

CHRIST, THE BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH

Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
February 25, 1979

Hosea 2:14, 19-20
2 Corinthians 3:1-6
Mark 2:18-22

Note: Before the homily of our teacher and pastor, Archbishop Oscar A. Romero, the seminarians of the Archdiocese of San Salvador communicated to the Archbishop the results of their three days of reflection on their mission as Christians today. They also spoke about their allegiance to the Archbishop: *On your second anniversary as the Archbishop we want to express to you our solidarity. We do so because of your authentic fidelity to the gospel, because you have put aside any desire for privilege and have accepted all the risks involved in the powerful denunciation of the violation of the fundamental rights of the human person. Despite the ever increasing oppression and persecution of the people and the Church, we want to let you know that with whole-hearted courage we are willing to continue to be firm in our vocation. One day we hope to become direct collaborators in the prophetic ministry that you have undertaken in order to make the Kingdom of God more present, here, among us.*

What follows is the homily of the Archbishop.

My dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

What a wonderful surprise! I am filled with great optimism as I listen to the words that were spoken from the lips of these young men who are preparing for the priesthood, words that express their solidarity and words that were spoken by this young man who spoke in the name of thirty-six major seminarians, that is, philosophers and theologians who are preparing themselves for the priesthood. These men could have aspired to some other university profession but as you can see, they are profoundly convinced and aware of the commitment that they have made and expressed here this morning. I want to tell them that, together with them, there are another fifty young seminarians in formation. They are called minor seminarians because they have not yet received their high school diplomas but they are under the direction of the Archdiocese. They will obtain their degrees in the Minor Seminary of San Salvador and Chalatenango. Within a little while we hope that these minor seminarians will join the group of major seminarians.

I want to take this opportunity to tell all the People of God who are listening to me that everyone who is a member of the People of God ought to feel committed to these young men. We need, above all, your spiritual and moral support and we hope that these seminarians will find encouragement and strength and hope among the people. We also hope that no one will extinguish the burning fire that the Holy Spirit has enkindled in the hearts of these young men so that in time the people of God will receive the harvest of these seeds that have been planted by the Spirit of God. Through your prayers and through your moral and economic support, you sustain the vocation of these young men, almost all of whom come from the

poorer economic class. For this reason we need your continued economic support. We do not ask for alms but we simply speak to the People of God about their obligation to prepare these young men who have been chosen from the people and gifted with their priestly vocation. May these men allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit that the Lord has given to all of us in the gospel!

Today we conclude the first period of Ordinary Time --- the time between the feast of the Epiphany and the beginning of Lent. We continue our journey through the Liturgical Year and today we celebrate the eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time and on Wednesday we begin a powerful period, the most powerful time of the year: Lent. Thus the celebration of Ordinary Time is suspended until the conclusion of the season that begins on Wednesday, the season of Lent. Lent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery, that is, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This period is prolonged for fifty days after Easter and culminates with the feast of Pentecost. Then we return to the Sundays of Ordinary Time that are now temporarily suspended --- later we will resume this season with the celebration of the ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Today we gather to bid farewell to this season in order, like Jesus, to enter into the desert.

Let us prepare for Lent. At this time I want to invite you to participate in the inauguration of Lent which will take place at 7:30pm, Wednesday, in the parish church of El Corazón de María in La Colonia Escalón. The vicar of this area has extended an invitation to me but I do not want to feel alone in that vicariate, rather I want to feel that the whole Diocese is entering into the celebration of Lent. On Wednesday at 7:30pm, I want to have the church of El Corazón de María filled with people from the Cathedral, filled with people who are enthusiastic and who truly express the reality that the liturgy is not some lifeless celebration or some form of protocol but rather a celebration of what the liturgy is meant to be: the liturgy of the People of God. Therefore, I want to be accompanied by you, my beloved sisters and brothers who are listening to me, especially those of you who are members of parish base communities of faith because through your participation we are all able to give life to the inauguration of Lent. In this way we can proclaim to Jesus the words that were spoken by one of the seminarians with regard to the bishop, the same words that were spoken by the apostle who heard the call of Jesus: *Let us also go to die with him* (1). Jesus invites us: *Those who wish to come after me must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me* (2). In the language of the liturgy, we give our response on Wednesday when we bow our head and allow the sign of penance to be placed on our forehead: *Remember, you are dust and unto dust you shall return* (3). We do not die, however, to those realities that make us enthusiastic but rather we die in order to give an enthusiasm and a true greatness to our human dignity.

