

A HOLY CHURCH IN NEED OF PURIFICATION

**Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 5, 1978**

Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10

I Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

Matthew 23:1-12

My dear sisters and brothers.

The twenty-third chapter of Saint Matthew's gospel is a model homily. It is a powerful denunciation of official religion and the abuses and vanities that surround religion. The gospel demands authenticity. Remember that according to the outline that we have been studying throughout this year, these final Sundays of the Liturgical Year place Jesus in the midst of a crisis that the Kingdom of God must confront before it is established: opposition, evil interpretation, slander, and a refusal to understand.

In the twenty-third chapter of Saint Matthew's gospel we discover not only some biographical characteristics of Jesus but also a reflection of the primitive community on the teachings of Christ and how the Judeo-Christian community lived these teachings. The majority of the members of this community were Jews who had converted to Christianity and who felt themselves surrounded by other Jewish people, authentic followers of Judaism and proselytes who had been won over to Judaism --- these converts were more fanatical than the Jews themselves and viewed the Christians as renegades. If we were to use today's terminology then the Christians would be viewed as subversives. The Christian community reflected on this subversive following of Christ --- and you know there is nothing subversive about following Christ, rather there is an obligation to follow the Lord.

Let us also remember another event which is presented to us in today's gospel in a most tragic form. In the year 70 of the Christian era, during those formative years of Christianity, the Romans surrounded Jerusalem and conquered it. This was a great catastrophe --- so much so that in Judea, its capital, people experienced the wrath of God because they had not listened to God's messenger, to the Messiah who had come. We will hear in today's gospel the story of the bloodshed of the prophets; we will hear of many persecutions and crimes during this time of pain and hunger and bloodshed, during this time of the sacking and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Keeping all of this in mind, we can also see some good here in El Salvador especially today, November 5th, when our nation remembers the first cries of independence --- we might say the first cries of childbirth because true freedom has not yet become a reality. We heard in today's gospel the words: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling!* (1). We heard an echo of these words fifteen days ago on television when we listened to the Pope speak in Saint Peter's Square. The Pope,

who comes from an area that has sealed off the entrance of Christ, looked toward the world of the West where in the name of Christianity the entrance of Christ has also been sealed off but done so under the guise of capitalism which is also a form of atheism. The Pope said: *Open the doors and do not be afraid, for Christ has the words of eternal life!*

My dear sisters and brothers, I want to give to today's homily a title that is perhaps bold, some might say almost sacrilegious. Yet the Vatican Council speaks about this reality of a holy Church in need of purification. In the dogmatic constitution on the Church we read: *While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin, but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal* (2). For me this is a beautiful statement of the Council. We would be very mistaken to think that the greatest institution in the world is the Church. Unfortunately, many view the Church in this way. They see the Church as incapable of sin, immaculate and untouchable. The Council has stated that this is not so because within the Church there are sinners. Bishops, priests, religious, and married people who call themselves Christian, are sinners and in need of purification. The true path is that of penance and renewal. Woe to the Christian, the bishop and priest who feels they are so perfect that they can scold others just like those who are going to try to correct Jesus now.

In this homily which is entitled, the holy Church in need of purification, I will present, as usual, three points: first, the sins of the Church, second, the holiness of the Church --- the example of which is presented to us by Saint Paul in the second reading, third, where is the source of holiness for a sinful Church that desires holiness? [the source is found in the words that Saint Paul speaks to us: *in receiving the Word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the Word of God* (3) --- in this lies the secret].

The Sins of the Church

Let us focus on my first thought: the sins of the Church. Today's first reading, which is always parallel to the gospel, is taken from the prophet Malachi and with what frankness!

It refers to the restructuring of the Temple cult in Jerusalem, to a time when there was a certain well-being among the people. Many times this well-being can result in evil: well-being in the Church can lead to a certain relaxation, priests feel well in their parishes --- be very careful! Christians who do not feel disturbed by the Gospel --- be very careful! The state of well-being in worship that does not lead one to commitment is spoken about by the prophet Malachi: *And now, O priests, this commandment is for you ... you have turned away from the way and have caused many to falter by your instruction ... therefore I have made you contemptible and base before all the people* (4). There is nothing worse than an evil priest. Jesus said: *if the salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot* (5). How sad are the words of a priest when he has lost his credibility --- that priest has become *a sounding gong or a clashing cymbal* (6).

