

THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD'S SALVATION

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 29, 1978

Exodus 22:20-26¹

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Matthew 22:34-40

My dear sisters and brothers.

I feel that the Christian community is a true family. I felt my inability to be present with you last Sunday². I felt like that family member who is unable to participate in a weekend gathering with his other sisters and brothers. At times, however, the Lord asks us to make sacrifices. At the same time I want to thank you for your presence and attention during the celebration and the preaching of Father Jesús Delgado who was most kind in substituting for me last week. I have heard some very good commentaries on his reflections.

As I have reflected on the Biblical readings, as usual, I give a title to our homily which today will strengthen the meaning of family and communion. I title my homily today: the Church, a communion of life, of charity and of truth for the salvation of the world. Today's readings are beautifully summarized in one of the most profound texts of Vatican II (1): *So it is that the messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth* (2).

My beloved sisters and brothers, this is what we are and this is what we must be if we want to build the Church. I want to affirm that the reason for my preaching, the reason for our meetings and Christian reflections on the Word of God is so that each day we might grow as a People of God and as followers of Christ and so that we might experience ourselves as the seed of unity, hope and salvation (3). May the world and our country look upon the members of Christian groups as people who are truly light of the world and salt of the earth and not as people who are suspect!

Life of the Church

For this reason I like to make this community concrete --- this community that is reflecting this morning on the Word of God. We are not a Christian community that has come together in a church in Europe or Africa or some other country on our continent. Rather it is the Church here in the Archdiocese of San Salvador, in this Cathedral, that has come together this morning. It is those communities in the different towns and villages that are listening to these reflections and this Mass on their radios. It is the community of this

village or that town. In this case we have to experience this community with its joyful and sad realities. Thus it is here that I like to share with you the joys and the hopes of the community so that we might experience ourselves as this communion of life, communion of love and communion of truth. Let us draw together our experiences as the Christian people of El Salvador, as the people who may not be from El Salvador but who have identified themselves with this community and live as members of this small flock.

Notice how the Council has no illusion that this Church encompasses all peoples but rather states that many times the Church is a small group. Jesus spoke to his disciples and said: *Do not be afraid any longer, little flock* (4). This is a warm expression that Jesus used to tell the disciples that not everyone would accept the Word but that there would always be a group of people, a small group of people, and this group should rejoice because the Father wants to give them the kingdom of God (5) and they are the seed of unity and the world's salvation --- they are the hope of all people. My beloved Christian sisters and brothers, let us live as a Christian community: holy followers of Christ who are filled with hope and united in love! Let us not seek the glory of great numbers but rather let us be joined together in love and in a life that comes to us from God. We are the community that has celebrated twenty-five years of ministry of some of our priests. Twenty-five years ago three of our priests were ordained. What a beautiful harvest from our seminary San José de la Montaña! Let us also remember our beloved friend who now rejoices in the gift of eternal life, Msgr. Jorge Castro Peña who was also a member of this class. He is not able to celebrate with us but from his place in heaven he smiles upon us and feels that he is also a member of this community. In Zacatecoluca, Father Cosme Spezzotto, a Franciscan from Italy, also celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination. Yesterday in Acajutla two young men were ordained Franciscans: Oscar Arturo Gutiérrez and Marion Antonio Benítez. Next Saturday --- and may this announcement serve as an invitation --- at 11:00am in the Cathedral we are going to ordain a young man from our Archdiocese who has completed his studies in Guatemala and is going to work with us: Rafael Urrutia. Two young men from El Salvador were ordained in Spain to work with Opus Dei. These are professional men who seek to live holy lives and on other occasions we have worked with them. This holiness must be extended to the community because no one lives the Christian commitment for themselves alone. It is for this reason that we say that Christians must be the odor of holiness and the seed of unity and salvation 6).