Puebla is the impulse for our Lenten renewal. Today, on the eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time, the readings invite us to undertake the renewal that Puebla pointed out --- I want us to become familiar with the language of Puebla because it is the language of the People of God. In the presentation of this document we wrote: *The Conference itself is primarily a spirit. It is the spirit of a Church reaching out with renewed vigor to serve our people, whose realization must follow the living transforming summons of him who set up his tabernacle in the very heart of our history.* In light of the three readings that have just been proclaimed I want to say the same thing in my homily, namely, that from the perspective of Puebla, the Church of the whole Continent longs for this spirit of renewal. Hopefully the characteristics of the multiple local churches of this large and hope-filled Continent and the characteristics

of our Archdiocese cry out in beautiful harmony and proclaim the glory of God and the greatness of human dignity.

Therefore, I give a youthful title to my homily. Christ himself authorizes us to use the title, perhaps a little bold, but Christ has given us permission to call him today: Christ, the bridegroom of the Church. Here I want to give homage to those who see their relationship not as some adventure or some passionate experience but rather an opportunity to imitate Christ and so with their young hearts hand themselves over to the Church. I will develop the following points: One: Christ and the Church, a mystery of the conjugal covenant; Two: therefore the Church relies on a divine capacity; Three: as a result, the renewal of the world takes place from the perspective of the Church of Christ. Just as the bridegroom finds in his bride the center of his life --- she is like his home and the reference point for all his activity -- - so too the Church finds in Christ the center of her life and Christ becomes the reference point for all her activity.

Christ and the Church, a mystery of a conjugal covenant

First we say that between Christ and the Church there is a mystery of a conjugal covenant. On this Sunday, Jesus is the central figure in the gospel of Saint Mark. He responds to the objections that are outlined in chapters two and three --- objections that form the outline of the conflict between Jesus and his enemies that lead to the statement in chapter three where we read: *The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death* (4). All those who proclaim a message of love and truth and justice are opposed by those who are steeped in injustice and selfishness which is an inability to love and are also opposed by those who dwell in the darkness of lies that blinds their vision because they are afraid to look at the truth and consequently they seek to eliminate the truth.

Jesus takes a stand and responds to these objections. The disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees are celebrating a fast: *Why do your disciples not fast?* (5). It seems that in religious matters a note of hypocrisy and legalism and appearances entered into play. Jesus seeks sincerity in the worship of God and sincerity in the internal renewal of the human person and as we heard in the gospel, he responds to this objection with the words: *Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day* (6). It is as though this is a forewarning about Lent and Holy Week but this is stated within the framework of the profound love and fondness of Jesus for his Church.

In order to understand the comparison of Jesus as the bridegroom it is necessary to go back to the language of the prophets. Today, our liturgy has chosen a very ancient text where this comparison of the relationship between God and the people is first compared to the relationship that exists between spouses. Hosea was a prophet who experienced a very harsh reality in his personal and intimate life as a man. He loved a woman and was not only misunderstood but also betrayed. As a result of this experience of having his love misunderstood he moves beyond his resentment and compares his experience to that of the relationship with God. Like spouses who hope for a moment of reconciliation, so too God hopes that his people will return to him and all the while God continues to love them.

The time of reconciliation arrived and the prophet places in the mouth of God feelings that are his own but feelings that he transfers to the Divine Being and to the relationship between God and the chosen people who have failed to respond to this relationship. As the Bible says, *the people's hearts were hardened* (7) and were insensitive to God's tenderness. But with a view to forgiveness and to a return to God, the prophet writes: *So I will allure her: I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart ... She will respond there as in the days of her youth when she came up from the land of Egypt* (8). The people are reminded about the era when God showed kindness to his people, leading them out of slavery in Egypt and miraculously bringing them into the desert. In the desert God made a covenant with his people on Mount Sinai and we might say that God was wed to his people. God reminds the people of this covenant with the hope of finding a response of love so that the love of God is no longer despised.