Because the priests had turned aside from the way and looked on the appearances of people before applying the law (7)--- this is Mr. so-and-so and Mrs. so-and-so, how happy to meet you. But if the person is some poor person then that individual is ignored. The Church of the poor is a criterion of her authenticity. The Church is not a Church of classes and I am not saying the Church despises the rich, but if the rich do not become poor in spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The true preacher of Christ is the Church of the poor

who finds in the midst of poverty and misery, in the midst of the hope of those who pray in their shacks, in the mist of those who suffer and are not heard --- the Church finds in these situation a God who listens and draws near to these voices so that she might also experience God. You looked on the appearances of people before applying the law (8). The *campesino* says it very well: *the law is like a snake, it bites only those who are barefooted.*

Besides this prophecy, today's gospel is even more powerful. I do not want to comment on just those verses that were read today, but I have brought my Bible here because the entire twenty-third chapter is a powerful denunciation that is made by the first Christian community that reflected on the teaching that Jesus had left them. In the official passage that was read today we find the following sins of the Church.

Jesus said: *the scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all the things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example* (9). The first sin of the Church is this contradiction between what she teaches and what she does. My sisters and brothers, in March of last year the bishops in an official statement wrote these words: *Everyone who denounces another must also be willing to be denounced*² ... and this Sunday our turn has arrived. Today during our reflection as a community and with all honesty, I am inviting all of us, a prophetic people who are obliged to denounce the injustices of the world --- I invite all of us, pastors and faithful, to look at ourselves and see if our denunciation is hypocritical --- do we say one thing and then act in another way?

Another sin that is spoken about in today's reading is the following: *They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them* (10). This is the sin that results from a rigorous, almost inhuman, interpretation. Many moralists and some confessors and counselors find it easy to impose burdens but they themselves are not willing to bear the same burdens.

Another more frightening and more frequent sin among ecclesiastics is vanity and hypocrisy. *All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels* (11). Phylacteries were cords that were tied to little boxes which contained parts of the law --- this was done in order to fulfill a command of the Lord: *keep my law before your eyes*. These words, however, were understood in a physical manner and so they copied a section of the law and put this into little boxes that were tied around their necks, thus enabling them to have the law before their eyes (12). These individuals also lengthened the tassels on their cloaks --- the garments that were worn by the Pharisees as they walked in the plazas (13). The length of their tassels signified the majesty of their sacred power and their wisdom. All of this is vanity. Thanks be to God the modern Popes have renounced the tiara, the long capes and many other pompous customs that created so much vanity and evil among ecclesiastics.

Jesus refers to a religion of ostentation, a religion in which certain individuals liked to be greeted by the people (14). According to a custom of the East if a person was of a high rank then the greeting extended to that person was longer. Thus people engaged in lengthy greetings in order to appear important. Jesus says: *do not be called "Rabbi." You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called "Master"; you have but one master, the Messiah* (15).

My sisters and brothers, what a beautiful ecclesiastical reflection! Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus said that we often become confused about the title that we give to the Church's prelates: your excellency, your eminence, and we do not understand that so often all of this appears to be nothing more than foolishness: excellency, eminence. How much more beautiful is the simple name of Christian. We may feel that we have inherited these titles but today the gospel lashes out against us. With Christian honesty, I ask all of you, and include myself here, to allow ourselves to be converted by this powerful diatribe of our Lord Jesus Christ. *The greatest among you must be your servant* (16). This is the beginning and in this consists the greatness of an individual. The greater an individual is the more authority a person has --- none of this should be manifested by phylacteries or tassels or garments. Greatness and authority should be demonstrated by service and simplicity --- by being the first to offer oneself. Those to whom God has given authority have also received the grace to serve people and therefore should not abuse or insult or place burdens upon people --- rather they should help people through their humble service.

My sisters and brothers, after these verses that have been proclaimed in the gospel, Jesus utters seven powerful threats (17). I do not want us to forget these verses but rather I want us to pray so that we do not fall victim to these curses of the Lord: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter* (18). Here Jesus refers to the fact that the Jews closed their synagogues to and expelled those who became Christians. They were seen as renegades and it is for this reason that Jesus says: *Because you rejected Christ you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven for the doors of heaven will be closed to those who desire to enter. You have the key of knowledge and you know the law very well but have not known how to interpret Christ who is the fulfillment of the law.* Let us not trust in our theological wisdom or our knowledge of religion for if we lack the humility and grace that enables us to accept Christ then none of this is of any value --- not even our knowledge of the law.