This community that is reflecting together here is precisely the community that lives and makes this Word come alive in the various parishes and villages. I had the privilege of visiting the parish of El Carmen in Colonia Roma where we celebrated the feast of their patroness, Saint Theresa. This evening I will visit the parish of Divina Providencia in Colonia Atlacatl --- a very lively and organized community --- and meet with the parish Commission of Carítas. I also shared in the life of the Christian community in Soyapango and met with the pastoral ministers and the members of the youth group who desire to follow Christ. I have also received news from the community that gathers together in La Basílica Sagrado Corazón and who are members of the Cursillo Movement. They are studying the Pastoral letter that was written concerning the Church and popular organizations.

My sisters and brothers, because of illness I was unable to visit a number of communities that I was committed to visit but I want to extend a warm greeting to the parish of San Juan Opico where the pastoral ministers are studying our Pastoral Letter. I was also scheduled to celebrate the feast of the archangel Saint Raphael in San Rafael in Chalatenango but this was the same day that we celebrated Hospital Day and while I was unable to go to San Rafael I was able to give testimony even with my weakened health. Yes, even at the hospital I was

able to pray for the community. I was also unable to go to El Paraíso where the Betlemita Sisters were preparing an evaluation of their work with the pastoral ministers.

I could not participate in the joy of celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Father Moreno's ordination which was held in the parish of San José Guayabal. I was also unable to participate in the Corn Festival yesterday, a festival that was organized several years ago in San Antonio Los Ranchos. I did, however, send my warm greeting to the community there and pray that this product would not be lacking in any of our homes --- a product that is so basic for the nutrition of our people. I am glad that this initiative attempts to find ways to use this product in many different forms. This shows what a community can do when besides developing themselves according to the gospel they also look for ways to develop themselves materially. Last night I was scheduled to be in San Antonio Abad but again was unable to be present at this meeting where they gathered together the fruit of their reflection and their work for the missions.

As you can see there are many reasons why our community should feel alive in so many different areas. This is the community that during these days has rejoiced with our Catholic Schools because they have concluded their difficult work of teaching. Therefore with the warmth of the whole family I pray that all the teachers, men and women religious and the students will enjoy this time of vacation. Speaking about the Catholic School, we celebrated the feast of Saint Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionist Sisters who minister in El Colegio de la Divina Providencia. In La Sagrada Familia I had the joy of collecting some beautiful essays that the students wrote for their religion class. Among these works were their responses to the questionnaire on the Pastoral Letter.

I also want to share with you, my sisters and brothers, the great satisfaction that I had as I participated in a meeting with fifteen young men who graduated from the Minor Seminary. What is most beautiful is the fact that they expressed their desire to continue their studies next year at the Major Seminary. Fifteen graduates will enter philosophy in addition to some others were not in the Minor Seminary but have graduated from different high schools (public and catholic) and will enter the Major Seminary. Indeed, we have the joyful problem of not having enough space to lodge so many vocations. These young men have graduated and have open before them academic and other worldly careers but they have stated that they desire to serve the people as priests.

This community also opens its eyes to the universal situation because it knows that, despite the fact that it is living in this concrete situation and experiencing the events that I have just mentioned, yet all of these events incorporate this community as a treasure and a blessing of God into the mainstream of the universal Church. Therefore on Thursday, from the perspective of the universal Church, here in the Cathedral, our Archdiocese, with a representation of priests and women religious and laity joined together in the joy of the whole world as John Paul II began his Pontificate. I hope that you were able to see this event on television and come to know this man who is a true pastor, simple but strong in his thinking, popular, a polyglot, a wonderful man who knows how to give a true meaning to the tiara --- the triple crown that the Pope wears on the day of his coronation and that has not been used since the time of John Paul I. John Paul II knows that it is not only the Pope who must proclaim this triple meaning of the three powers of Christ: prophet, king and priest. The whole work of the Pope and the priests and all ministers is to enable all the People of God who are consecrated on the day of their baptism as prophets, priests and kings --- to enable the People of God to develop these three dimensions of their lives. All of you who are

baptized and all the communities of the Archdiocese and communities beyond the Archdiocese are a priestly people, a prophetic people and a royal people. This is your great dignity. Blessed be God that there is a Pope who knows how to take the crown off himself and place it on the people and tell them: *all of you are pontiffs, prophets and kings. It is not only the responsibility of the Pope to live this beautiful responsibility for the universal Church, but rather this is the responsibility of all those who have been baptized.* Therefore, my sisters and brothers, these events and many others that we might call to mind lead us to reflect on the Word of God.

