

THE CRISIS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 24, 1978

Readings:

Isaiah 55:6-9

Philippians 1:20c, 24-27a

Matthew 20:1-6

Dear brothers and sisters, my esteemed radio audience.

Today, September 24th, our Church honors the Virgin under the very historical and real title of our Lady of Mercy. During the Middle-Ages the Virgin, under this title, inspired a group of generous men who, in order to confront the problem of slavery in Muslim prisons, organized themselves to free those prisoners. Besides collecting great sums of money in Europe which enabled them to achieve this goal, they also took a vow to take the place of the prisoners so that those who were held captive could go free. This is a glorious page in the Church's history and her struggle to achieve freedom for humanity. The defense of human rights has always been a gospel demand and is not something new. Here, therefore, we greet all prisoners because today is considered the patron feast of all detention centers. Today, through our prayer, the Virgin is honored in those detention centers where there is much suffering.

Life of the Church

Our Lady of Mercy is present today in the midst of the suffering of those imprisoned. She sheds light on the different forms of cruelty and consoles these persons who suffer such inhuman isolation. Indeed, she becomes a symbol for our time. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to celebrate Mass and the sacrament of Confirmation for a group of women in the Women's Reform Center (better known as the Women's Prison). The presence of the Good Shepherd Sisters transforms this center into a true home of reform. The presence of a chapel in the midst of this community is like the presence of the sun that illuminates the darkness and as a result of this the women almost never experience this darkness. How beautiful is the presence of Christian hope and faith-filled prayers, especially when these actions illuminate situations such as the situation where these women prisoners have to pay the penalty for their crimes! These women have found there a school that seeks to reintegrate them into society. I want to congratulate the Good Shepherd Sisters for their ministry which continually demonstrates how persons should function in our society. May this witness of the Virgin continue to inspire these religious women in their holiness and strengthen them in their ministry among these prisoners. Indeed, may the Virgin continue to be this source of inspiration!

On the occasion of the feast of our Lady of Mercy we celebrated the first Communion for many children who had been prepared for this sacrament by Mercy Sisters of the Eucharist. This celebration took in the Church of María Auxiliadora and these Sisters minister here in El

Salvador in the Colegio Eucarístico, El Centro Educativo de San Martín and the Colegio Eucarístico de San Vicente. How many students have been educated under the title of our Lady of Mercy! We also want to greet the Sisters and students on their patronal feast day.

Last Sunday we were in Apulo, in the village whose patron is our Lady of Sorrows. The Carmelite Sisters and Father Fabían, who administer that parish, showed me in a very pleasant gathering what it means to be a Church that is composed of base communities of faith. I experienced their Christian awareness and their ability to analyze the realities of our nation with a critical conscience and biblical criteria. These groups are often persecuted, dissolved or terrorized, but I assure you that their gatherings and meetings are entirely focused on the Scriptures. Naturally when the gospel is absorbed and digested and when people allow their lives to be guided by gospel principles, such people with their critical awareness will begin to disturb the established order when this order is neither just nor evangelical. The gospel collides with those realities that do not conform to the Scriptures. Yet the Church must continue to form the evangelical conscience of all Christians.

On Thursday, September 21st, the feast of Saint Matthew, I encountered the same awareness in Santiago, Texacuangos where Father Teodoro Alvarengo and the Sisters of Saint Nicholas (from Belgium) are forming a community of great hope. These Sisters also minister in another community in Cojutepeque and on the same day, Thursday, we were able to greet them and their Superior General, Mother María Javier, who was visiting El Salvador. I thanked her for the ministry of these Sisters who have come to this land that is so far from their home and have collaborated in the ministry of the Archdiocese. May God reward them!

Today in Aguilares there is a gathering of many Christians. There the Sacred Heart Sisters and Father Octavio Cruz are forming these Church base communities of faith that provide us with so much hope. When the gospels are profoundly studied and reflected upon there is a need for these small groups. They are in no way subversive unless we call the denunciation of injustice and solidarity with justice (wherever these realities are found) subversive.

On Wednesday the community of Guazapa began their novena in honor of Saint Michael whose feast we will celebrate on September 29. The people have great devotion to their patron. During the time that their pastor was expelled from the parish and the time of the ill-fated military occupation of the region, the Carmelite Sisters maintained their pastoral ministry and religious and gospel presence in the community. To the lay people who have been left without a priest, I want to assure you that we are making every effort to provide priests for these communities so that you can participate in the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation and those other services that the Sisters and laity are unable to perform. And so I say to you, my beloved Catholics in Guazapa, those of you who are not happy with the situation there: what are you doing? You are the Church. How are you collaborating in the ministry there? Is it necessary for the priest to spend his time in the physical construction of the church building? This is not the work of the priests but rather the laity who experience themselves as Church. They should collaborate together in this area where they are more competent than the priests. I beg you to be understanding and to collaborate in the building up of your community --- a work that is being encouraged by the Sisters who are ministering there.