Second: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves* (19). In the early years of Christianity the Jews traveled to many different areas seeking converts --- something similar to our Protestant sisters and brothers who seek proselytes --- and when they found one they made them more fanatical than themselves. These new converts hated the Christians even more and it is for this reason that Jesus says that they have made them children of Gehenna twice as much as themselves. What does it profit one to gain a convert and then lose salvation?

Third: *Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "if one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated." Blind fools, which is greater, the gold or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, "If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated." You blind ones, which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it* (20). It was common among the Pharisees and the scribes to consider many, many options, but these were cases that were invented by them in order to escape any type of commitment. Jesus refers to this when he told them that they had invented formulas but not focused on the intention of the one who uttered the formula: did that person really swear or

not? If the person has made a promise and swore to it, then the person is obliged. Let us not look for ways to avoid the commitments that we have contracted with God.

The fourth curse of the Lord: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the other* (21). There was a law that demanded the payment of tithes for the good things that God had given to the earth. There were, however, these people who were concerned about every small detail of the law, paying tithes of cumin and mint, but they forgot about that which we spoke about last Sunday, that which is most important in the law. Therefore Jesus uses this powerful comparison: *blind guides, you strain out the gnat and swallow the camel* (22). The camel, the largest animal that was known in Palestine, is a sign of the hypocrisy of those who focus on the mosquito and do not notice the camel. This is the hypocrisy that Jesus is speaking against when he says: *blind guides, you strain out the gnat and swallow the camel*.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside you are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean (23). What a beautiful comparison! So many wonderful decorations but filled with plunder and self-indulgence. How amusing is society when people clothed in cashmere and silk greet one another with courtesy, yet inside these people are stealing from one another. How beautiful are our offices and bureaucracy and the tables in our courts yet in these same courts stands a man who has been tortured by the National Guard and now he is forced to repeat the words he spoke while being tortured because the judge is incapable of telling the officers to leave the courtroom so that this poor man can speak the truth! How beautiful are the facades of our jails and prisons but within these places those who have been able to escape these hells that are worse than tombs tell us about other who are now dying as persons who have disappeared!

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, "if we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood." Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets (24). What a profound reflection of Jesus! What value is there in singing the praises of the prophets who were murdered by our grandparents, especially if the grandchildren continue to kill the prophets? It is for this reason that Jesus does not refer to the past but to the present time in which he himself has become the target of the people's hatred. He says: *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?* (25). *How can you flee from the judgment* is a powerful expression of the prophets which when spoken by Jesus means: I am the Christ who is speaking with you. You are plotting to crucify me and this act will culminate in a sea of blood and crime and hypocrisy and grief. You serpents, you brood of vipers, the culmination of your iniquity and injustice is at hand!

Jesus then refers to the history of the New Testament, a history that is familiar to all of us and he says: *Therefore, behold, I send you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that there may come upon you all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the righteous blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Amen, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation* (26). The year 70AD was drawing near and the Romans were planning the siege of Jerusalem --- the

culmination of the ingratitude of people who did not want to receive those individuals who were sent by God. The greatest of these, the very Son of God who became man and proclaimed love and justice and freedom, was not understood. He was also killed but now the hour of vengeance draws near.

My sisters and brothers, God is infinitely good but also infinitely just and all this bloodshed and criminal activity, all this hypocrisy --- and here from the beginning I have told you that I am not simply referring to the denunciation of those events that take place outside the Church but I am speaking about the denunciation of those intimate events that involve us as members of the Church. Here I am also speaking about the iniquity of ourselves as pastors, the hypocrisy of the priests, our lack of holiness and our failure to live lives that are consecrated to God. Here I speak about the lack of fidelity in so many Christian marriages and adultery. Here I speak about so many young people who do not live lives of purity --- lives that God asks them to live. Here I speak about a society that has established so many houses of prostitution, so many centers where different forms of vice are everyday occurrences. Here I am speaking about so many appearances --- and all of this cannot remain the way it is for this would imply that God was blind and unjust. The day of the Lord's justice will come. Jesus tells us that it will definitely come.