But I want to make these following announcements before beginning my reflection. On December 3rd, the First Sunday of Advent, that is, the beginning of the Liturgical Year, we are going to put into practice what we have previously announced, namely, the sacrament of Confirmation will be conferred on those persons who have knowledge about the sacrament that they are about to receive and who have been instructed by their pastors. They will have to show some proof of this instruction. Just as children are not allowed to receive First Communion unless they have learned their catechism, so too there is a catechism for Confirmation and no one is dispensed from acquiring this knowledge. This is not some whim of ours but a respect for the dignity of the People of God, a dignity that is not lived by everyone because they have not had an adequate catechesis concerning the sacraments when they were initiated into the faith as Christians. To receive the sacrament of Baptism the parents of the child who is to be baptized must be prepared and no one is dispensed from this preparation. Even when there are priests who do not want to fulfill this obligation, Christians do not receive a favor when they are not given this preparation. On the contrary, they are renouncing a service that the Church wishes to provide for them. I therefore ask all the priests to take seriously this obligation of providing adequate formation before baptizing. You must demand the preparation of those who are going to be responsible for educating their children in the faith --- children who are not aware of their own baptism.

This community that desires to live more intensely its life of faith and its sacramental life --- this community is presented to us in today's three readings as a communion of life, of charity and of truth. These are my three thoughts.

Communion of life

Communion of life. We find an example of this in today's second reading as Saint Paul writes to the community of the Thessalonians. In Thessalonica, Saint Paul encountered difficulties that arose everywhere he traveled. The Jewish community was his worst adversary but their complaint also was echoed by the Gentile community. This latter community that embraced the preaching of Saint Paul and his collaborators, Timothy and Silvanus, is referred to in the Acts of the Apostles where the difficulties and the cost of being a true community of life is spoken about.

I am going to read some words from the Acts of the Apostles so that you can see that what is occurring here in our Christian communities in the Archdiocese is the same story as always. The community of the Thessalonians was formed some twenty years after the ascension of the Lord. The letters that were written to the Thessalonians are the first writings of the New Testament. We might say that this community was a relatively new community. Remember what occurred here twenty years ago --- we would be speaking about the year 1958. Many people could remember some of the events that occurred that year. The same happened in Thessalonica, that is, many people remembered that the apostles lived and they

had heard about the events surrounding Jesus, the Son of God who became man, who died on the cross and rose again --- they had heard that if they believed in Jesus then salvation could be obtained.

Even though the Jewish community experienced these events that took place in Jerusalem, they did not understand the meaning of all this. Indeed, it was only a small number from this community that followed Jesus and his teaching. It was for this reason that the Apostles decided to leave the territory of the Jewish people and preach in other places where the people were waiting to hear the Good News. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Jews *became jealous and recruited some worthless men loitering in the public square, formed a mob, and set the city in turmoil* (7). The apostles went to the house of Jason, a recent convert to Christianity, who offered them lodging because the people in the synagogue, that is, the official place where Paul began to preach to the Jews, did not want to receive Paul any longer: *in this hermitage, in this synagogue, you are no longer welcome. Here we the officials, we are Jews and your doctrine is against our order.*

