Julio Orellana prepared a very devout community.

In the parish of El Calvario in Santa Tecla there has been a change of pastors. Since Thursday the new pastor is Father Francisco Javier Aguilar, S.J. who has taken the place of Father Eduardo Orellana.

Within this framework of the parish communities I want to denounce the abuse that occurred in Cantón San José Primera¹ in the parish of San Martín. Members of ORDEN (Democratic Nationalist Organization) entered the hermitage, took possession of the building and proceeded to hold a celebration there with a dissident priest. All of this was done behind the back of the legitimate Church authorities. I want to remind all the Christian communities that the Church is hierarchical and only those celebrations that are authorized and presided over by legitimate priests are true acts of worship of God. Other forms of clandestine worship, such as was celebrated in this parish, might have value for those persons who do not realize they are being manipulated, but for those responsible for the manipulation of these situations, for those who make religious worship a political act, these people have sinned gravely against God and have also oriented the community in a distorted manner. This was not a true celebration.

This week the laity also celebrated two important events. In Ayagualo, the Sierra Club held their Central American Convention. Men and women from the different countries of Latin America came together to study the problem that is the focus of all their work: vocations and the priesthood. I thank them and greet them. Also a community of young men and women, the Latin American Union of Ecumenical Students, gathered together in Planes de Renderos to reflect on themes that concern young people. I had the pleasure of participating in both of these meetings and was able to communicate to them the Church's message and the hopes that we have for you, the laity.

I also want to announce to all young men that on next Friday, September 22nd in the Seminario San José de la Montaña we will have a gathering for the young men discerning a priestly vocation. Therefore, in the Seminario San José de la Montaña it will be our pleasure to attend to those young men who want to have some further knowledge about this important matter of a priestly vocation. My sisters and brothers, these are some of the events of the Church that is on pilgrimage here in the Archdiocese of San Salvador.

Events of the week

This is the framework in which we move and yes, there are many events that are both painful and hopeful, sad and joyful. Each one of you has much to say about these events, and I, for my part, want to highlight the fact that on September 15th we celebrated Independence Day, but we did so in a very superficial way since there was no reference to the horrifying tragedy that is occurring among our people who are supposed to be free.

Look at what is happening in our sister nation, Nicaragua. Listen to the call of Archbishop Obando. A civil war is being fought there and battles have been waged in Diriamba, Massaya, Jinotepe, Peñas Blancas, Chinandega, Estelí, Granada, Rivas, etc. The President has declared a state of martial law and the army with machine guns and indiscriminate bombing attacks the people who are fleeing for their lives. People are attacked with planes and tanks. Even members of the Red Cross, an organization that has international respect, are attacked. It is said that it will take Nicaragua at least fifteen years to recover from the effects of this war. The will of the people is very clear: they do not want the President to continue in office. Yet the President continues to affirm his decision to remain in office, but the voice of the people must be heard. We have said before that as bishops we are not political experts, but as pastors we experience the pain and the bloodshed of so many sisters and brothers who have taken different sides in this struggle. During this celebration of the Mass and in our personal prayers, let all of us beseech the Lord to intercede and resolve this conflict! Instead of more blood, let peace return to that land!

Let us be mindful of the fact that people have formed groups --- one side seeks to give legitimacy to the present government in Nicaragua while the other side has started an insurrection that has been called a communist insurrection. I want to tell you that this is an argument that is put forth by the National Guard and it is a lie. Not everyone or everything is communist. We know that in Nicaragua there are many decent people who are impartial in their judgments and who are supporting those who form part of this insurrectionist movement. In particular I want to mention here the death of Don Gustavo Adolfo Aguello whose family has collaborated in many ways with our Church --- I ask you to remember him today in your prayers. No one can say that this man was a communist or that he wanted to overthrow the present government because he saw that communism was the best form of

government for his country. Nicaragua has people with great abilities and the Church has always said that the government must open democratic channels so that all people who are able to and who want to engage in a search for the common good of the nation can find a path that will lead to the realization of that goal.

My sisters and brothers, we cannot be indifferent to these situations because tomorrow the situation here can be very different. The Church always has to maintain her justice and the order that she demands in the name of God's justice. Let us pray that all the governments in Central America will understand this lesson and come, in time, to the realization that these situations are the product of repression, institutionalized violence and all of those other realities that the Church has continually denounced even though people have called the Church communist because of these denunciations. The Church is pointing out the open wounds of society and is telling people that there is still time: there is no need to continue the suffering. Those who are suffering can change this situation even though there has already been too much bloodshed.