Then the year 70AD arrived, a year which would give the people of Jerusalem an example of God's punishment. The historian, Flavius Josephus, wrote about these events and stated that there were not enough trees in the surrounding areas of Jerusalem --- trees that had to be cut and then used for crucifixion. Within Jerusalem, mothers ate their own children, there was no food or water and people died of hunger while the living appeared to be walking skeletons³. My sisters and brothers, God will also free us from all of the events that are occurring in our midst. Hopefully we will listen on time to the merciful call that concludes the twenty-third chapter of Saint Matthew's gospel: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold your house will be abandoned, desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (27).*

Look at how Jesus, despite his anger, is always merciful. Recently we were studying Saint Paul's letter to the Romans and reflected on God's plan (28). Because the Jews rejected God's message, the apostles preached to the Gentiles who received their message. Then, the Jews, when they see that the One whom they despised has become great throughout the world, will return, humble and converted. Jesus announced this sign when he said: *I am going and you will no longer see me; you will no longer be the Chosen People. God has exhausted all the possibilities that a Father could do and you have not heeded him --- now your house will be abandoned, desolate* (an adaptation of Matthew 23:37-39). How sad to see a house that has been abandoned and is desolate! How sad when people who have lived far away return to their homeland and cannot find their parents, brothers, sisters or friends but discover the house of their childhood in ruins --- the house where there once was great joy no longer exists. This is the comparison that Jesus uses when he says: *behold your house will be abandoned, desolate.*

At the present time when one visits Jerusalem and sees the esplanade of the Temple --- how sad! There one sees what is called the Wailing Wall where the Jews cry over what was once the Temple. Now the Temple has become nothing but an empty esplanade --- *behold your house will be abandoned, desolate* (Matthew 23:38). The scene that we have just

witnessed during these days of the election of the Pope, the spiritual head of the world, should have taken place in Jerusalem --- this is what God desired. But everything there had been abandoned and become desolate and so we went to another place.

My sisters and brothers, this not only occurs in Jerusalem. This community that is reflecting on history and the plan of God must admit that human beings have made a failure of God's plan. Let us not simply focus on the community where Saint Matthew is writing this tragic chapter but let us focus on our own situation. Let us focus on ourselves who are present here in the Cathedral or listening to this message on the radio --- each day I become more comforted to know that through the use of the radio this reflection is being heard in so many towns and villages, by so many people on their sick beds, in so many prisons, by so many people who are suffering, and by so many people who are directly hearing the cry of Jesus: *hypocrites, change your ways!* May all of us who are participating in this reflection feel that we are the ones who are listening to Jesus say: *I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (29).*

Life of the Church

My beloved sisters and brothers, the community that is participating in this reflection is a real community of women and men and I am pleased to be able to call to mind some concrete events. First, we remember the joy that was experienced here in the Cathedral yesterday as we ordained a young man, Rafael Urrutia, in the midst of a great celebration of the People of God. He is celebrating his first Mass in the diocese of Santa Anna. I want to greet you, the People of God, because the priests from the seminary in Guatemala where Rafael was educated accompanied us at the ordination ceremony and spoke about the participation of the laity in the liturgy. It was truly a beautiful ceremony not only because of the imposition of hands upon a man who was consecrated to God but because all the people participated in this ceremony with faith and prayer and at certain moments with applause and in this way celebrated the gift of priesthood.

This community also rejoices because of the fifty years of religious life of Father Juan Platero. He is a Jesuit priest who has dedicated his life to ministry in the seminary and at the present time he is ministering in the parish of Guadalupe in San Vicente. Tomorrow at noon we will celebrate his golden anniversary in the parish church of El Carmen in Santa Tecla and we invite everyone to participate in this celebration.

This community that desires to reflect in a serious and sincere way on their service to the world is organizing during these weeks a time of retreat for the clergy. This morning, in the Novitiate of the Somascan Fathers, several priests will begin this time of retreat that will be directed by Father Jesus Delgado. This week is a time of reflection so that these men, as we heard in this morning's gospel, might be authentic pastors of the people. Father Delgado has asked me to advise all the priests who are participating in the retreat that the theme of the retreat will be focused on "Priestly Identity". He has also asked me to tell all the priests to bring their Bibles and a copy of the Documents of Vatican II, so please do not forget to bring these important documents with you. In the parish El Carmen in La Colonia Roma there will be a change in pastors because the present pastor, Father Enrique, has to return to Mexico.