Does this not seem to be similar to that which is occurring in some of our hermitages that have been taken over by others who have not allowed the presence of Christians? My sisters and brothers, is there not a similarity here? Then Paul, with a group of Christians, goes to the house of a friend, Jason. The authorities come to Jason's house and bring them before the people. In the presence of the magistrates they cried out: *These people who have been creating a disturbance all over the world have now come here... they act in opposition to the decrees of Caesar and claim instead that there is another king, Jesus* (8). My sisters and brothers, what do you think of all of this? Now we say that people are subversive and act against the legitimate authorities. These people must be sent to jail. It is not strange, my beloved Christians, that the history of our communities is the history of persecution. Persecution has always arisen whenever we have proclaimed that Jesus is the true King, whenever we have proclaimed his gospel as the only word of salvation, and whenever in light of the Word of God we have denounced the abuses of the powerful people of this world.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that they were taken to prison *but took a surety payment from Jason and the others before releasing them* (9). In his letter to the Thessalonians, in the words that you have just heard, Saint Paul praises the people of this community: *you have not allowed yourselves to be overcome by these difficulties and from your community the word of the Lord has resonated throughout the world. You have believed in the living God* (10). See, they became a community of life. This is the Church, a communion of life. Indeed we are motivated to come together in this Cathedral and in our churches and in so many other meetings because we remember a person who has not died but who lives. How unfortunate to encounter those Christians who believe that their religion is a museum of memories and only want to preserve these memories and do not want to place themselves in any danger! No, my sisters and brothers, the Church is a communion of life and must confront the life of the present age. The Church is life and her laws, dogmas and beliefs ought to become life. There are people who do not want to accept the religion of an eternal, living Christ who will never die again, the religion of a living God who has bought the people by his death and who in the first reading tells us: *do not act unjustly because if the poor and the victims of usury and unjust loans cry out to heaven I will listen to them. I am the living God* (11).

Our religion is life. This is a beautiful truth that I want to remind you of. I want to recall it to you with gratitude to God, because the preaching of religion as life is what has given

resurrection and life to many who are dead in faith. It is worthwhile to believe; it is worthwhile to come to Mass on Sunday and nourish oneself there on the words of life, not because so-and-so speaks these words, but because those words come from Christ, the one whose life is beyond comparison. Courage, my dear friends! I know that for many the hour of testing has come, and they have fled as cowards; catechists, celebrants of the Word, people who shared with us the joys of our meetings --- these people have been frightened. People we thought were strong are frightened because they have forgotten that there is a religion of life and, as life, it must clash with the life that is not God's life but exists as the kingdom of darkness and of sin in the world.

Hopefully, my sisters and brothers, this invitation that is extended to us today by the Word of God and the example of the community of the Thessalonians will come alive among us. I know that many are once again beginning to reflect on the Sacred Scriptures and I invite the base communities of faith to take as a theme for their reflection this history of the community of the Thessalonians. There you will see that history continues to repeat itself.

Communion of truth

A second aspect of the Church's communion is the communion of truth. It is beautiful to realize that our Christian faith is the truth. No one person can say that they possess the whole truth. No person is infallible. Yet when people believe in the One who is the source of the truth and hand themselves over to this truth then they become people of truth. These persons have the truth even if they do not completely understand the truth but because they have accepted the truth and because they handed themselves over to this truth they are people of faith and of the truth. I want everyone who is listening to me to become people of faith so that Saint Paul could also speak to you the words he spoke to the Thessalonians: *your faith in God has been spoken about by many people and we have no need to explain things any further because these people have spoken to us about the details of our visit, spoken about the way in which you have turned away from idols and returned to God in order to serve the living and true God. They speak to us about the way in which you live and await the return of the Son of God who will free you from future punishment* (12).

A Christian community is evangelized in order to evangelize. A light is lit in order to give light. Jesus said: a candle is not to be put under a bushel. It is lit and put on high in order to give light (13). That is what a true community is like. A community is a group of women and men who have found the truth in Christ and in his gospel and who follow the truth and join together to follow the light more intensely. It is not just an individual conversion, but a community conversion. It is a family that believes, a group that accepts God. In the group, each one finds that the sisters and the brothers are a source of strength and in moments of weakness they help one another and by loving one another and believing they give light and example. The preacher no longer needs to preach, for there are Christians who preach by their own lives.

