

**MESSAGE OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO DURING THE
EASTER TRIDUUM, TRANSMITTED BY Y.S.A.X.**

**Good Friday
April 8, 1977**

Readings:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

I had the honor and the pleasure of participating in the Sacred Burial Procession. A great number of people left the parish church of El Calvario, traveled through the streets of the city, passed in front of the cathedral and then returned to the church. I wanted to come here to the studios and visit the noble workers of YSAK, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for providing us with the opportunity to transmit this message for Holy Week which you, my dear radio audience, are listening to and without a doubt will take these words to heart. I have also participated many times in delivering this message for Holy Week. I have also received impressions and witnessed the devotion with which our Archdiocese and our country is celebrating this Easter Triduum. These days are given this name because this is the Christian Passover. It begins with the commemoration of the Last Supper when Jesus left us a memorial of his passion, death and resurrection and culminates with the celebration of the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening. Therefore, the solemn burial is but one event of this celebration --- certainly a very solemn event and one that is very important for the people, but it by no means represents the totality of Holy Week. The Sacred Burial Procession in San Salvador is a beautiful procession that terminates in the church of El Calvario. There, in the church of El Calvario, Jesus remains "buried" during this time before the celebration of the Easter Vigil

Holy Saturday

It would be good if we visited this holy place, El Calvario. Also in each parish, and town and village I invite you, my radio audience, to live this Holy Saturday in the way that the Church wishes. This is not some other vacation day, nor is it properly called the Saturday of Glory. In the new liturgy, where the Triduum has recovered the meaning of a true Paschal celebration, Saturday is still a day of mourning, a day of silence before the Lord's tomb. Today the Church is like that widow who is in a state of waiting. The Church awaits the resurrection of the Lord. The Church, like the lonely Virgin after the tragic death of her son, is waiting with a calm sadness the resurrection of the Lord. The Church and Mary are all of us, joined together at the Lord's tomb, awaiting the solemn hour when Easter will arrive.

After the sacred burial, this state of expectation characterizes the Church's situation, that is, her reality, psychology, faith, and hope. Therefore I invite you, from these studios of Radio YSAX, to share in these sentiments of calm sadness and of hope in the glory of the Lord. For we know that this tragic death of Jesus was undertaken for the good of the world and entered into voluntarily, for Jesus himself said: *I lay down my life in order to take it up again* (John 10:17). As we await this moment when Jesus will take up his life once again, let us live this Holy Saturday in holy expectation of the resurrection of the Lord.

Christ is also the Redeems of the Old Testament

After we have celebrated the death of Jesus on the cross and his sacred burial and as we remain at his tomb and are dismayed at all that has happened, we might take time to reflect on this very appropriate thought that is expressed in the Creed: *he descended into hell* (Sacramentary, The Apostles Creed). This phrase contains a whole theology of what occurred during those hours when the soul of Jesus was separated from his body, when his body was rigid and taken to the place of burial. What happened to that blessed soul? If the soul of the human person who dies goes to God, where did Jesus' soul go?

Our Creed tells us that: *he descended into hell* (Sacramentary, The Apostles Creed). This phrase should be understood as representing that mysterious place where the holy ones, the good people of the Old Testament --- from Adam up to those who died during Jesus' time: John the Baptist, Joseph, etc. --- the place where all of these people were in a state of waiting. There, in that place, was a people for whom the afternoon of Good Friday and Holy Saturday represented a true Palm Sunday. Their spirits rejoiced; redemption had arrived and the heavens were opened. When Christ rose on Holy Saturday night, they also rose from this place of limbo, from this place where there was certainly a degree of happiness but not glory. All the good and holy people that humanity had produced up to the time of Jesus dwelt there.

All men and women encounter their salvation in Christ, including those who lived before him. For this reason Christ is also the redeemer of the Old Testament. When the Creed speaks about Jesus *descending into hell* we are being told that during the time when Jesus' soul was separated from his body, his soul became united with all those souls who were in this state of waiting. Imagine the joy of Adam and Eve and the patriarchs and the prophets, all those souls who awaited the Lord. If we feel such a great joy to have been redeemed by Christ, how much greater had to be the joy of those persons of the Old Testament when they encountered the Lord.