Once again I want to extend my congratulations to Bishop Rivera on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination. He was ordained on September 19th, and on that

day in San Esteban Catarina, his birthplace, the faithful gathered together to offer the Bishop a testimony of their respect and love for the priesthood. There I had the opportunity to greet the ten Vincentian priests who, thanks to God, are ministering there¹. I want to greet them because during this ... (homily interrupted by applause) ... thank you for this applause. I do not seek this applause but thank you for your spontaneous applause. I want to tell the priests that here in the Cathedral of San Salvador you are understood. The testimony of your unity as priests, the warmth and kindness of the people you minister to --- all of this enables me to assure you, my sisters and brothers, that these priests are not communists but very sensitive men who from a gospel perspective make demands that can very easily be confused with communism. But the gospel is not communist, rather it seeks justice.

I also thank the Lord and ask you to pray so that these fifty years of priestly life and fifty years of redemptive service might be prolonged. On September 22nd, I had the pleasure of concelebrating with Fathers Eladio Cuznego, Jesús García, Joaquín Mendoza and Félix Palacios and I once again extend my congratulations to you for your fifty years of priestly ministry. May the Lord reward you for the great good that you have done in the parishes where obedience has led you.

I want to express here the solidarity of the hierarchy of the Archdiocese with the Colegio Sagrado Corazón that once again has become the object of harsh criticism². They are being accused of Marxist indoctrination and biased criticism of our National Anthem. How superficial are the accusations of our critics. When these critics say they are going to inform the Minister of Culture and ask for an investigation of these crimes that are being committed against their children, these people have forgotten that the Minister of Culture, in a recent seminar, advocated in favor of an educational system that would form students with criteria so that these students would not be simple recipients of knowledge, but would be able to raise questions about our history. The National Anthem is not dogma. It contains many beautiful and truthful statements and this truth and beauty must be analyzed in light of the reality of our country so that we are not singing about something that does not exist. The beauty of our National Anthem must be applied to the situation of our country. The facile criticism of communism and communist indoctrination is beyond belief. I want to remind you about some of the eloquent words of the priests and sisters in Nicaragua who wrote to President Carter about the situation there. They stated: *to justify the present situation, today like yesterday, many people use the argument of anticommunist*. In Medellín, the Latin American Bishops warned about those forms of government and stated that it was very easy for them to find apparent ideological justifications for their actions (1), e.g, anticommunism or practices to preserve order which dishonestly justify their actions. The tragic reality of Somoza's government is that many *campesinos* have been dispossessed of their lands so that the communists would not dispossess them; unemployment has been maintained at low levels so that communists would not condemn people to forced labor; unfair competition approved by private entities³ so that communists would not receive financing; military dissidents are sent to jail so that they do not enter into an alliance with communists. It is difficult to find in Nicaragua any social group that the government has not attacked in one way or another because they were seen as communist or instruments of communism⁴. In the letter that was sent to President Carter the priests and sisters state: *in fact, here in Nicaragua, Mr. President, there are people who say that the government of Somoza is in the hands of leftists*⁵. I want to add here that Pope Paul VI when he wrote his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* --- it was called "heated up Marxism". Whenever one touches the open wound where the root of injustice and the lack of peace are found, it is easy to say: *there is communism*. For this

reason the Church fully supports the educational endeavors at the Colegio Sagrado Corazón because this ministry is inspired by the Gospel.

The Catholic Church of our Archdiocese rejoices on this feast of our Lady of Mercy because of the gathering of young men discerning a vocation to the priesthood is coming to a conclusion at the Seminario San José de la Montaña. Many young men who are about to graduate are reflecting on the problem that every young person has to confront: why has God given me the gift of life? Hopefully you will respond in a generous way. To become a priest is to give one's life to God for as Saint Paul tells us today this is the most beautiful ideal of human existence. If you do not have a vocation to become a priest remember that serving humanity is a vocation and this includes people who dedicate themselves to married life or to some form of professional life. The professions should not be viewed as simply a means to earn money or obtain some social or political position. One should look at how young people are presently serving humanity and then ask: how can one best use the gift of life to serve? How wonderful are our young people. I extend an enthusiastic greeting to you who are discerning a vocation. We will have a problem next year because we do not have sufficient space in the seminary to provide lodging for the many vocations that the Lord is sending us. But space is the least of our problems --- your generosity is what matters most.

I also want to inform you that there are no more copies of the new edition of our Pastoral Letter. We are preparing a third edition in which we will include an appendix and a series of questions to facilitate your reflections in small groups.