I said once and I repeat today that if unfortunately some day they silence our radio and they do not let us write our newspaper, then each of you who believe must become a microphone, a radio station, and a loud speaker --- not to talk, but to call people to the truth. I am not afraid that our faith may depend only on the archbishop's preaching --- I do not think that I am that important. I believe that this message, which is a humble echo of God's word, enters your heart, not because it is my word, but because this word comes from God. All those people of good will, women and men, families, communities are giving life to this word

and because of that fact are also preaching the Word. I have the great joy of speaking to you the same words that Saint Paul spoke to the Thessalonians but there would not be enough time in the day to tell you about all the good things that you are doing. If we were to change the name of the Thessalonians to the name of the towns of villages where you live, then it would be you, the men and women of these places, who are bringing this preaching to your concrete situations. You do not have a blind faith but rather there is content to your faith. You have made great effort to inform yourselves about this content that is summarized by Saint Paul in the following words: *You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath* (15).

The content of your faith is the following: first, it is monotheistic, that is, we have renounced all idols in order to believe in the one God; second, it is Christological, that is, the Son of God became man, is called Jesus and we believe in this Jesus who died and rose for all people; third, it is eschatological, that is, our faith leads us to something that is beyond this earth for there is a hope that this Son of God lives in eternity and will come again to judge the living and the dead. Sinners, who have not made a decision to change their ways and accept the truth in this world, will be definitively condemned when they hear the words: *Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire* (16). In summary form this is the content of our faith: the Church is a community of truth and these are the great truths of our faith --- to believe in the one true God and in light of this true God to renounce all false powers.

Remember last week when John Paul II spoke about the power of the tiara which is the power of Christ and which the whole People of God must proclaim to the world: *Do not be afraid to open the doors to this power of Christ. Open the economy, society and politics to the doors of this power*³. Do not say that the Pope is not talking about politics. He has said that we must open the area of politics to the doors of this power because Christ is going to preach to the politicians about the kingdom of God. If politicians do not act in this way then politics becomes a tragic drama of the wolf against humankind. Only Christ can give a human meaning to the relationship between capital and work. Only Christ can give a sense of understanding to human relationships. Now that the time has come in which the harvests of our fields ought to bring happiness to all those persons who have been born in this land, we ask that these products be distributed with the equality and justice that God has intended. We ask that the Christian meaning that we have heard proclaimed in the first reading regarding the privileged and the poor be applied to this situation.

Two years ago, the present Pope was called by Paul VI to preach a retreat to the Curia at the Vatican. Cardinal Woytila then wrote a book that his companion in the episcopacy, the Cardinal of Poland, has recently presented to the public. In one of the reflections that Cardinal Woytila presented to Paul VI and all the cardinals of the Roman Curia he stated: *In the world there is certainly a great charge of faith --- this text came to my mind because we are talking about the Church as a community of faith --- a considerable margin of freedom for the mission of the Church: though often it is a question only of a margin. It is enough to observe the principal tendencies that prevail in the media of social communication, it is enough to pay attention to what is happening in silence or to what people are talking about aloud, it is enough to listen to what arouses most opposition, to see that even where Christ is accepted, he is, at the same time, opposed as regards the full truth about his Person, his mission and his gospel. People would like to "model" him, to adapt him to the dimension of the man of the age of progress and to the program of modern civilization, which is a consumer program and not one of transcendental ends. People oppose him from those*

*positions and cannot bear the truth that is proclaimed and recalled in his name. This opposition to Christ, which goes hand in hand with lip service to him, comes also from those who call themselves his disciples; it is a particular symptom of the times in which we are living*⁴

These are the thoughts of the present Pope. When one wants to refer to an attitude of anti-Marxist as though this was inspired by Christianity, it should not be forgotten that there are many people who are anti-Marxist and have no fear of Marxism but are really afraid of losing their power. They proclaim themselves to be Christians and say: *yes, look, here is the marginalization of freedom*. Yes, the Cardinal spoke about this marginalization of freedom and truly it is a marginalization because what do these people consider central to their lives? They consider the press, the television and laws as central and thus these realities are not simply on the margin but have become that which is central and as a result Christ is given no consideration here. Thus we have consumerism and selfishness. Indeed it is clear that some people who call themselves Christians are living lives that are far from the Christian reality. They cannot call themselves Christians when they give Christ and his Church only a margin of faith and freedom --- like a page that is written on and only a margin of space is provided.