This week of Independence Day celebrations has also been marked by the repression of a demonstration in Santa Ana which led to the death and wounding of people, as well as the capture of others². The same occurred in Zacatecoluca. There were also protests in front of the Assembly and the National University because of partial examinations in the University. These are hours of violence.

We are saddened by many events today and there are many other events that I cannot recall at this moment. Yesterday, however, we were disturbed by the news of the assassination of Dr. Ruben Alfonso Rodríguez³, the outbursts of machine gun fire on the North American Embassy, the assassination of two young men in Soyapango --- Miguel Angel Flamenco Solís and Rubén Orlando Platero⁴. News about this has been very ambiguous and during the week our Information Office will communicate a bulletin detailing the results of our investigation into this matter --- we want to honor justice and the truth.

We received a letter from a very afflicted woman who lives in Portillo del Norte where Adrián Serrano disappeared in August. The sad note of this woman says: *On August 2nd [Adrián] was captured by the National Guard at 11:00am in Caserío Las Cañas. He was then taken to Chalatenango. We have had no news concerning his whereabouts and we have searched for him in many places. The Security Forces in Chalatenango tell us that they have no information about this case.* What anguish for those persons whose loved ones have disappeared! Therefore, the Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners desires to interpret this suffering and pain and this week will present to the Assembly a petition requesting amnesty for 56 prisoners who were imprisoned as a result of the Law of Public Order. They are also asking for information concerning the whereabouts of the one hundred-one persons who have disappeared --- whose number continues to increase⁵.

Again with regard to Nicaragua and the situation of the Salesian Congregation --- we have received news from Father Pacheco superiors who clarified the events. Their statement is quite distinct from the news that was published in the media. At the conclusion of their statement we read the following words: *We state that after the National Guard had searched Father Pacheco and since it was evident that he and the other members of our Congregation were solely involved in the exercise of their ministry, it should have been clear to the National Guard and other governmental officials that these priests were in no way nor at any time meddling in politics. Father Pacheco was in Magdalena to assist in providing for the*

religious needs of the faithful. The statement concludes with a protest for the distortion of the truth.

My sisters and brothers, I have many others things that I would like to share with you but I do not want to tire you. You are able to read about these many events on the *Solidaridad* page of *Orientación*. You also know about many other events. Therefore, aware of your knowledge of so many incidents of injustice and pain, such as the pains of illness and suffering of so many people --- all of this should inspire us and impel us to make our community-Church a gathering for Christians who experience and try to share all things.

The problem of violence and forgiveness

Thus I would categorize this morning's Biblical reflection as a conflict, between violence and hatred on the one hand and on the other between forgiveness and love. The first reading brings together the Bible's wisdom and tells us that wrath and anger are evil. The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance (2). I want to take this opportunity when we are reflecting on this message of Sacred Scripture to invite you once again to study and reflect on our Pastoral Letter concerning *The Church and Popular Political Organizations*. The third part of this Letter deals with the Church's judgment on violence. Today, the sacred pages of the Holy Scripture tell us that when the Bible counsels us to forgiveness and benevolence and peace, the Christian ideal is being placed before us. This ideal is definitely not a form of cowardice or a way for courageous people to flee and evade the present reality.

In my Pastoral Letter I say: *Every individual has the potential for a healthy degree of assertiveness. It is an endowment by nature to enable persons to overcome the obstacles in their lives. Courage, boldness, and fearlessness in taking risks are notable virtues and values among our people. They have to be built into society, not to put an end to lives but so that law and justice may be achieved for all, and especially for those who today are most cut off from their benefits*⁶. I am also mindful of the fact that the Church documents state that Christians love peace, not because they are not willing to engage in combat but because they know that peace is better. *The Christian is peaceful and not ashamed of it ...not simply a pacifist, for he can fight but prefers peace to war. The Christian knows that violent changes in structures would be fallacious, ineffectual in themselves, and not conforming to human dignity* (3).