When the bridegroom places in the hands of his bride thirteen coins on the day of their wedding, these coins become a sign of the handing over of his whole self to her so that together they can collaborate in the establishment of their home. The bridegroom explains the meaning of this exchange as he says: *I enter into this marriage with you forever.*(9) *I also enter into this marriage in righteousness and justice, in mercy and compassion.* These are the elements that characterize the love that unites God with his people. This is the love of the bridegroom, the love between Christ and his Church to which we belong. Jesus hopes that we will use the gifts that he gives us in a productive way so that we act with righteousness and justice and mercy and compassion. Therefore the Church cannot speak another language because her language is that of love which attempts to respond to the gifts which we have been given. In other words, it is hoped that we will defend the rights of the human person and denounce every form of injustice and abuse. A faithful wife has to speak in conformity with the likes and pleasures of her husband. Thus, the Church, faithful to her bridegroom, Christ, has to please him with the language of justice.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, it is beautiful to listen to the words of Pope John Paul II when, as the interpreter of the Church today, he supported the pastoral lines of the bishops of Latin America and said: *We ought to call injustice by its proper name: the exploitation of one human being by another, the exploitation of the human person by the state, the exploitation of the human person by economic systems. We have to call all of this by its proper name and we ought to call any social injustice, any discrimination, any violence inflicted on the body, the spirit, the conscience, the human dignity or the life of a human person by its proper name.*¹ I believe that the words of John Paul II are not well received by many people because he is trying to be faithful to the relationship of love between Christ and his Church. A bride who betrays her bridegroom, flirting with other idols, would not be a true bride of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I am glad to be able to remind you that in Puebla we spoke about poverty and called it by its proper name. We pointed out the fact that poverty takes on very concrete faces among the poor. We referred to the faces of indigenous peoples, the faces of peasants, the faces of laborers *who are frequently ill-paid and who have difficulty in organizing themselves and defending their rights* (10). In the faces of workers who are denied the right to form union and organize themselves, as well as those peasants who are denied the same right --- in their faces we see the face of everyone who suffers, all those who are tortured and imprisoned and who have disappeared. Christ loves these people with the love for his bride, the Church, and therefore the Church must stand beside these individuals. Thanks to God, the Pope, with total clarity, has authorized us to call injustice by its proper name.

Thus, when Jesus in today's gospel is weighed down by the reminders of the relationship between God and the covenant and the people, he defines his position with regard to the Pharisees and his enemies. Notice the following detail: the disciples of John the Baptist were not enemies of Jesus but they were looking at a form of prophecy and situations that did not take into consideration the wide horizons that Jesus was opening up in order to renew humankind. We are going to see this in a few minutes. I want this beautiful image of Jesus to become engraved in our hearts because it reflects the unceasing love of God for humankind despite the fact that women and men betray him. This can be understood by those who have experienced, like Hosea, the tragedy of giving oneself to another in love and not receiving the same response of love. When we reflect on the words of today's readings we see that God, in Christ, presents himself as the bridegroom of humanity.

Hosea not only refers to the infidelity of his wife but also speaks about the social infidelity that occurred during his time --- a concrete political situation where people sought advantages. It was at this time that the kingdom of Judah, the Northern Kingdom, separated from Israel. The people separated themselves from the center of revelation and little by little began to fall into idolatry. Under the direction of government officials who had lost the authentic faith of the Jewish religion, the people began to worship and adore Baal. The Baals were fertility gods who were viewed as having power over the harvests, the rain and the sun. Throughout his book Hosea proclaims: *It is not the Baals or other idols who give bread to Egypt but rather it is the one true God! Change your ways and repent of your worship of these idols.*

The voice of the prophet seems to be very relevant today in light of the new Baals of our time who want to take the place of the one God who loves us and cries out for our love. The Baals or idols of our time are seen in the idolatry of money, the idolatry of luxury and the idolatry of sex. So many idols before which men and women, like the apostles of Israel, bow down in worship and turn their back on the true God.