From the perspective of this local Church and as we look at the universal Church, it is with joy that we see, that day by day, the person of the Pope is being warmly embraced. Yesterday the Pope, as the bishop of Rome, took possession of his cathedral. You know that the Pope, besides being the universal shepherd, is also the Bishop of Rome. As the Bishop of Rome his cathedral is not Saint Peter's Basilica but the Basilica of Saint John Lateran which from the earliest of times was considered the residence of the Bishop of Rome. In his discourse on the occasion of presenting himself to the people of Rome (many civil authorities were present) the Pope said that as Pastor of the Eternal City he would collaborate with others to establish peace and justice in the city⁶. You can see, my sisters and brothers, that the reality of justice is not something that we have invented in order to obtain your applause. The Church has a right and an obligation to point out the fact that the sources of justice cannot be poisoned by injustice. Indeed, the primary role of the Church is to work on behalf of justice as the source of peace --- this is applicable to the Pope in Rome as well as the humble priest working in the rural areas of our Archdiocese.

The Pope reminded the North American Bishops that the family is the cornerstone of the Church and therefore we should not allow divorce to destroy our families. I want to take advantage of this news to extend a call to all families. How beautiful is each person in our society who is able to say: *I have a good family*. My sisters and brother, families who are faithful to one another and whose lives are blessed by One who gives meaning to family life are the foundation of a balanced, tranquil, ordered and just society. I do not have time to go into detail about the Pope's discourse, but his words have appeared in the press⁷ and he points out many wonderful paths for the construction and reconstruction of our family life. Here all of us have to work and exert great effort so that the families of El Salvador might become true Christian families.

In another discourse⁸ the Pope insisted on the need for the Church to intervene, present and recommend solutions to the problem of freedom, justice and peace. He stated that people must struggle to resolve these problems. Here I want to make a useful clarification: the political, social and economic justice that many people are searching for does not coincide with salvation in Jesus Christ. Let us understand this well. In my Pastoral Letter⁹ I explain that one of the Church's services is to support those efforts on behalf of the just demands of people. The greatest service that the Church can provide is to share with people her criteria on this theme of liberation. Thus, when the Pope says that certain forms of liberation do not coincide with salvation in Jesus Christ, he is saying that Christian liberation cannot be measured by earthly liberation. I do not want to be misunderstood, for as I say in my Pastoral Letter, Christian liberation encompasses and integrates those liberating forces of earthly liberation. I tell you that those who work for a better world and for a more just society are doing good work, but remember that this is not enough. All people have an eternal and divine vocation and if we want others to journey in a world that is more just then let us not forget about this transcendent liberation, the liberation that Jesus gave us as he saved the world from sin, this Jesus who through grace gives us dignity to live as children of God and live forever as free people. In this sense we can say, with the Pope, that certain forms of liberation do not coincide with salvation in Jesus Christ, but neither are they completely divorced from this concept. Therefore we can say that we support the Pope when we neglect the realities of this earth and focus solely on the realities of heaven. The Pope also supports all those human efforts on behalf of justice and peace in this world.

Another wonderful aspect of our Catholic life: all the bishops of Poland signed and published a Pastoral Letter and have asked that this letter be read in all the Churches. They say that the social life of a nation requires openness and the expression of public opinion. The people who control the means of communication, in Poland as well as El Salvador, are only mindful of their own interests. We can say that we, as people, have a right and an obligation to express our opinion and our criticism. If these efforts to achieve freedom are not valued, then, the bishops go on to say, we as women and men are being treated as objects. In other words, those who have seized power are manipulating the citizens and depriving them of the possibility of publicly expressing their opinions.

Lastly my sisters and brothers --- here because the problem is capitalism and not communism and in Poland where the problem is communism and not capitalism --- but in whatever situation the Church does not identify herself with capitalism or communism but proclaims evangelical freedom. I have often said that we must know how to read the newspapers¹⁰ because it is sad to read what the Bishops of Poland have said, namely, that the media which have an obligation to inform and to respond to the people's right to be informed have instead become instruments that allow themselves to be manipulated by political and/or economic power and then distort and falsify the news so that it is no longer information but pure ideological politics.

It appears that this Church that is being built up with mystery and presence, even though these might be humble ways that define our reality as an Archdiocese --- it seems as though we are surrounded by a giant world. So often I think of poor David confronting Goliath. The Church is David and when Goliath laughs at David because of his smallness, he says: *You come against me with sword and spear and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of hosts* (2). In the name of the Lord the humble David overcame the arrogant Goliath. The Church has to confront the giants of every age: the idols that people have created. I will speak of the ways in which the Church does this later in my homily. Here I

ask that all of us focus on this Church, this Church that I have spoken about, a Church that takes on concrete form here in the Archdiocese of San Salvador, in Poland, in Rome and wherever the Church is present. For on this Sunday, September 24th, in all the Churches the readings that the young people proclaimed in this Cathedral, these same readings are being proclaimed throughout the world: the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, the first chapter of Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians and the twentieth chapter of Saint Matthew's gospel. What a beautiful discipline!