We also defend this human value of assertiveness and we say that every passion has to be educated. The assertiveness that is a part of each person can lead one to become either a criminal or a saint (saints also possess this assertiveness). True Christians are not cowards and know how to fight when it is necessary, but they know how to orient this great power of assertiveness with the principles of peace and love and forgiveness. Thus there is a violence that is nonviolence. Jesus preaches this violence when he says: *when someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well* (4). This is not cowardice. Through experience I believe anyone can strike and assault another. When such an action occurs one expects an aggressive response. When, however, one receives a smile, forgiveness and understanding, then the one who was attacked becomes the stronger person. Therefore when speaking about the martyrs it is said that they were not lacking in courage when they allowed themselves to be killed but rather because of their situation as victims they actually became stronger and were victorious over their persecutors. Where are the hands that are stained with blood as a result of so many criminal actions? They are people who are fearful. I do not know any people who are more fearful than those who are criminals. They have not

developed their human personalities. It is for this reason that the Lord teaches us nonviolence and forgiveness in the Bible. My sisters, I want to be honest and truthful and therefore I must also tell you that there are times when this power of assertiveness that we all carry within ourselves, there are moments when it is right and just to know how to use this power. In our Pastoral Letter we explain two cases⁷.

The first case involves self-defense in face of unjust aggression. When one is unjustly attacked, one has the right to defend oneself: this is the violence of just defense. But this is also conditioned. The defense cannot exceed the degree of unjust aggression (for example, if one can adequately defend oneself with one's hands, then it is wrong to shoot an aggressor). The second condition is that the recourse to proportionate violence can only take place after all peaceful means have been exhausted. When an aggressor does not listen to the reasoning of the one being attacked, when the aggressor continues to pursue unjust violence, and when all peaceful means have been exhausted, then one has the right to legitimately defend oneself. It is said that war is the last recourse. The third condition states that a violent defense should not bring about a greater evil than that of the aggressor. For example, if in order to defend oneself from an unjust aggressor, one creates a greater violence or gives origin to a greater injustice, then the greater good must prevail.

A second example is similar to the first and is part of the traditional doctrine of the Church. There is nothing new here that you are hearing and therefore you should not be scandalized. The modern documents of the Church have been placed before us to guide us in the actual situations that we must confront. In the Pastoral Letter I call to mind the following principle that is stated in the Documents of Medellin and that refers back to the Pope's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (5)--- thus this principle is endorsed by the Pope and the Latin American Bishops. This principle affirms *the legitimacy of "insurrection" in the very exceptional circumstances of "an evident and prolonged 'tyranny that seriously works against fundamental human rights and seriously damages the common good of the country,' whether it proceeds from one person or from clearly unjust structures"*. Immediately, however, we speak about the conditions that must guide the use of this principle. The Church also warns of the *dangers of occasioning, through insurrection, new injustice ... new imbalance ... new disasters --- all of which would justify a condemnation of insurrection*⁸. You are going to tell me then that we say one thing and then say the opposite. Actually we are saying one thing and we place some true moral conditions on the use of insurrection. This is what makes it difficult. For example, this is the case in Nicaragua: What will be the greater evil? In light of these principles of Christian morality the consciences of the people there must decide this question.

My sisters and brothers, while these forms of violence are permissible, in general violence cannot be used as an instrument to obtain justice. Therefore in our Pastoral Letter we, as Church, condemn those forms of institutionalized violence which in an organized way violate the rights of the people. Together with this institutionalized violence we experience a repressive State that provokes people to act violently, which violence the State wishes to sustain. Violence for violence cannot be used as an instrument to attain justice and the seriousness of this situation must be understood.

It is for this reason that I want to remind you about the ideal of the Church --- an ideal that the Word of God reminds us of. Peace and love and forgiveness are not forms of weakness. We see in today's readings that God uses the violence of his wrath and anger against those who are not worthy of forgiveness. Forgiveness supposes an attitude of

repentance in the other. Forgiveness also supposes conversion, a change in one's behavior. Therefore when people change and seek the Lord as repentant individuals, the Lord uses nonviolence and gifts people with his mercy and forgiveness and loving embrace. It is beautiful to meet two enemies who have reconciled with one another because this form of reconciliation supposes a powerful domination in the heart --- the domination of one's anger, wrath and aggressiveness. Therefore, the ideal of forgiveness that is presented to us in Sacred Scripture today must be the star that guides us in this environment of violence. This ideal must not be used to justify that which is unjustifiable but rather must be allowed to call people to conversion, especially those individuals who need to change their lives --- for it is in this way that we will create situations of peace and forgiveness.