Cardinal Woytila, who has also lived in other circumstances, continued his meditation with the following words: *This is not, however, the only form of contradiction with regard to Christ. Alongside it (which, moreover, presents many variations and nuances and can be called "indirect contradiction") --- note these words --- there is another form, which probably springs from the same historical basis*⁵. Who is at fault for the triumph of communism? Those who are anti-Marxist often play into the hands of communism. The Pope has already stated that this opposition to Christ is sometimes the result of communism but the origin of this opposition is rooted in the selfishness of Christians.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council have stated: *taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion* (17). If communism is atheism then --- and do not be surprised here --- capitalism is a form of practical atheism and if this system marginalizes faith, it is a marginalization and nothing else. But more important are the words of the Pope. He speaks of this historical form of opposition to Christ and states that in great part this results from the false Christianity of those who defend their selfishness more than Christ and so the Cardinal says: *this is a form of direct opposition to Christ* (*L'Osservatore Romano*, November 9, 1978, p.8). You can see that the Church is not communist because the Cardinal himself lived in a communist environment. I am saying the same thing and speaking from the perspective of the demands of the Church's social justice: I state again that communism is a form of direct opposition to Christ, an open rejection of the Gospel and a denial of God's truth which the Gospel proclaims about humankind and about the world in which the Gospel must be proclaimed. At times this rejection takes on brutal forms. It is often asked: where does one find the most brutal forms of opposition? I know that there are countries where the doors of all the churches of every faith are closed and where priests are condemned to death because they administer the sacrament of Baptism. Also in our own situation, priests are killed because they have preached social justice. What difference is there between previous eras and our present situation? Perhaps in those lands of former

persecution there are still remains of the ancient catacombs and the circus where the followers of Christ were thrown to the beasts to be devoured by them. Nevertheless, the present persecution, that which has been customary during these years of the twentieth century, offers us a completely distinct panorama from the persecution of previous times and as a result has a distinct meaning⁶.

Communion of faith

The reflection of Cardinal Woytila is beautiful and these two thoughts are sufficient so that you, my dear sisters and brothers, can see that if our Church --- and this is the conclusion --- if our Church is a communion of faith then do not allow yourselves to be deceived by restrictions that certain systems that present themselves as protectors of the Church wish to impose on our faith and freedom. If we are truly a communion of faith we should not be content until we do experience this faith as life and are able to bring this faith into the different aspects of our life without any fear whatsoever. Cardinal Woytila reminds us of the times of the catacombs and the times of the circus --- the times of the martyrs. He also reminds us (for he has experienced this in his very flesh) of the chains of Marxism and we are living the chains and tortures of the capitalist system. What is important is that in each and every economic system the faith of Christ is the torch that gives serenity, courage, and hope to this present life.

Communion of Charity

Finally let us speak about the Church as a communion of charity. I have left this for my final point because the readings speak for themselves. The first reading from the book of Exodus is from the book of the Covenant where God is dealing with women and men of the Covenant: *I shall be your God and you shall be my people*(18). Like every covenant, however, there are conditions. A series of laws follows and you are able to read these laws in the chapters of the book of Exodus. In today's reading we are presented with a series of social laws: *You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry* (19). What powerful arguments!

Christ sees everything that is done to poor people. How deeply was I afflicted when I heard about the poor widow of the watchman at the University who tried to save her husband! She and her children watched as this man was cut and slashed with machetes. She hoped that he would be found alive in some part of our country and suddenly she was told: *his body was buried in Suchitoto*. It is the cries of these widows and orphans that rise up to our God and God is not deaf: *My wrath will flare up, and will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows and your children orphans* (20). The Bible is a great book! If you lend money, do not act like an extortioner (21). I know of a recent case where a loan of five thousand pesos became a debt of thirty-five thousand pesos and the house of this poor man and his nine children was taken as payment of the debt.