This community of the Archdiocese has rejoiced greatly with our religious. On November 1st, the feast of All Saints, I was very pleased that the religious from throughout our country gathered together in Ayagualo. They spent time together studying and then

electing new members for the leadership of their organization which is called CONFRES. It is beautiful to see that so many congregations with different charisms can come together because they share the same desire, namely, to consecrate themselves to God and to serve the People of God in our country. During this gathering I was provided with some further information concerning the meeting that the Oblate Sisters of Divine Love are going to have in Rome. Mother María Del Carmen Scaglietti will travel there to represent the community here in El Salvador and we want to tell her that we will accompany her with our prayers. I was also informed that one of the beloved sisters of the Congregation of the Assumption, Sister Inés, is going to be leaving us very soon. We are deeply saddened by her departure because she has been a wonderful collaborator in our ministry. She always participates in our Sunday celebration at 8:00am and I want to thank her. Hopefully her remembrance of the experience of the Church in this Archdiocese will be a source of inspiration for her. Let us continue to remember her in our prayers and since the world is so small we all hope that she will return to be with us once again.

On October 31st there was a very interesting meeting between the pastors who are interested in our seminary program because they have young men from their parish who are seminarians or because they have seminarians working with them. The Diocesan Pastoral Commission as well as the faculty and administration at the seminary and the seminarians were also present at this meeting. It was a very honest meeting where these young men and the priests were able to look at the past and the present in order to examine how the reality of the Church has changed. We cannot simply cling to traditions when these traditions are no longer vehicles that enable us to live as ministers of the Church or no longer enable us to live the life that Christ has given to our priests and to the world.

We have had some very beautiful visits in various communities. On November 3rd, the feast of Saint Martin de Porres, we visited the community of Quezaltepeque, where this feast was celebrated in a very colorful way (young boys dressed in the habit of Saint Martin and carrying brooms, young girls dressed in the habit of Saint Rose of Lima). How beautiful! Father Roberto, the Dominican Sisters and the Belgian Sisters had prepared a group of young women and men for the sacrament of Confirmation. There is a very lively community there in this location where, as I have told you before my sisters and brothers, the parish church has been taken over by another group. But I greet all the people of this community for at this present time you are the Church, you are this community of love, this community of faith and this community of life. This is exactly what the Church desires of you. The churches and convents made of brick and cement --- the Church is accustomed to the fact that these buildings are established and in the course of history these buildings are often stolen and used for other purposes. This is not really important at all because the community of the Church continues to live and this is certainly more important and of greater interest to us.

Today the community of Santo Tomás is celebrating the 25th anniversary of Father Teodoro Alvarenga's ordination. He has lived in this parish for these twenty-five years and despite the number of years that he has spent there he is also very mobile. It is as though he had arrived there only yesterday for he continues ministering and working there. How beautiful is the example of one who is a shepherd/pastor.

In the village of El Carmen, the parish of Cristo Redentor, we will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation next Sunday, the 12th of November and not on Saturday as had been previously announced. In Santa Tecla there is also another community that has the name El Carmen and there the elderly Jesuits, who are always young in spirit, have organized

a series of talks on the Bible. This course began on October 31st and will continue until December 21st. Therefore on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 7:30pm the people from Santa Tecla can go to the church of El Carmen and have the opportunity for further Biblical instruction. We also want to let the children of this community know that on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons, at 3:00pm there will be classes to prepare children for the celebration of First Communion which will take place on December 31st. The community of Manaquil in Nueva Trinidad --- a more distant community but one that is in communion with our Archdiocese --- extends an invitation to all the People of God to join with them in a concelebrated Eucharist on November 13th in honor of Saint Anthony.

At the same time our community is saddened by the news that was sent to us via telegram by our beloved Father Gonzalo López, the pastor of Comasagua. He informed us that in Talnique the sacred vessels and other objects were stolen from the church. This act has caused great suffering and pain in the community and because we are sisters and brothers we share in their pain.