We conclude our Pastoral Letter with a call to all the different sectors of the country⁹. We call upon all those who have the power and money to not use these goods in a repressive way that leads to more institutionalize violence. We call upon intellectuals and those with the ability to organize and we invite them to dialogue and place their power at the service of harmony, forgiveness and peace. We call upon those who do not have, or have little of this world's goods to not seek the realization of their just demands through bloody violence, but rather through just pressure to create justice where there is injustice.

My sisters and brothers, this is the ideal and, as you can see, the Church's preaching about peace in the midst of a wave of violence has nothing to do with cowardice or evasion. Rather the Church confronts the reality and the present situation in order to be able to speak with women and men who are tempted to use violence at this time. Who is not tempted to use violence in this present environment? What family that experiences the abduction of a husband or wife or brother or sister is not tempted to inflict vengeance and violence against those who have committed these injustices? Also poor people, oppressed for such a long period of time, misunderstood, and the channels that enable them to participate in the shaping of the common good closed --- do not these people also experience the temptation to become violent? There is nothing evil with feeling this passion, nothing evil in temptation. It is wrong, however, not to educate ourselves about these feelings.

In our Pastoral Letter we condemn those who have made violence a religion and a mystique and those who believe that problematic situations can only be resolved through violence. We tell these people that this is not reasonable and that all of the different forms of violence are irrational and cannot be approved by God¹⁰.

My dear sisters and brothers, I believe that you understand the Church's thinking and so in light of the Word of God we invite you to reflect on the great, positive values of human assertiveness that is a part of each one of us. This assertiveness is never more beautiful than when it is used to resolve differences and forgive and ask another for forgiveness and become reconciled with one another. This assertiveness is never more beautiful that when it is used to avoid further bloodshed and to eliminate this ugly face from our country --- a face that we have not created but a face that simply is.

The conflict between traditionalists and progressives

My second thought involves this other conflict that arose in the primitive Christian communities. It deals with a conflict between those whom Saint Paul refers to as the weak and the strong. It is possible that in the letter to the Romans this is a reference to those persons who converted to Christianity and who continued to practice the Judaic traditions or

their Gentile religion. These people said that certain meats could not be eaten and so they ate vegetables. At the same time there were other people who had moved beyond this way of thinking and who, like Saint Paul, understood that salvation comes through one's faith in Christ and does not depend on these religious acts that the other group tried to maintain. The traditionalists were scandalized by the progressives --- much like our situation today.

It is wrong to take a radical position and place oneself at the extreme and believe that only my way is the right way while another says that no, only my way is the right way. These situations exist today. There are movements in religious life in which individuals believe that they possess some type of monopoly on God and the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul speaks in the name of the Holy Spirit and offers a solution. This is my third point concerning the three readings which confront these two conflicts: conflict-violence-forgiveness, conflict-progressives-conservatives, simply to give them a name.

The key to the solution, the transcendence of love

The key to the solution is found in the word forgiveness and in the reasons for this forgiveness. What are the reasons for forgiveness? Let us gather these reasons together as the fruit of our reflection.

The first reading presents us with the fact of our dependence on God. You who depend on God for your health, how are you going to ask God for good health if you do not forgive your sisters or brother? This is illogical because God says that we should love our neighbor and if we do not love our neighbor, then *how can one expect healing from the Lord if one nourishes anger against his/her neighbor* (6).

Another reason to forgive: we all need the understanding mercy of God. The apostle tells us: *How can God be merciful toward you if you are not merciful toward others, if you do not forgive others, if with vengeance you kill and beat another?*(7)

Another reason to forgive: our lives, our flesh is fragile. In other words, our lives are transitory and thus fragile. What good is accomplished by making an absolute out of the offense of another or making an absolute of vengeance? (8) If we are fragile, then it is logical to live the brief span of our lives with the love that God desires of us. If we are fragile, it is logical to forgive.

Another valid reason for the first reading. *Think of you end* (9), of death and corruption. When the most aggressive and violent person dies, what is the meaning of this cadaver enclosed between four planks of wood? All the potential of a person who conquered kingdoms and killed people --- there in that coffin, that person is nothing but dust and ashes. The Bible tells us that we should conquer our anger and we ought to reflect on those words.

The first reading tells us: *think of the commandments* (10). Let us remember that we also have an obligation to God. Among all the commandments there are two that provide us with a summary: *You shall love the Lord your God above all things and you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (11). Hatred is the destruction of this commandment.