My sisters and brothers, this is not the community of charity that we should be living. In Jesus' time the people had to deal with a very complicated series of laws that had been invented by Pharisees --- the commentaries state that the legal system had become so complicated that people were given 613 laws: 248 were positive and 365 imposed prohibitions on the people. This explains why the experts in the law drew near to Christ during this time when the last battle was being waged, a battle that would lead to the

establishment of his kingdom as a result of his crucifixion and death. Thus we find Jesus in the last week of life, in the portico of the Temple. The Pharisees test Jesus with very dangerous questions such as the one we heard last week (but there was not enough time to comment on this question because it was Mission Sunday): *is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?* (22). Now Jesus is asked another question: *Considering all of these six hundred and thirteen laws, which commandment in the law is the greatest?* (23).

Difficult, right! He has to select the greatest law from six hundred and thirteen laws. It was for this reason that the Pharisees could only divide the law into laws of greater or lesser importance. Yet Jesus categorically states: *This is the greatest and the first commandment on which the whole revelation of God rests. You have so distorted the Lord's revelation that you no longer understand that you have made human laws instead of divine laws. Forget about all these difficulties that you have created and focus on that which is primary for the greatest commandment is the following: You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (24).

My sisters and brothers, the uniqueness of Jesus' words is that he did not refer to those words that every Jewish person prayed as a profession of faith in the *shema*. This is a Hebrew word and means *hear*. The prayer begins with the words: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!* (25). Thus in this famous text of the *shema* Christ calls to mind the fact that God is primary. In this aspect Jesus is like every other Jewish person for he has reminded people about the words of the Bible.

But there is also a uniqueness in his words --- and we should not forget this --- together with this law of great importance, *you shall love God*, he places on an equal level the second law: *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*. This is also the uniqueness of Christianity. The same realities that motivate one to love God should also motivate one to love the neighbor. This is the unique characteristic of the gospel and for this reason we speak of a new commandment when Jesus bids farewell to his disciples: *love one another as I have loved you* (26). Jesus not only loved the Father with his whole heart but because of his love for the Father he also loved all people and offered his life for the whole world. My sisters and brothers, this is the uniqueness of our faith and yet at the same time it is very easy. In fact it seems contradictory to say that one is going to the Church to love God and then say that my neighbor is not very important. Here we should remember the parable of the Good Samaritan (27) in which the priest and the Levite --- God's ministers --- did not fulfill their obligation because they had to go to the Temple to pray. They passed by and left the wounded man on the side of the road and Jesus says that these persons did not act as neighbor toward the wounded man.

Events of the week

My sisters and brothers, in this environment of a community of love, I want to refer to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Indeed, we find ourselves in a situation where there is a great lack of love. I have heard that this past week there were numerous cases of torture in order to force confessions from certain individuals. Several prisoners have been brought before the courts because of violations of the Law of Public Order and they have appeared in court with horrible signs of torture: electric shock, bruised bodies, etc. Even more shameful are the immoral situations in which women are stripped of all their clothing. It is sad to see the state in which certain people come before the court --- almost dragging

themselves into the court. The doctors in the court have confirmed the physical states of these prisoners.

Since August 19th, Isabel Rodríguez Barrera has been recovering in Rosales Hospital and been guarded by the National Police. His case has not been presented to any court and we are concerned about his situation.

There have been many cases of abduction and many persons imprisoned and all of these remain a mystery. Recently one of the communities has asked me to denounce the capture of Neftalí Gutiérrez, Evangelina Galdámez, and José Salvador Menjivar. My sisters and brothers, what we ask for here --- and we have said this repeatedly --- is that these individuals be brought before the courts and if they are guilty then they should be punished according to the law. No one, however, has the right to punish another with torture. It is impossible to call to mind all the cases of people who have been captured and disappeared and what is even sadder is the fact that these cases are becoming normal and people are becoming accustomed to hear about all of this. The victims of this abuse are frightened and not able to speak for themselves. They have been horribly threatened!