In this situation we have seen that God utilizes the comparison of human love to reflect his divine love, and so I want to try to apply this to those people who are married. Saint Paul places before married couples a profound reflection when he says that marriage between a man and a woman is a great mystery (11). A man and a woman do not simply love one another and live together for pleasure or for human love but rather there is a sacrament to their love which God has given to the attraction that is so irresistible between a man and woman, an attraction that leads them to the altar where they join together forever. What sacrament is reflected in the couple that is married? The sacrament is that of the love between God and humanity.

My sisters and brothers who are married, Christians who are joined together in matrimony, it is to you that I now direct these words. I want to say to you that just as my priestly ministry is a great sacrament in the midst of the world, so too as you love one another you must reflect to the world the depths of God's love for us. Wherever two married people go they give this beautiful witness and if they go with their children then that witness is even more beautiful. The whole world ought to tremble before this love of God that is communicated through the sacrament of matrimony. I have invited you to accustom yourselves to the text of Puebla --- listen to what we wrote when reflecting on the family. *The couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony is a witness to the paschal presence of the Lord* (12). Do not forget these words, those of you who are married: *The couple*

sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony is a witness to the paschal presence of the Lord. The Christian family cultivates the spirit of love and service. Four fundamental relations of the person find their full development in family life (13). What are these four relations? They are *parenthood*, the love of parents for their children, *filiation*, the love of children for their parents, *brotherhood*, the love that unites children as brothers and sisters and *nuptial life*, the love that people experience as they move from infancy into young adulthood and that leads them to fulfill their obligation in which they leave their father and mother (14). As the Spanish poet said: *I will search among the daughters of my land for a woman like my mother*. How wonderful will those bridegrooms be who, as they search for the person with whom they will establish their home, think of their mother in order to find a bride who will continue to reflect the same love! The same could be said of the bride who searches for the person with whom she will establish her future home and looks for a man who will be a pillar of responsibility, as holy and just as her own father! Future mothers and fathers, will you accept this challenge of youth?

The document of Puebla goes on to state: *these same relationships make up the life of the Church* (15). Notice that just as the family reflects these relationships, so too, the Church reflects these same relationships. What is the Church? Puebla says: *[the Church] is the experience of God as Father; the experience of Christ as our brother; our experience as children in, with, and through the Son, and the experience of Christ as the spouse of the Church. Family life reproduces these four basic experiences and shares them in miniature. They are four aspects of human love* (16). As you can see, these words present us with a wealth for our reflection. At the present time it would be good for us to reflect upon our relationships which ought to unite us to the fullness of Jesus who is the model of these four faces of love. The bridegroom is in the Church.

As a result of the conjugal covenant which unites us with Christ, the Church has divine capacities.

Here I am going to focus on the second reading. Saint Paul is responding to some of his enemies who object to his preaching and who said: *Paul does not present letters of recommendation from other communities while we bring letters of authorization and letters of recommendation*. With the irony that is present in so many of his letters, Paul responds: *My sisters and brothers, do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God* (17).

My sisters and brothers, with great pleasure I am able to say the same thing: *You are my letter of recommendation*. When I listened to the letter that was read by one of the seminarians stating that they were in solidarity with their bishop, I thought of the words of Saint Paul: *you, my dear seminarians, are my letter of recommendation and you are a very valid letter*. Therefore, I beg you to be worthy of the presence of Christ that is revealed in the midst of the community. I am the first one to be aware of my own deficiencies and limitations but I know that you, priests, men and women religious, ecclesial communities of faith --- I know that you are living the holy presence of Christ in his people and you make up for my deficiencies and are united with your bishop and give the Archdiocese an appearance that proclaims that it is truly good to be a Catholic of our Archdiocese.

Saint Paul says that none of this is due to him. (18) We have this confidence because of Christ and it is not because of our abilities that we could point out something as being our

own accomplishment. Our abilities come from God. Here I wish to return to the document of Puebla in order to make you aware of what it means to be a diocese, a parish, a base community of faith. Puebla uses the same words as the Council when speaking about the diocese: *In the local Church, which is shaped in the image of the universal Church, we find the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ truly existing and operating* (19).