The gospel of Saint Matthew has nourished the universal People of God throughout this past year. As I previously said, the gospel of Saint Matthew is beautifully organized. I have sent an outline of the gospel to many people who have asked me. In the Jerusalem Bible this outline can be found at the beginning of each of the Synoptic Gospels. The passages that we have read on previous Sundays refer to the Church, the Kingdom of God, as a community that is initiated here among you, among us, among all people who believe in Christ and follow him. In these chapters, Matthew has given us norms that should guide the life of this community and has also presented us with the head of this community: the Pope. Since we are approaching the end of the Church's Liturgical Year, we begin to read the final section of the gospel that presents this community with a perspective. Chapters nineteen to twenty-five of Saint Matthew's gospel present us with the crisis that the Church, the Kingdom of God, must endure before it is definitively established. There are beautiful parables, like the one that was read today, a parable that speaks about the different criteria and ways of thinking that distinguishes God from the human person. This section will conclude with the majestic discourse of Jesus, a discourse that is called the eschatological discourse and in which Jesus speaks about the end of history and the beginning of eternity. In this same discourse Jesus speaks about the final judgment: *Come, you who are blessed by my Father ... whatever you did for one of these least sisters or brothers of mine, you did for me ... depart from me you accursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels ... for whatever you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me* (3).

These beautiful words conclude the section that we begin to reflect on today. As usual and in order to present a synthesis of my thoughts, I entitle my homily today: the crisis of the Kingdom of God. Since the readings present us with this crisis, my first thought is to investigate what is God's thinking. Secondly, we will reflect on how God's thinking provokes a crisis in the way people think, and thirdly, Saint Paul in the second reading presents the Jewish people as a synthesis of this crisis that is resolved in favor of the Holy Spirit. Like Saint Paul, every person is called to resolve this crisis. If at this time in 1978 there is anyone who does not experience a religious crisis, then that person is not in touch with reality. I am not surprised by crisis. Like Saint Paul, many have resolved this crisis and love the Church, while others have resolved the crisis and hate the Church.

But first let us look at God's thinking as revealed in today's readings. The reading from the prophet Isaiah concludes with the beautiful words: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts... as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways* (4). As Jesus concludes the parable that was proclaimed today, he speaks about the crisis that he is going to experience in his life --- this section of the gospel contains the passion narrative. Jesus also speaks to those workers in the vineyard who criticized him because of his generous payment and says that he does not think like them nor does he reward people like they do. He says they are evil in their calculations and want him to act like them.

What is God's way of thinking? It is higher than our thoughts, and --- blessed be God --- God does not identify with human thinking. Many indeed would like, as the song says, a pocket-God, a God who gets along with their idols, a God who is satisfied with the way they pay their workers, a God who approves of their atrocities. How can people pray the *Our Father* to that God when they treat him as one of their servants or one of their employees?

Isaiah says that God allows himself to be found: *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near* (5). This is a God who is near to us so that we can call upon him. This is a God who offers mercy and a God who is generous in forgiving (6). My sisters and brothers, I, the greatest of all sinners, want to communicate to you the joy and happiness that I experience in my misery when I think about the God whom I adore and realize that this God calls me to share in his mercy and forgiveness. Therefore, I try to draw near to this God, not with arrogance, not desiring that he lower himself to share in my misery, rather I draw near to God and try to repent of my sins. I call upon all people who are seeking the Lord to do the same. As Isaiah says: *seek the Lord while he may be found* (7). There will come a time when it is too late. Behold the hour of God's judgment will arrive for those people who have not sought God when they could have found him so easily --- indeed it will be a terrible time for those who have not looked for God.

In today's gospel, God appears to take the initiative. He went out to look for workers. My sisters and brothers, you believe that we who are here in the Cathedral have come together because of our own initiative. Yes, this is true. We are free and no one was forced to come here. But here also we see God's tenderness and kindness. God creates us as free persons and as he gifts us with freedom so also he gifts us with his grace so that we might use this freedom to look for him. Thus the initiative to come to Mass has its starting point with God who gives us the gift of freedom and places within us that grace that leads us to look for that which is good. The Church does not come together here because of some political curiosity, but rather comes together to seek God. God also comes forward to look for us and to look for all people. How beautiful to know that at every hour of our life the Lord is looking for us!