I also want to remind you that this is the time in which the salaries of the *campesinos* should be reviewed. It seems that not much importance has been given to the fact that the Department of Labor has decreed an increase of fifty cents to the workers who harvest coffee and cotton⁷. In our weekly publication *Orientación*⁸ we have analyzed that this paltry increase is not in accord with the inflation rate that burdens our people. The fact is that today the *campesinos* who are working have less ability to satisfy their basic needs even when this increase is taken into consideration --- an increase that is in no way equivalent to what is just.

I understand and have spoken with those persons who cultivate sugar-cane and other crops and they have good reasons. But I say that there is an authority and a system that must create a situation of order. There is a moral obligation that the products of our land should be made available in such a way that the well-being of everyone is considered. It is God's will that these products be distributed more equally. People are not communist when they ask others to listen to the voice of the *campesinos*. We are simply asking that just as those who produce the products of our land are able to organize and have their voices heard, so, too, those who collaborate in this process by harvesting these crops should also be heard.

We are also saddened by the continuation of the labor conflicts. When workers desire to organize themselves there immediately arises repression and the firing of workers from their jobs. In this way workers are unable to organize themselves and yet on numerous occasions the Popes have spoken about this right of workers.

My sisters and brothers, today in our prayer as a community we are going to remember the situation in Nicaragua. It seems that a pessimistic attitude is spreading because the international interventions do not respond to the needs of the people. On our part, I want to thank you for the generous donation of 6,000 colones that we are going to give to the Archbishop of Managua, Archbishop Obrando Bravo. I ask you to continue to help the people of Nicaragua because when people are suffering it is necessary for us to help them.

We also express our solidarity to our sister republic of Guatemala during this time when terrorism, through an organization called the Secret Anti-Communist Army, has made very dangerous threats that are now beginning to become reality.

This morning we also join our prayers to those of the Pope and remember the Middle East --- may peace, which is truly a desire of the Church, be established in the world.

A community of life, a community of faith, a community of love and charity. Let us not separate ourselves from this community because this is the Church. From the perspective of her life, her charity, and her faith the Church cannot ignore so many injustices. Precisely because the Church is a community of life, faith and love of God who demands proof of this love --- love and justice must become a reality in all our relationships --- the Church must raise her voice and make demands even though this might be repugnant to many people. The Church cannot place her trust in the powers of this earth and therefore she immediately draws near to the altar of Jesus Christ. For there on the altar we find Jesus Christ and the eternal life in which we believe and which we live. We place our hope in Jesus Christ and it is for this reason that we come here to celebrate the Mass.

Let us draw near to the altar of the Lord!

¹ The reference is incorrect in the UCA edition of the sermons. The corrected reference is given here.

² On Saturday 21 October 1978 Mons. Romero was interned in the Hospital de Emergencia y Diagnóstico in El Salvador and remained there till 23 October. See *Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, su diario*, Arzobispado de San Salvador, 2000, pp. 61-62.

³ See Homily of John Paul II in the official inauguration of his Pontificate (22 October 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 October 1978.

⁴ Writings of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 1978.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See *Diario de Hoy*, 24 October 1978.

⁸ See "aceleran proceso de pauperización campesina", *Orientación*, 29 October 1978.

Marginal References (1) LG 9: (2) Mt 5,13-16: (3) LG 9: (4) Lk 12,32^a: (5) Lk 12,32b: (6) 2Cor 2,15: (7) Ac 17,5: (8) Ac 17,6-7: (9) Ac 17,9: (10) 1Th 1,8-9: (11) Ex 22,26: (12) 1Th 1,8-10: (13) Mt 5,15: (14) 1Th 1,8: (15) 1Th 1,9-10: (16) Mt 25,41: (17) GS 19: (18) Lk 26,12: (19) Ex 22,20-22: (20) Ex 22,23: (21) Ex 22,24: (22) Mt 22,17: (23) Mt 22,36: (24) Mt 22,37-39: (25) Dt 6,4: (26) Jn 13,34: (27) Lk 10,29-37.