Yes, Christ lives and becomes visible for the whole diocese in the person of the bishop. Thus the diocese must be united with their bishop. Nothing without the bishop! For this reason I said before that I recognize my limitations and my wretched state but I cannot renounce the role that Christ has entrusted to me: to be a sign of unity in the Church of the Archdiocese, a sign of the Church's teaching and truth. It is for this reason that I am pained by so many expressions of dissent, dissent that is expressed not only by some of the laity whose ignorance can be understood because they are enemies of the Church and worship the idols of this earth. It is more painful when this dissent is rooted in the hearts of those who ought to be the bishop's intimate and generous collaborators. I know --- and this is sad --- that during the Mass some priests are ashamed to pronounce my name in prayer. As a sign of unity with the bishop, priests have an obligation to pray, at least nominally, for their bishop. If a priest does not share my person is being despised, slandered and ridiculed, but as Saint Paul says: *Our qualification comes from God who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant* (20). In light of these words I realize that the dissent and contempt is not being directed against a man, but against God, and Christ will hold us accountable for this contempt and lack of love.

This leads us to the conclusion that as Church we must live with confidence in God. Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, who builds his Church with love, gives us serenity in our ministry. The Spirit of love unites all people of good will because we are creating the Church. My dear sisters and brothers, I want to reaffirm the following: what we do here in the Archdiocese is not done to enter into some form of rivalry with people. I do not want to be an anti, against anybody. I simply want to be the builder of a great affirmation: the affirmation of God who loves us and wants to save us. The Church is nothing more than what Puebla said when speaking about marriage: a sign of God's love in the world. If the family is this sign of God's love it is because the Church reflects this same love and the Church is a great family that reflects this love of God. Building this unity and authenticity of the Church, the true bride of Christ, is the joy of the bishop who wishes to give love and homage and solidarity to Christ. If in some way my poor human presence is tarnished then like John the Baptist I tell you that I must decrease so that Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, might increase. (21) I have no reason to feel that I am in some form of rivalry with Christ but rather I must simply serve Christ with humility and love and rejoice in the fact that I have won the heart of his Church.

Life of the Church

It is here that I now want to remind you that the Church, where Christ lives as the bridegroom, as the spouse --- this Church is not an abstract Church. I would like you to be able to experience how the presence of Christ has been revealed in the history of our Church during this past week. For example: I want to express my gratitude to the newspaper reporters, as well as those of the radio and television, for providing me with an opportunity to have a press conference in which I was able to speak about the events in Puebla and where other questions were posed concerning the life of the Archdiocese. I had a good impression of the acceptance and the reports that were made concerning the interview in which, with genuine kindness, I was invited to participate as a friend. I thank you and I simply want to

clarify the emphasis that has been given in the news to my statements concerning dialogue with the government². I want to tell you that I have said nothing new. *Orientación* has been faithful in transmitting my thought when I have spoken on this matter. I said: *At a given time I expressed to the President the conditions for a dialogue between the Church and the authorities: create an atmosphere of confidence, cease the arbitrary arrests, searches and abuses. I do not seek a dialogue for any personal advantage. I wish that any dialogue would be of service to the people who suffer and it is for this reason that as long as there is no guarantee that such dialogue would bring true benefits to the people, as long as there is no guarantee of creating an atmosphere of confidence and credibility, then anything else would simply be a show. I must look at the concrete reality and my trust must be gained and I must see that the changes that I desire to see in this situation become real.*³ This is what I have said.

With regard to this same matter I want to clarify a headline in *La Crónica del Pueblo* which stated: *the Church and the ANEP engage in a dialogue*. I would say the same thing here and use the same criteria, that is, the newspaper itself mentioned at the conclusion of the article the criteria that I use. I am completely open to dialogue with the government, with the ANEP and with any other entity in the country. I experience in a profound way the anguish of the present situation and the Church, which I unworthily represent, wishes to contribute to the solution of the problems that we confront. The Church, however, wishes to find an environment that is appropriate for her evangelical proposals. When *La Crónica del Pueblo* speaks about this dialogue with the ANEP they remind their readers of the criteria that ought to be used to enlighten a true dialogue. They stated: *The Archbishop, in his homilies, frequently alludes to the institutionalized injustice in the country, criticizing with frank and direct language the government as well as the powerful economic sectors of the country. He demands justice for the most exploited sectors of the nation, especially the agricultural sector of El Salvador*⁴. These are indeed my criteria and I want to tell the people that I do not want to lose the credibility and the confidence that the people have placed in the Church and therefore any dialogue must result in benefits for the greater well-being of the people. You can be assured that this is my sole desire in any dialogue.