I also want to inform you that the Commission on Information has published the Appendix to our Pastoral Letter⁴. Our Letter, *The Church and Popular Political Organizations*, has found ever greater and wider acceptance and I want to thank all of you for this. In order to help your study of this letter we have prepared three appendices: the first one describes the national reality in which the Church minister, the second is a reflection on human misery in light of the Word of God and the last one contains some of the more recent documents of the Church. There are a series of questions attached to this document and we hope that these questions will facilitate your study of the Pastoral Letter.

There will soon be published a series of lessons that Father Jesús Delgado has prepared in order to help us assimilate the doctrine of the Pastoral Letter. Again I am grateful to you for the wide acceptance that people have given to this letter. The media have completely ignored the publication of this Letter but our *Vox Panamericana* and our newspaper, *Orientación*, and especially all of you --- as I have said before --- continue to be the microphones of the Church because you communicate this news wherever you are and there are more of you involved in this work than in the media. You communicate this news with enthusiasm in so many different situations. Your proclamation is very different from the biased articles of our newspapers and the paid propaganda of the media. You speak with a love for the truth and you defend the rights of people which very often disturbs people, especially those who want to silence the Church

This community also experiences the intimacy of certain personal events. I was very pleased on All Soul's Day when a person asked me to celebrate a series of Gregorian Masses (thirty consecutive Masses). This person told me that she did not want these Masses offered for the deceased members of her family but for the most abandoned souls in Purgatory. What wonderful gestures of love can be found among our people! I also received a beautiful letter from the community of Comalapa which stated: *I ask you to pray for our beloved Pablo León León who was a faithful servant of the Eucharist*. How I would love to be able to repeat here all the personal suggestions that I have received --- they are the voice of our community and the joy of our people.

Events of the week

My sisters and brothers, this Church that rejoices and suffers illuminates the historical situation of our country, illuminates events which cause us pain and other events that are very consoling. For example, on November 3rd, when the Colegio de la Sagrada Familia generously opened its doors to those students who were going to take examinations, three hundred students from the Instituto Tecnológico de San Salvador (a school administered by the Department of Education) arrived for these examinations. Soon thereafter the armed forces arrived and stated that a group of demonstrators waving their flags had entered the school. The Principal and Vice-principal calmly stated: *there has been no demonstration here and these students are simply here to take their examinations*. Nevertheless helicopters circled overhead and the armed forces guarded the entire block as if they were confronting some violent revolutionary army. Yet in the school there were simply poor young women and men taking their examinations. The parents of these students have written letters protesting this abuse. These events appear to be ridiculous but they are the result of the repressive situation in which we live. Hopefully in the future these events can be avoided because they only bring disgrace upon our nation.

The onslaught of repression continues in the area of Cinquera. ORDEN and the National Guard continue the torment, violence and torture of many workers such as Elio and Elpidio Fuentes who were savagely beaten in front of their families. In Arcatao in Chalatenango a military operation took place that mistreated and transported the men of this area to an unknown destination⁵.

I was very pained by the visit that I received from an elderly man last Sunday. He had listened to the statements of Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar who had been put in the prison of the Treasury Police with Cecilio Ramírez who is almost blind because of the torture that was inflicted on him. The elderly man said: *he (Cecilio) is my son!* I have presented a petition of habeas corpus on his behalf but I have not received any response. His father asked me to offer two Masses. I asked him why? He responded: *hopefully God will soften the hearts of those who have imprisoned him*. So I celebrated the two Masses. My sisters and brothers, hopefully the prayers of this elderly father who is in anguish because he does not know whether his son has died a painful death or not --- hopefully his prayers will be heard by God. And there are so many other cases like this one.

I am happy that the Human Rights Commission in El Salvador has made a statement concerning the case of Isabel Rodríguez Barrera --- a case that we spoke about last Sunday. This man was selling trinkets and on August 19th was shot in his truck. While in the hospital he had been under such a strict guard that not even the Judge who had been named by the Supreme Court to handle this case was allowed to see him. What kind of democracy is this when justice must submit itself to armaments? Every one has the right to an effective recourse to justice and the courts. This poor man who is ill knows nothing about his fate because he is being watched by a group of people who are armed with guns.