There is another reason, one that is almost completely disregarded but one that has great value. Remember the covenant(12), what is this covenant? The covenant is a pact that God made with the people" *I will be your God and you will be my people* (13). This means that

all those who are part of this people are loved. Neither violence nor hatred can destroy this love. Let us be mindful of this covenant that in a short time I will remind you of when I take the consecrated chalice into my hands. This is the blood of the covenant, the pact between God and humanity (14). You, the People of God, who have come here to offer to God your ratification of this covenant of faith, promise God that you are going to love and forgive. The measure of our forgiveness is presented to us in today's gospel --- in the parable the master who forgave a large debt but the one who was forgiven did not know how to forgive (15). As we stand before God, we are the ones who have been forgiven, forgiven when it seemed impossible for this to happen. Those who have offended God merit nothing less than eternal punishment. But if God has forgiven us this eternal, infinite debt how can we not forgive another who has not committed an eternal offense against us --- even though the offense might be most serious, it is not an eternal offense? The *Our Father* is a continual demand for God's forgiveness: *forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* (16). How many times have we been unable to pray the *Our Father* because we have not been sincere and have not known how to forgive?

Finally Saint Paul presents us with another reason which in reality is a synthesis of my thoughts. Saint Paul says: *For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living* (17). Saint Paul is reminding us here that those people who abstain from meats on certain days out of respect for their religion --- they should abstain because of their love for God and they should be respected. Those who no longer believe in this practice but believe that they are saved in Christ should not abstain because of their love for God and they also should be respected. Saint Paul says: *why then do you judge your brother or you, why do you look down on your brother* (18).

Thus when two people are engaged in a conflict, one person defends one position and the other defends another position but they overlook a third reality because each one is defending himself selfishly: *I am right and you are wrong!* In this kind of situation reason never prevails. But if the two who are in conflict attempt to resolve this conflict through the eyes of God --- and here there is a great lesson for us my sisters and brothers --- then the differences that exist in our Church can be resolved with this principle: *you, in your Charismatic Movement, in your Cursillo Movement, in your Catechumenate Movement --- you, with your traditional way of thinking, with your progressive thoughts, why do you act in this way? Because this makes you feel comfortable? But that is not a good reason! Do you act that way in order to serve God with sincerity? Then continue to act in that way and you must also understand that the other is motivated by the same reason.* This is true pluralism and this is the pluralism that the Church desires. We are not all going to think alike in this Church, but we should all equally act for God, for Christ --- *for if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord and Christ continues to be Lord of both the dead and the living* (an adaptation of Romans 18:8-9).

Peace is achieved among people through Jesus Christ. Hopefully so much bloodshed and hatred and violence and so many differences and divisions among people will be resolved when all people look at the One who is on the cross, the One who crucified the hatred and violence of all people --- the One who allowed all hatred and violence to be discharged from his body like bolts of lightning. As we look at Jesus on the cross we learn how to translate our aggressiveness into goodness and forgiveness and praise of the Lord, our God.

Today, my dear sisters and brothers, we celebrate the Eucharist with this prayer: Lord, look upon our people and look upon our bloodied brothers and sisters in Nicaragua! Look at the divisions in our Church! Look at all the crime and violence in our surroundings! We want to be a Church that is a community of love. May no one extinguish the fire, Lord, the fire that you desire to see burning brightly! May this fire burn brightly each day that we look at you nailed to the cross, with your arms wide open! May we know how to forgive and love and embrace all people! So be it. (Applause ended the homily).

¹ Reference to the cantón of San José Primero, of the municipality of San Martín.

² See “Piden amnistía y son masacrados”, *Orientación*, 17 September 1978.

³ Dr Rubén Alfonso Rodríguez was president of the Legislative Assembly from 1972 till June 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 18 September 1978.

⁴ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 September 1978.

⁵ See “Piden amnistía para presos políticos”, *Orientación*, 24 September 1978.

⁶ *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978), p. 50.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁹ See *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, p.50.

Marginal References (1) Jn 20,21: (2) Si 28,1: (3) M 2,15: (4) Mt 5,39: (5) PP 31: (6) Si 28,3: (7) Si 28,4: (8) Si 28,5: (9) Si 28,6: (10) Si 28,7: (11) Mt 22,37-39: (12) Si 28,7: (13) Lv 26,12: (14) Mt 26,28: (15) Mt 18,21-35: (16) Mt 6,12: (17) Rm 14,8-9: (18) Rm 14,13.