Our Church community here in the Archdiocese has brought together for the first time the Pastoral Commission. This is a representative body of the various vicariates that will plan and carry out our pastoral ministry throughout the Archdiocese.

I ask your prayers for the priests who will be on retreat during this first week of Lent, that is, from March 5-9. I take this opportunity to invite my brothers, who like I, have not yet made their retreat, to do so during the coming week.

I want to express my condolences to Father Sebastián Martínez on the occasion of the death of his beloved mother, Doña Teodora de Martínez.

Looking at the life of the religious in our diocese, I want to call your attention to the fact that yesterday I participated in a meeting with the religious (more than 300 of them) in order to inform them about the meeting in Puebla. There is a wonderful spirit among these religious and they are willing to embrace the pastoral initiatives that ought to characterize the next steps of our Archdiocese. Thanks be to God because it has become clear Puebla is simply a new impulse in a journey that we have already undertaken. Puebla inspires the pastoral ministry of our Archdiocese and moves us in the same direction that was initiated by the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín meeting of the Latin American bishops.

I also want to point out that there has been a change in the principal in el Colegio Guadalupano. I greet Mother Esperanza Madrigal Duarte who is replacing Mother Lucila and who will now guide the destiny of this school.

This week we saw a beautiful sight as we travel through our communities.

Last Sunday in Tamanique thirty catechists were authorized to bring communion to their villages. Mother Juanita prepared these people in a very effective way.

The center of promotion, Anna Guerra de Jesús, inaugurated a new year of work in which they will continue to promote the women who work in the market.

In the parish of El Carmen, the Marriage Encounter continues with much enthusiasm. I had the joy of participating with these people in their pastoral ministry toward married couples.

In the parish of El Calvario in Santa Tecla a Cursillo of Initiation was provided for the whole Department of Libertad.

A course for the formation of catechists was given in the parish of Dulce Nombre de María in Chalatenango.

The patronal feast was celebrated in San Matías and La Palma. The patronal feast in Arcatao merits special mention. This celebration was to have occurred on February 2nd but the blockades by the security forces impeded the freedom of the Church in the celebration of this feast and deprived the people of their legitimate right to participate in this popular celebration. False information led the authorities to believe --- and this is ridiculous --- that this was not a patronal celebration but a subversive movement and so the security forces impeded people from traveling to Arcatao for this celebration. The celebration was then moved to Saturday, February 17th and even then there were new signs of a lack of confidence because priests and religious were searched. In light of all of this I ask: *is this the freedom that is given to the Church? Is this not a form of persecution of the Church?*

The same signs and consequences of persecution are seen in San Antonio Abad where Mother Chepita was brought back to Belgium by her Superior General and this decision was made because the government made her pastoral work most difficult and also placed further obstacles in her path to obtain residency.

On a happier note, last Sunday the committee organizing the centenary celebration in Tonacatepeque chose as their symbol an elderly woman of 114 years, Sebastiana Jiménez. When the civil authorities gave her a crown of laurel she said that she did not deserve this and was going to bring it to the Archbishop. I was filled with emotion as I greeted this elderly woman who was accompanied by some young people. She placed the laurel wreath on my head and then we both placed the wreath on the altar. Today I ask all of you to pray for this woman because the emotions of this elderly woman seemed to me to reflect the emotions of the elders in Jerusalem who greeted the redemption of Christianity --- here I refer to Simeon and Anna (22).

In Zacamil the people will celebrate ten years of working together as a base community of faith. The principal act of this celebration will take place at 4:00pm this afternoon when we will celebrate Mass in the day school of San José. Everyone is invited to participate in this celebration and to give thanks for the work of these base communities that were cultivated by the Belgian priests. As Archbishop I also want to express my own gratitude for this ministry.

This evening, in the parish of San Jacinto, there will be a change of pastor. Father Eduardo López Molina has been named the new pastor there.

Thursday, as occurs on the first day of every month, we will celebrate a Holy Hour in the Hospital de la Divina Providencia.

Even though I extended this invitation at the beginning of my homily, I repeat it here: the inauguration of Lent will take place on Wednesday at 7:30pm in the church of El Corazón de María in La Colonia Escalón.