He went out (8) at the first hour, at the rising of the sun (according to Roman calculations), at the third hour (about 9:00am), at the sixth hour (noon time), again at the ninth hour (3:00pm) and finally at the eleventh hour (as the day comes to a close), the Lord is still calling: *"Come and work! Why do you stand here idle all day?" They answered, "because no one has hired us." "Come, I will pay you a just wage"* (9). According to the labor system of that unjust era, the owner could pay whatever he wanted and the parable is not praising this type of action. The parable highlights God's initiative and God's generosity in paying the same wage to those who began work at the last hour as those who were working from the first hour. God's reward is generous and perhaps those who had come at the first hour were angry at God because they felt they owned the vineyard: *We are good and those who have just arrived are evil. We want you to pay them less.* In this way they attempt to make God become indebted to them.

My sisters and brothers, before God --- and here we are coming to a knowledge of God --- the God who reveals himself to us is a God who calls even the greatest sinner. Remember Dismas, the good thief: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (10). Jesus responded: *I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.* How rich is God's forgiveness and mercy. We have no privileges or rights before God. If we have served God from our youth, then blessed be God, for we have used our life well. This, however, does not

give us the right to feel that we own the Church, even if we are bishops or priests. We priests and bishops can be the ones who are most in need of God's mercy, more in need of his mercy than the one who has just repented and converted and who because of his/her love is closer to God than the one who feels he owns the Church. God is kind. No one can pass judgment on his undertakings. Appeal to his mercy, beg, like the good thief, just a remembrance and God will give more than a remembrance.

I am trying to show you the God of the bible, the God we have read about today. Thus is our God --- blessed may he be --- one who has allowed us to know how he calls us at every moment and at every moment is ready to receive us, no matter what crimes we have committed. And so, my sisters and brothers, I repeat again what I have said here so often, addressing by radio those who perhaps have caused so many injustices and acts of violence, those who have brought tears to the eyes of so many, those who have stained themselves with the blood of so many murders, those who have hands soiled with torture, those who have calloused their consciences, who are unmoved --- I invite them to see under their boots a person abased, suffering, perhaps ready to die. To all of them I say: No matter what your crimes. They are ugly and horrible, and you have abased the highest dignity of a human person, but God calls you and forgives you.

And here perhaps arises the aversion of those who feel they are laborers from the first hour. How can I be in heaven with those criminals? Sisters and brothers, in heaven there are no criminals. The greatest criminal, once he/she has repented of his/her sins, is now a child of God. The prostitute Mary of Magdala tearfully wept over her sins. Society continued to say: *Look, if this man were really a prophet he would know who it is who is touching him* (11) But Jesus comes to her defense: *She is no longer a sinner for she has loved greatly. She has repented of her sins. She is Saint Mary of Magdala* (12). The sins of the past no longer matter for they have been cast aside. For this reason Christ's justification is called rebirth. We see this when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus: *no one can see the Kingdom of Heaven without being born from above* (13). All those who repent of their sins have set aside their old shell, their evil past lives. Like a new pupa, the butterfly is born again leaving behind that old shell --- these persons are new creatures. This is God's generosity. We are unable to understand this because we utter the cruel words: *I will forgive but never forget*. This is not Christian. God pardons and forgets.

God's thinking causes crises among humans

What is the reaction that God's way of thinking causes? The God who reveals himself as goodness finds people in conflict. The parable says: *they grumbled against the landowner* (14). One of the most serious conflicts in the history of the Church is that which is presented in this section of Saint Matthew's gospel which Saint Paul experienced in his own flesh, namely, that Christ had given the world a new religion. The Jews who lived according to the old religion, the religion that Moses proclaimed, believed that it was necessary to continue to follow the Jewish Law. Paul and the other apostles who preached to the Gentiles, to those people who were not Jews, told these people that it was not necessary to become Jews, to become circumcised, to keep the Law of Moses. It was sufficient to believe in Jesus Christ -- nothing more was needed.

This is how the conflict arose, the conflict that is reflected in the parable. The objective of the parable of the vineyard workers is to unveil the crisis of early Christianity: there were on the one hand those Pharisees who converted to Christianity and felt they owned Christianity, the Bible, and Christ. They were proud of the fact that they had worshiped God

from the dawning of the day. They felt they had rights. On the other hand there were the Gentiles whom Saint Paul had found and with whom he had shared this same knowledge of Christ --- these people were considered second class Christians. Saint Paul and the primitive community said that salvation is found only in Christ. No one has any right except that of giving thanks to Christ. Thus the first Christians resolved their crisis in the same way that the crisis is resolved in the parable: everyone was treated equally. In other words, everyone was given the opportunity to come to know this God of revelation, a God who recognizes no privilege except that of becoming holy (and everyone is called to be holy). In God's eyes there are no social classes or human categories. The only category is to believe in Christ and live in conformity with this faith. The explanation of all of this is found in today's readings: *my thoughts are not your thoughts* (15). *Are you envious because I am generous?* (16).

