

## THE ONE MASS<sup>1</sup>

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 20, 1977**

*Joshua 5:9, 10-12*

*2 Corinthians 5:17-21*

*Luke 15:1-3, 11-32*

My dear sisters and brothers.

Welcome to this ancestral home of the Archdiocese. This bishop, the lowliest member of the family, chosen by God to be a sign of unity, this bishop graciously thanks you for joining him in giving the awaiting world the Church's word. This word of the Church not only comes from our lips but is proclaimed by our presence here at the only Mass that is celebrated today.

Through this celebration we want to give great value to the Mass that is celebrated in all our parishes, in all our chapels --- the value that the Mass has when a family in mourning asks that Mass be celebrated for a relative who is about to be buried or when a family gathers to give thanks to God on the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday of a daughter or to bless the marriage of two people who promise to love one another until death. At this time the Mass is recovering all its value. Perhaps because it is celebrated so frequently it is seen as an adornment and not with the splendor that it is recovering at this moment.

I believe that you who are here, participating in this celebration, will feel what it means to celebrate the Mass. This is very true, my sisters and brothers, and so I also welcome those who have no faith in the Mass and are also present here. We know that there are many people here who do not believe in the Mass but are here because they are searching for something that the Church can offer them. The Church is most happy to offer that something to humanity that is searching and does not realize that it is so near to them, near to them in every Mass that is celebrated. In every Mass that is celebrated there are two banquets: the banquet of the Word that evangelizes and the banquet of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life that nourishes humankind. This is what we are doing now as a pilgrim Church, dressed in violet, in repentance, journeying toward Easter, toward the Christ who is risen because he died for us. The Mass is Christ. Those who do not believe in the Mass, listen at once, what you have found today is Christ.

### **The Mass is Christ who gives his body and blood for life to the world**

I want to compare this people to today's first reading. The people who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt arrived at the Promised Land and celebrated the Passover. This is the Mass, an encounter with the Promised Land, a breath of hope. Perhaps the account of the prodigal son in today's Gospel is a better example. The prodigal son is each one of us, we, the people, we who so often search for inauthentic liberation, we who are searching for happiness because this is why God created us, but

not finding it we leave our father's house like the foolish child and search for happiness in the world --- living in opulence, vanity, disorder, and debauchery. Yet at the end of our search the only thing we have found is emptiness. How powerful is the image of man seeking happiness apart from God! The only work he can find is that of caring for pigs. (a) There are so many people like that, caring for pigs, worshipping false idols, unable to satisfy their hearts with the things of this world.

As we have listened to the proclamation of the Gospel during this Lenten season, let us hope that in this Mass the prodigal son makes many people think. Perhaps they have come to this one celebration and been attracted by something that is calling within: *We have not found happiness in the world. Let us go and see if in this Mass, in this Church, they can offer us something that truly responds to our longing for happiness.* We say to you, sisters and brothers, if you have faith, you will find your answer here. The Mass is Christ who evangelizes. The Mass is Christ who offers his body and blood for the life of the world. These two realities are the Mass. At this moment we are in the first part, the celebration of the Word of God, calling humankind to understand that in this Word is found the solution to all problems: political, economical, and social --- all those problems that cannot be solved with human ideologies or worldly utopias or Marxism or atheism that excludes the one force that can save: Jesus who speaks to us about true liberation.

### **The healthy balance of evangelization**

With gratitude I remind you of the words of Paul VI who two years ago spoke to the bishops of Latin American who had gathered in Rome: *My dear bishops of Latin America, you walk and search restlessly for the language to evangelize this admirable continent, this continent so full of hope. The gospel of Christ is the answer*<sup>2</sup>. The Pope spoke of the bishops' restless search for adequate language that would enable them to communicate to the people Jesus' message and the new dimensions that they are finding in the Gospel. The Pope said: *Never cease to evangelize humankind with all of their concerns. Do not allow those who are insensitive to the actual problems of the world to obstruct your work. Do not allow yourselves to be manipulated by those who want to introduce into Jesus' gospel other solutions that are not Christian*<sup>3</sup>. Here we find the healthy balance of evangelization. Let no one impede the Church from telling humankind that there is reason to hope in the Church. Let no one abuse our language and attempt to justify with the Gospel other doctrines that are not Christ's doctrine.