This thought can occupy the minds of all Catholics who gather around the tomb of the Lord on Holy Saturday, who accompany Jesus Christ in spirit. During this encounter they ought to cry out with the people who greeted Jesus in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* (Matthew 21:9). This whole procession of souls that had been redeemed by Christ, accompanies Jesus --- it is a beautiful procession of these holy people to the tomb where his rigid body was interred. When the soul of Jesus returns to his body, when the resurrection is about to take place and Jesus will soon complete his passage from death to life, he does not do this alone but is accompanied by the whole court of redeemed persons who now initiate the great procession of those redeemed by the New Testament.

There are we also, awaiting our own salvation. One day, all of humanity, from Adam up to the last person in history, will form that court of persons redeemed by Christ. It is the image that the book of Revelation presents to us when it speaks about a large multitude singing and praising God: *To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might forever and ever* (Revelation 5:13). We will live this happiness, my sisters and brothers, if we are faithful to this redemption that Christ has bestowed upon us.

The Easter Vigil

These then are the thoughts that ought to fill our minds during Good Friday and Holy Saturday as we await the time of the blessing of the new fire that will proclaim that the hour of the Lord's resurrection has arrived. We will celebrate the Easter Vigil in the cathedral at 8:30pm. This is the solemn Easter Vigil that begins with the blessing of the new fire. We hope to be able to light a great fire which will be used to light the Pascal candle and then initiate the procession of the Risen Christ, symbolized in the Pascal candle which will light the candles of all those persons who participate in this celebration. Therefore we invite everyone to bring their own candle so that they can participate in this illumination by Christ, who in the middle of the night illuminates, like the light of day, the hopes of all those who believe in him

This will be followed by readings about biblical events that refer to this holy night and to our baptism. At this celebration we will renew our baptismal commitment and thus celebrate in our own life, as a redeemed people, baptized, filled with the grace of God, the resurrection of the Lord. Let us spend this Holy Saturday that will soon begin in spiritual preparation to participate in an intimate way in the joy of the Risen Christ.

Perhaps another thought might help us in this preparation: During Lent, the catechumens, that is, those who were preparing for baptism, received their proximate preparation and they were then baptized during the Easter Vigil. The Second Vatican Council reminds us of this history of the catechumens: their preparation during Lent and their baptism at the Easter Vigil, and invites us to use this time of Lent to prepare for the renovation of our own baptismal promises (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #64-65; *Ad Gentes*, 14). Thanks be to God that we are baptized. But how many baptized persons are in need of a good catechumenate so that they can think about the greatness and the responsibility that resulted from their baptism? Those who were baptized during the Easter Vigil understood, better than many Catholics today, the great honor and the meaning of dying and rising with Christ. This is Baptism.

This is why the ancient baptismal fonts were in the form of a tomb where the catechumens formed a procession and one by one lowered themselves into the font as if they were to be buried. There the bishop baptized and confirmed them and they came up from the font as one arises from the tomb, dressed in white garments – a precious representation of Christ who arose from his tomb. Dressed in their white garments and carrying a lighted candle in their hand they formed a beautiful procession. They were the neophytes, those who had been baptized and sang with joy about the redemption that was commemorated at the Easter Vigil as they walked and now processed to receive Communion for the first time. During Easter week they continued to dress in their white garment and thus reaffirmed for themselves their baptismal commitment while at the same time they visited the tombs of the martyrs, of those men and women who knew how to live their baptismal commitment even unto death.

My dear radio audience, my dear Catholics, why do we not take advantage of this Holy Saturday to review with sincerity the manner in which we are living out our own baptismal commitment? What are these commitments? We pronounce these words of commitment at the time when children are baptized but many times we are not conscious of the seriousness of these words: *Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises? Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do*

you believe in the Holy Spirit? (Rite of Baptism, Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith). We respond by saying *Yes, we renounce these things. Yes, we believe.* The renunciation of those realities opposed to God and the consecration that occurs when we profess our belief in God --- this is Baptism.

How good it would be if during this Easter Vigil we offered repentance for our unfaithfulness to our baptismal promises and firmly resolved to live our baptism more intensely! There could be no better way to participate in this feast of the Risen Lord. Indeed, there is no greater joy for the Divine Redeemer than to imprint in the depths of our souls the reality of his death and resurrection. For the meaning of baptism is rooted in our participation in the death of Jesus and our willingness to die to all that is evil in life, that is, to detach ourselves from selfishness, injustice, hatred, violence, all that is evil and diabolical and all that is perverse. On the other hand, our baptism is also rooted in our resurrection to a new life, to a life of holiness, simplicity, humility, chastity and all those virtues that gave life to the holy souls. All the baptized are called to be saints. On this night when we celebrate the Easter Vigil we are once again invited to make a resolution to be holy, to be faithful and consistent with our baptism.