The present conflict of the Church is similar to those previous conflicts. Today they are progressives and traditionalists. There are those whose spirituality leads them to think about the things of heaven but they consider all the efforts of the Church to create a better world as some form of communism. On the other hand, there are people who are concerned about the realities of this world, but forget about the transcendent dimension of heaven. These conflicts exist today. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, let us be mindful of the words of the Second Vatican Council that refer to the human vocation as earthly and heavenly (17). Today's first reading provides us with a framework to interpret the present situation.

When Isaiah says: *Seek the Lord while he may be found* (18), he is not unmindful of the realities of this world. Quite the contrary, for Isaiah is preaching during the time of the exile, during the time of the people of Israel's separation from their homeland. The hour to return has arrived and their exile has come to an end. Isaiah tells the people that it is not enough to simply return to their country --- they must return as a renewed people. God punishes the sins of the people with slavery. Indeed, the slaveries of this earth are a result of sin. Thus in order to return to their country and rejoice in God's freedom, people must change their hearts.

You can see and study this in the Pastoral Letter where I say that one of the most important services that the Church provides is that of supporting the just demands of people and incorporating these as a part of her life, while at the same time pointing out the transcendent end of liberation¹¹. A liberation that would forget God who must be sought or a liberation that would neglect the need to be freed from sin, would not be God's liberation. So that you can see that the Bishops in Medellin were not communists they stated: *The uniqueness of the Christian message does not so much consist in the affirmation of the necessity for structural change, as it does in the insistence on the conversion of men which will in turn bring about this change. We will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new men, who know how to be truly free and responsible according to the light of the Gospel* (19). What good are new structures if the hearts of people are still rooted in selfishness? We will simply have new people in old situations. The Church advocates on behalf of interior renovation and a transcendent vision that looks for true freedom. Without this divine, eternal perspective of God, everything becomes useless and earthly liberation is of little value. Keep this in mind so that later you do not say that we are preaching communism and class struggle. Even though it might be difficult to live these realities, we proclaim the renewal of humanity, the transcendence of God and the love that comes to us from above.

How to resolve these crises

Finally, my sisters and brothers, in order to resolve this crisis, these conflicts, I would like you to open your Bibles and fill out today's second reading (I do not have time, but you can take the time to do this). Today we read only the fifteenth verse (or perhaps I should say three verses) of this chapter from Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians (20). Paul is a prisoner and chained. He was informed that other people have become jealous of him and are going about preaching Christ. These people are saying that Paul is not needed and that he can die in jail. Saint Paul responds that none of this is important. That which is truly important is that Christ is preached (21)--- even if this is done hypocritically. It is important that Christ be made known and this is what gives Paul great satisfaction while he is chained and imprisoned. He knows that when Christ is proclaimed people become united with Christ and pray for him and even though he is in prison, Paul is able to give witness. He does not fear death, but says that God has inspired him and that his freedom will be restored and soon he will be able to continue his work.

There are some wonderful verses in the first chapter, excuse me, the third chapter where Saint Paul summarizes his life and says: *If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parents ... I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord* (22). In the reading we heard proclaimed today Saint Paul says: *For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I will choose. I am caught between the two: I long to depart this life and be with Christ... yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit* (23). Look at how true Christians desire death. Look at how they resolve their conflicts of faith with great hope and with great joy. Thus reflecting on heaven is not some form of evasion or alienation. *I am caught between the two: I long to depart this life and be with Christ... yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit* (24). Paul has to choose between the two alternatives. *Mihi vivere Christus est* (For me life is Christ) (25). What a beautiful phrase! Life has no other meaning. Paul feels that it is an honor to proclaim Christ both in life and in death. Eternity awaits him and there he hopes to live eternally with God --- this is the true Christian reaction when one is faced with a crisis of faith or difficult situation.

I exhort you once again to read the whole letter to the Philippians. It is only five chapters in length. In this letter Saint Paul provides us with some norms about courage --- courage to confront the situations that could very easily be compared to situations of our present era. There is nothing cowardly in his words (26). Even the prison chains make him joyful because as Saint Paul says: *I am making Christ known here to the praetorian guardsmen. It is as though some one were to say: Here in the quarters of the Guardia, shackled, I am making known this Christ in whom I believe to whoever wants to listen.* Many praetorians were converted, for God calls everyone. God is calling even the torturer. When people confront a crisis or conflict, Jesus is the answer. Those who have not found Christ are not happy. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, let us live this present crisis of the Church by being more faithful to Christ and our faith. Let us put aside every form of cowardice.

The Church is nourished by these evangelical principles and it is for this reason that I frequently insist on the fact that we must live as Church in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. Indeed the Church does not consist in having relationships with the powerful people of this earth. If this occurs, then blessed be God! If this does not happen, let us not be disturbed by this fact. When Saint Paul is free he is preaching Christ; when he is in chains, he is also preaching Christ. Saint Paul says: *the Word of God is not chained* (27). Therefore

the Word of God is our strength. To believe in Christ, to love Christ and to have no fear of other people when speaking the truth that Christ gives us --- this is the solution to our crisis.