My dear sisters and brothers, we are experiencing this balance right now and so in front of the archdiocese gathered here, in light of the unity that has brought us together at this one Mass, I want to publicly thank all of these beloved priests. Many of them risk their lives, and like Father Grande offer the greatest sacrifice. ...(Applause)... That applause ratifies the profound joy that I feel in my heart as I take possession of this Archdiocese. I also feel that my own weaknesses and my own inabilities find their complement, their power, and their courage in these united priests. Beloved priests, remain united in the authentic truth of the Gospel. This is another way to say to you, as

Christ's humble successor and representative here in the Archdiocese: the one who attacks one of my priests, attacks me. ... (Applause).

Be assured, my sisters and brothers, that the evangelical guidelines that the Archdiocese has put into practice are authentic and all those women religious and laypersons who collaborate with our beloved priests can be assured of their positions as long as they remain in communion with their bishop. Indeed this is the meaning of today's celebration. It is an authorization of the bishop, authentic teacher of the faith, so that all those who are in communion with him might know that they preach a doctrine that is in communion with the Pope, and therefore, is also the true doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... (Applause).

### **Evangelization is incomplete without the sacraments**

My dear brothers and sisters, the reasons for following the true orientations of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, was explained to us in the latest document, the *Magna Carta* of evangelization that stated that the process of evangelization would be incomplete, just as this Mass would be incomplete, if it ended with the word. The process of evangelization is complete only when the sacrament of the Church is celebrated, when the Church is seen as a sign of Christ's presence in visible realities: the sacraments (b). At that moment, then, we are in the second part of the Mass when Christ becomes our food, when Christ becomes the host, when Christ repeats his sacrifice that was offered on Holy Thursday evening: *This is my body, which will be given for you... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you* (c). A process of evangelization that consisted of works without sacraments, would not build up the true Church. A process of evangelization that was rooted in the Bible and words, excuse me for saying this my separated sisters and brothers, would be a mutilation of our Catholic doctrine. Indeed, this would be the state of any evangelization process that would put aside the sacraments.

Our priests preach the word and give that word life in the Eucharist. What a precious sign we have here as the priests gather around the altar where the ciborium has been prepared to be consecrated into the body of the Lord and then distributed to the people as nourishment for their life. Baptism and the other sacraments, like matrimony, are signs of the Christ who sanctifies life. This act of sanctification is also the work of the Church.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, the priests have this power that they have received from Christ, but a power that is exercised in communion with the bishop. This concelebration is a beautiful sign, for this gathering clearly proclaims that the priests consider their bishop as the center of the liturgy and the center of the sacramental life. Together with their bishop, they are instruments who bring the Word of Christ and the life of Christ to the people that await them. We also want to speak to those people who were unable to participate in the celebration of Mass today; we want them to understand what it means when a priest is persecuted. What would it be like if this small group of priests were taken from the people? What would it be like for the people to be unable to participate in Mass? What would it be like if there were no baptisms? My sisters and

brothers, I believe everyone has understood the language of celebrating just one Mass today. There is no sense of demagogy in this action. The Church is not being manipulated by some political party. The Church is not raising a protest against that which is human. Rather the Church is simply proclaiming the significance of the Mass, whether that Mass be celebrated by the Pope in the Vatican or the bishop in his cathedral or a humble pastor in the humblest village of the Diocese.

And we want to say this to everyone: value the Mass because in the Mass you are able to find.... (Applause). My beloved sisters and brothers, I began by welcoming you, and now I am happy to have had the opportunity to explain to you, with simple words, the meaning of the Mass. I hope that those who did not believe in the Mass will now become followers of that Christ who every Sunday becomes present in the Mass, followers of that Christ who becomes present in the Mass of every human event. Thank you very much for helping us give this sign that the Church wanted to give... (Applause).

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<sup>1</sup> After several meetings with his priests, Mons Romero decided to suspend the Sunday Masses on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March throughout the Diocese and celebrate one Mass in the Cathedral as a sign of unity, grief and protest for the assassination of Fr Rutilio Grande and the persecution against the Church. See "Information Bulletin of the Archdiocese, n° 6, ECA 341 (1977), pp. 256-257.

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, Homily in the Mass concelebrated with the members of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CELAM (3 November 1974), *Osservatore Romano*, 10 November 1974.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid*.

#### Margin References

(a) Lk 15,15: (b) EN 47: (c) Lk 22,19.