We are all saddened by the labor conflicts in ADOC⁶. Workers have also complained about unjustified firings at Sacos Sintéticos as well as in FINSA. We denounced all of these injustices and abuses and firing of workers. The INDECA union has stated that certain publications, because of their bias, have identified twenty of the union members as *guerrilleros*. There is a tendency to violate the right that people have to organize themselves. Our Pastoral Letter deals with this problem. Yes, the situation of the workers is extremely difficult and they encounter many problems in exercising the right of protecting themselves by forming an organization, but even more difficult is the situation of the *campesinos* ---

whose voice is not heard --- and who have received a paltry increase in wages that in no way approaches the increase in the cost of living that has occurred during the past year.

I received a letter from one of the small coffee producers and among some of the things that he told me was the following: *the small coffee producers are exploited by the larger producers and the work inspectors watch us to insure that we are paying the correct wages while the larger producers of coffee pay lower wages and no taxes.* Is not this exactly what I have been saying? The more powerful exploit the less powerful and pretend that they are fulfilling the law. The ones who always suffer the consequences of this injustice are the poor and the *campesinos*. I am not justifying all the *campesinos* because I know that they can become involved in various forms of vice --- and I am not in agreement with this. I have also counseled them to make the best use of the salary that they earn because very often this is their only source of income for the whole year and therefore it is important that they learn how to use this money. To say, however, that everyone acts like this and that therefore it is permitted to mistreat them and, what is worse, that this fact justifies the exploitation of these persons --- all of this is also unjust.

My sisters and brothers, this is the community that looks beyond her frontiers and views her struggle and her work with optimism. This is the community that realizes that she is not alone. I was very pleased to read that the Episcopal Conference of Brazil has published a document⁷ in which they comment on the situation of their country and say --- note well the hypocritical Pharisees --- that the mission of the Church means that she must express her opinion on themes that deal with the reality of the nation. Therefore the Church assumes the responsibility to form the political conscience of the people. The Brazilian bishops analyzed the reality of their nation in a very honest manner and criticized the Government.

Also in Santiago in Chile, the Pastoral Vicariate for Workers is supporting seven trade union federations that have been declared illegal for their Marxist tendencies. So the accusation is the same everywhere. But the Vicariate, which is the Church, is offering its protection because the government measures are unconstitutional and illegal,

I am also happy when I reflect on the reality of the ecumenical meaning of our Catholic Church. In the United States, during the time of the celebration of Thanksgiving Day, the Jewish and Orthodox religions are joining together with the Catholic Church in a campaign against hunger. We know that one third of the children in the developed countries of the world die of hunger. I am happy to see that our sisters and brothers are involved in this campaign.

Recently the Organization of American States published the cost that El Salvador and Honduras have incurred for their services --- our country has paid 1.2 million dollars and these costs will continue until the situation is resolved. When will this all be resolved?

The conflict at the university continues and I think about the many young men and women who are students at this institution. As I was entering the Cathedral, a young university student approached me and I could see by his countenance and his enthusiasm that he wanted the university to become a true seat of culture rather than an instrument of violence. Hopefully the professionals there, instead of fighting, will begin to seek a solution so that this house of culture might become that which was proclaimed by the President: *an institution that brings us honor outside of our country.* The President spoke these words when he inaugurated the International Fair on Friday.

An open showcase to the world. May this event bring us great honor and may it not be a distraction that simply covers over the misery and violence and injustice of our country. May these beautiful words be fulfilled and become a reality: *let us join our efforts together and multiply our actions in order to establish a new international order in the social and economic spheres so that peace might be guaranteed, justice strengthened, and human dignity promoted*⁸. It is beautiful to speak these words in front of the international community but we must remember that we have prisons where human dignity is crushed and we also know that freedom of expression is an illusion especially in light of some of the laws that have been enacted. We greet our beloved visitors from other countries who honor us with the exhibition of their progress and we pray that their solidarity with our country also means a strengthening of the bonds between women and men that will enable our society to be true to the words that were spoken by the President, that is, an economic order that is more equitable, an economic order that is established on peace and one that does not simply believe in repression.

We rejoice at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Hospital Bloom. This is a beautiful work! How many children and families have found there a true refuge: health and comfort!

We also pray for our poor sister nation, Nicaragua. Ten thousand people from Nicaragua are refugees in Honduras and another ten thousand in Costa Rica. The President of Nicaragua has suspended all development programs in order to buy arms and defend his government. Outside mediation seems to have failed. We also weep with the people of Mexico because of the death of fifty-two people who died when some storage tanks of gas exploded.