Events of the week

The Church does not live for herself but lives for the world. I feel as though my time has ended but I want to provide you, my sisters and brothers, with some aspects of the reality that surrounds the Church so that we can all live our reality in the world.

The most important news today involves Nicaragua. All of you have been informed about this situation and so I only wish to communicate to you the fact that we are in solidarity with the Bishops of Nicaragua. Bishop Salazar stated that he, as well as the people of León, felt profoundly wounded as a result of the methods that have been employed by the governmental forces. *There is no freedom in León*, said the Bishop, *and so people must be given what is rightly theirs*. The Archbishop of Managua met with President Somoza and asked him not to bomb the city. Yet, as the Archbishop stated: *Three churches in the city were destroyed and entire neighborhoods bombed*. He then said: *When they do not listen then it is necessary to act*. We express our solidarity with all of this and the priests and religious, in light of the situation that is occurring in Managua, have sent a letter to President Carter¹², a very courageous letter that coincides with what was announced today on the *Voice of America*. A editorial from West Germany stated: *The present situation in Nicaragua is the fruit of a policy that supports your [the United States] commercial interests and has little consideration for the people*. Hopefully this lesson will be studied.

My sisters and brothers, I want to ask you to enter into a deeper solidarity with our sister Republic and therefore we are going to have three days of prayer: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, at 7:00pm. We will celebrate a holy hour each day and ask the Lord for the necessary graces, for the eternal rest of so many people who have died as a result of the violence and for inspiration for those persons who are able to resolve this situation. I also want to ask you for your financial support. The Churches in Germany, the Ecclesiastical World Service, Cáritas of Spain, the Central American Churches and several ecumenical movements --- all of these institutions are collecting funds for the people of Nicaragua. I therefore ask our beloved priests to collect money for the people of Nicaragua. We are unable to send food or clothing to Nicaragua so all the money that is collected from our Archdiocese will be sent to the Archbishop of Managua. I hope that at the time of our next clergy meeting (the first Tuesday in October) the priests will bring with them the money that they have collected from the various communities of the Archdiocese.

During this past week --- a week that could be called a week of violence --- many events have occurred. Yesterday the press published a list of crimes¹³ (but the list is still not complete because in Zacatecoluca on Sunday, September 17th a *campesino*, while buying some food, was killed). On Monday the 18th, two guards were killed at the National University. According to many students, the incidents that occurred last week at the National University were provoked by the guards who continue to maintain this center of studies in a state of upheaval. On the 18th several people saw the guards at the University chasing students beyond the enclosure of the campus. On this same day the Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Dr. Carlos Rodríguez, was riddled with bullets. There has been much speculation about this event that remains clouded in mystery. A clandestine group called UR-19 spoke on radio and claimed responsibility for this action. But later the same group,

UR-19 stated they had no responsibility in this case. All of this makes us suspicious that something is being manipulated and covered over.

This week when some professionals and politicians brought before the Assembly a petition for the repeal of the Law of Public Order, they also denounced and stated that many of the events that are occurring in the National University have been caused by the guards at the University. The President of the Assembly stated that other sectors had informed them of this situation. I have received reliable information that Dr. Carlos Rodríguez had previously had unpleasant encounters with the guard and it is not impossible that they are responsible for this criminal action that is now being covered up. We want to say that originally the guards at the university consisted of 75 members: 70 guards, 1 Director and 4 supervisors. Now there are over 300 guards who are creating this horrible situation at the University. At this time I call upon the Supreme Court to investigate this crime so that this does not become one more case that is hidden in the cloud of injustice here in El Salvador. I also express my condolences to the family of Dr. Rodríguez.

On the same day, September 18th, the car of the Controller of the University was attacked near La Colonia Nicaragua and as a result one civilian was killed and a young woman was wounded and then brought to the hospital. We have information from the hospital that this young woman (Cristina Salguero Arriaza, 15 years old, was wounded in the left leg by a G3 caliber bullet) and was brought there by the National Guard who stated that she had been involved in the incidents that occurred at the entrance to La Colonia Nicaragua. At the present time she is in the custody of security agents and two detectives. This young woman is concerned that when she is released from the hospital, she will be brought to the police station and is fearful of what will become of her there. She has said that she has no family who can intervene on her behalf and that she lives with her mother in a tent in Colonia San Antonio. Her income is obtained by washing and ironing the clothes of other families. We suppose that since she is not in the custody of the police that she will be brought before the courts (which is the right of every citizen) so that her responsibility in all of this can be clarified. We do not want to see this become another case of injustice.