Demands of the time

It is here, together at Jesus' tomb, as we await his resurrection, that we examine our life and our commitments to him. We do not want to be Judas nor the cowardly apostles. We want to be faithful today and tomorrow. The time demands this faithfulness. These moments do not allow us to live as Catholics who are asleep, nor is it the time to accommodate Catholicism to our own way of thinking or our individual whim. The hour has come when we must say with Jesus: *whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters* (Matthew 12:31). This is the hour for integrity and laying down one's life. We must constantly recall the fact that Christ died and was buried, and allow these realities to blossom into a resolution to live an integral Catholicism and to accept the ultimate consequence of our fidelity. It would be very fruitful to reflect on this at the Lord's tomb as we await the hour of his resurrection.

We wanted to transmit this message so that during these solemn hours you might reflect on these different thoughts. There are many Christians who do not know what to do at this time and who believe Holy Saturday is the end of Holy Week. Holy Saturday is a time of waiting. Let us live in this time of expectation until the Church tells us that yes, the glorious hour, the joyful hour has come --- the time has arrived to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. We want you to participate in the solemn Easter Vigil that will begin at 8:30pm in the cathedral. Those who cannot participate in the cathedral, please check with your local parish. The pastors attempt to schedule this service at a time that is most convenient for the people. In some places they do not begin this celebration until midnight --- it can never be celebrated before the sun sets. So check with your parish to find out the time for the celebration of the Easter Vigil and participate in it. If this message is heard by some who are vacationing and have not participated in the liturgy of Holy Week, we invite you to participate in this most solemn day of Holy Week. To those who only participated in the Procession of Silence or the Burial Procession and then began their vacation, we say to you come back here for a moment and participate in the solemn Easter Vigil. We invite you to the cathedral at 8:30pm and bring a candle so that at the time of the blessing of the new fire you can also participate in this gesture that symbolizes that the light of Christ has become our light and then bring this lighted candle back to your home. For this light will enlighten us in the time of affliction,

perhaps at the time of our agony, or death. A similar gesture was made at the time of our Baptism when we were given a lighted candle and invited to keep it burning brightly until the time of our encounter with the Lord.

The hope of Christ

When the Easter Vigil concludes it would be beautiful to see in all the streets of San Salvador and in all the town and villages, those candles in the hands of the faithful, illuminating our hope on the roads of the country: the hope of Christ, the only hope that can save us.

There, my dear radio audience, at 8:30pm Saturday night, we will see you in the cathedral and I want to have the pleasure of greeting you there at that time: Happy Easter. Let us accustom ourselves to greeting one another in this way and thus christianize that which is most beautiful about this night, a much greater night than Christmas, for Christ was born not to die but so that death would no longer have dominion over us. The resurrection of Christ, the Easter evening, the greatest night in history, is what we are going to celebrate and it is near at hand as we approach Holy Saturday.

My dear radio audience, as this hour approaches, let us, you and I, lift up our prayers to God. Blessed be God for this has been a very devout Holy Week. I have received reports from many parts of the diocese speaking about the participation of the faithful in the ceremonies, a participation that is double the number from last year. I have been informed about endless communions, and confessors who have found it difficult to cope with the large number of people asking to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. Look at how Catholicism has flourished in our parishes! Look at how we are longing for this Easter season! For my part I want to advise you that I am preparing a Pastoral Letter that will be published next week. This letter is titled: *The Easter Church*. It is our Church that flourishes as a result of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus suffered on the cross during his Lent --- a Lent and a cross that enabled him to enter a state of calm joyfulness, the joy of a Church that offers true hope to humankind. Let us pray often, for prayer will be our power. God is with us. God tries us and knows that the trial is fruitful because the sorrow of the cross blossoms into the resurrection of Easter.

My dear radio audience, from the studios of YSAX, this voice of the Church has spoken for you, your humble servant and friend, the Archbishop of San Salvador.