Finally, we unite ourselves to the Pope who in his desire to be a pilgrim will journey today to the land of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Catherine of Sienna. We accompany him spiritually with our prayers because with the passing of each day we enter into a deeper solidarity with the Pope who is truly popular. As he draws closer to the people he brings with him that which truly constitutes them as a People of God, namely, the holiness of the Church (and with this I will conclude).

The Church's Holiness

My sisters and brothers, in the second reading Saint Paul tells the community that he did not come among them to work on behalf of some self-interest. He writes to the Thessalonians with kindness and tells them: *As you know we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you conduct yourselves as worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory* (30). In the first reading and the gospel we found a strong diatribe against the evil pastors yet, my sisters and brothers, it is also true that in the holy Church that is in need of purification we will also find a great treasure of holiness. How beautiful it is to know that in these past few months, when the Church was in need of naming a Pontiff, she was able to select from her pastors two unknown men who, like Saint Paul, have shared their love. Like Saint Paul, not only are there pastors who, like fathers, love the people, but there are also many religious and priests and lay people who have that same love for the people and have handed over their lives on behalf of the People of God.

Where is the source of this holiness ?

I conclude --- and this is my third point --- by posing this question: where is the secret of this conversion, of this renewal of the Church? Saint Paul concludes today's second reading by saying: *for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe* (31).

This is the secret of holiness. It is true that we will see many sinners in the heart of the Church, but when these sinners accept the word of forgiveness and hope and faith, a process of conversion is begun and the past has little importance when the Word of God has begun to form new women and men --- and here in our Archdiocese there are many new women and men. Blessed be God! Like Saint Paul I can also say to many of you who are listening to me today: I give thanks to God because you are receiving my word for what it really is, God's word. Many receive it as a man's word, an enemy's word, a subversive's word, as the word of a man who only desires evil. That is the sad lot of one who preaches God's word, to be, like Christ, a sign of contradiction. But, blessed be God for that also means that the vehicle, even though it is crude and useless, is only a vehicle. What matters is what is in the vehicle: God's word which is accepted into the hearts and which converts the hearts of individuals, thus bringing about holiness and life. And so there is much holiness in our communities.

I give thanks to God, and I invite all to draw near with me to the Eucharist, which means that we give thanks to God because there in the Eucharist is found the source, Christ, who is the Word made flesh, nourishment, sacrament, and life. It is Christ who now nourishes us as a result of our Sunday Eucharist and the word that is preached --- a Church of sinners becomes a Church of holiness. So be it (applause)

¹ See Homily of John Paul II on the official inauguration of his Pontificate (22 October 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 October 1978.

² See Mensaje de la Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador sobre el momento actual que vive el país (5 March 1977), *Orientación*, 20 March 1977.

³ See Flavius Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, VI,12; VII,8.

⁴ *Anexos a la Carta Pastoral "La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares"*, Comisión de Pastoral, Arquidiócesis de San Salvador, October, 1978.

⁵ See "Solidaridad", *Orientación*, 12 November 1978.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See Episcopal Conference of Brasil, *Reflexión sobre la situación nacional* (26 October 1978).

⁸ Discourse of Carlos H. Romero at the inauguration of the 8th International Feria of El Salvador, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 4 November 1978.

Marginal References (1) Mt 23,37: (2) LG 8: (3) 1Th 2,13: (4) Mt 2,1.8-9: (5) Mt 5,13: (6) 1Cor 13,1: (7) Mt 2,9: (8) Mt 2,9: (9) Mt 23,2: (10) Mt 23,4: (11) Mt 23,5a: (12) Dt 6,8: (13) Mt 23,5b: (14) Mt 23,7: (15) Mt 23,8: (16) Mt 23,11: (17) Mt 23,13-32: (18) Mt 23,13: (19) Mt 23,15: (20) Mt 23,16-22: (21) Mt 23,23: (22) Mt 23,24: (23) Mt 23,25-28: (24) Mt 23,29-31: (25) Mt 23,32-33: (26) Mt 23,34-36: (27) Mt 23,37-39: (28) Rm 11,13-14: (29) Mt 5,20: (30) 1Th 2,7-8.