On Tuesday, September 19 two policemen were killed and several offices of the National Police were attacked. Several cases have been presented to the courts that have involved people accused of violating the Law of Public Order. Dead bodies appeared on the road to Apulo, etc.

I want to tell you, my sisters and brothers, that we must analyze this week of tragedy. Anyone can see that all of this is the result of the moral disintegration of criminal elements. Attempting to resolve this violence by repudiating it and increasing the repression, intensifying the vigilance and threatening the suspension of rights and guarantees --- this is no way to create peace and we have said this many times. When the lawyers and members of a political party brought a Petition of Amnesty to the National Assembly and another petition asking for the repeal of the Law of Public Order, they presented the conclusions of Dr. Donald Fox¹⁴, a representative of the Human Rights Commission. I have spoken about these conclusions on another occasion and today because of a lack of time I will only say that Dr. Fox concluded that this situation cannot be repressed with violence and with repressive laws. There must be a legal analysis of this Law of Public Order for such a law cannot lead to democracy nor can it resolve the problems of our nation.

The family members of those persons who have disappeared are being asked to go the offices of the Red Cross. You can read more about this in the newspapers and if you need some information from the Chancery, we will gladly help you.

We have also received a request for help from those victims of the recent floods that have left many families without any lodging. Once again I ask your help and know that your assistance in this situation, as well as your assistance to the people of Nicaragua, will be blessed by God.

The campaign of repression continues against the workers and their right to organize themselves. Yesterday on our radio station YSAX we read a letter of the Pope when he was a bishop --- a courageous defense of the right of the workers to form labor unions¹⁵. This morning I also received a letter from the Secretary General of Education in France expressing solidarity with the teachers in El Salvador. This letter was presented to Dr. Astacio while he was traveling in Paris. In the letter they ask that the teachers of our country be respected.

My sisters and brothers, you can see that our life is weighed down and that the Church tries to illuminate all of these realities with the gospel. The Church cannot distance herself from all of this. I believe that I have not gone outside the framework of the gospel. From my position as an enlightener of faith I illuminate these realities so that each one of you can see the good that must be supported and the evil that must be repudiated. The Church would not fulfill her mission in society if she were, as the Prophet said, *a mute dog who did not take care of the Lord's inheritance* (28).

Therefore my sisters and brothers, as we celebrate this Eucharist in honor of Our Lady of Mercy, a beautiful image of the Church and a voice of freedom in the midst of captives, let us lift up our voices: Lord, give us a Nation that is truly worthy and illuminated by the light of your gospel. So be it. (Applause at the end of the homily).

¹ In March 1978 Mons Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio, bishop of San Vicente, suspended from priestly ministry ten priests of his diocese for having signed a letter which questioned the actions of the Apostolic Nuncio, Emmanuele Gerada. The priests appealed to the Vatican and were restored to their ministry in August the same year. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 August 1978.

² See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 23 September 1978.

³ The text of the letter reads "private initiative".

⁴ Letter of the Council of Priests of the Archdiocese of Managua to Jimmy Carter, president of the United States of America (15 September 1978), *Orientación*, 1 October 1978.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Discourse of John Paul 1 to the Mayor of Rome (23 September 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 1 October 1978.

⁷ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 22 September 1978.

⁸ See Catechesis of John Paul 1 in the general audience of 20 September 1978, *Osservatore Romano*, 24 September 1978.

⁹ See *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, (6 August 1978) pp. 27-28.

¹⁰ See "Iglesia Católica lanza desafío a gobierno polaco", *Diario de Hoy*, 18 September 1978.

¹¹ See "La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares", (6 August 1978), p.27.

¹² See *Orientación*, 1 October 1978.

¹³ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 September 1978.

¹⁴ See "Reporte de la Comisión Internacional de Juristas sobre la Ley de Defensa y Garantía del Orden Público. Informe de Donald T. Fox", *ECA 359* (1978) pp. 779-786.

¹⁵ See *Orientación*, 1 October 1978.

Marginal References (1) M 2,6: (2) 1S 17,45: (3) Mt 25,34-41: (4) Is 55,8-9: (5) Is 55,6: (6) Is 55,7: (7) Is 55,6: (8) Mt 20,1-6: (9) Mt 20,6-7: (10) Lk 23,42-43: (11) Lk 7,39: (12) Lk 7,47: (13) Jn 3,3: (14) Mt 20,11: (15) Is 55,8: (16) Mt 20,15: (17) GS 11: (18) Is 55,6: (19) M 1,3: (20) Ph 1,13: (21) Ph 1,15-19: (22) Ph 3,4-8: (23) Ph 1,23-24: (24) Ph 1,25: (25) Ph 1,21: (26) Ph 1,12-14: (27) 2Tm 2,9: (28) Is 56,10.