These are our communities, my sisters and brothers, and as I mention these names I think of Corinth and Ephesus because of what Paul said about his communities, I can also say the same words to our parish base communities of faith: Christ is there in your midst and it is the work of Christ that is being undertaken in your midst. Therefore, as we said in Puebla, I want to encourage you because *the faith based community brings together families, adults and young people in an intimate interpersonal relationship grounded in the faith. As an ecclesial reality, it is a community of faith, hope, and charity* (23). These are the words of God --- words that encourage our communities and therefore I want to say to the government: respect these communities because in these communities people are nourished by the Word of God and therefore people are conscious and no longer asleep --- people have a critical conscience that is formed by the Scriptures. These communities cannot be stopped. In Puebla the bishops saw that throughout the Continent the creation of these communities of the People of God cannot be stopped. These communities are based on the Word of God and on the sacraments and have become a true leaven in the liberation of our nations.

From the perspective of the Church, Christ renews the world

Here I want to use the last comparison of the gospel that Jesus has placed before us today: *No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins* (24). What are wineskins? They are bags made of leather that are used in those areas where wine is produced and the wineskins hold the new wine. These wineskins, however, when they become old, crack and break and if new wine is poured into them, they burst and are torn apart. Thus Jesus also uses the comparison of mending the old cloth with an unshrunk piece of cloth because the tear in the old cloth will only get worse. Therefore Jesus is not a friend of mending. The Church, his bride, is also not in favor of mending and therefore denounces those situations of mending and those situations where people allow the cloth to be torn apart or the wineskins to burst.

Events of the week

The situation in our country is reflected in the events that we have lived during this past week, a week of many hopes but also of much grief.

Events that give us hope. I am pleased to gather together the impressions of the new rector of the University, Doctor Eduard Badía Serra. He wants the university to be a center for studies that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the university community. We would say that the university has to also look at all the horizons of the problems that confront our nation. My sisters and brothers, I know Dr. Badía Serra and I hope that people will see his abilities and understand his feelings in this matter and provide him with firm collaboration. As the People of God, let us at least help him with our prayers.

I am also filled with hope by the news that the distribution of 37,000 parcels of land has begun. I said this last Sunday but I repeat it here again today, namely, that I hope that this project of agrarian reform might be undertaken according to the words of the President: *we undertake this project and as leaders are mindful of our duty to promote the dignity of the human person, thinking always about the human person....without differences in political parties*⁵. As we said last Sunday, we hope that this project will be accomplished by putting aside partisan politics.

On the other hand, denunciations have continued, denunciations that refer to labor anomalies among farm workers and industrial workers. The construction worker, José Macario Miranda, has been detained for sixteen days. His family is very concerned about his situation and in the name of his wife we ask that he either be brought before the courts or set free.

The workers employed by the National Railroad have complained about the breaking of the promise that involved an increase in their salary.

There are denunciations of many people who have been arrested: In Chalatenango, José Santos Martínez González from Cancasque and also Sabino Molina from Cancasque; the assassination of Luis Antonio Alas, *za campesino*. In Cinquera, Paula Mijango, Mamerto Flores and Pantaleón Flores; in Sensuntepeque, Juan Antonio Fuentes from Las Marías; in the area of Lourdes in our capital, the labourer, Oscar Armando Interiano.

People have protested in Tutunichapa as a result of indiscriminate searches. In the poor huts of that community a voice was heard to say: *We live in misery, with no hope and we are pursued like war criminals. It is a crime to be poor in El Salvador...*

A judge has been accused of illegal arbitrariness for having frustrated the jurors in the case of the political prisoners Juan José Martel and José Alberto Landaverde. Their case should have been heard on Friday in Santa Ana where they have been imprisoned for two years. We place before the Supreme Court these anomalies that cause so much evil to so many people in El Salvador.

We are saddened once again by the death of our brothers José Heriberto Guzmán Córtez and José Leon Magno Guzmán Córtez. We spoke about them last week but we repeat this news today and I am thankful for the information that was sent to me by the Director of the Guardia Nacional⁶. To explain what I said last week, it is enough to read the news that was

reported in the paper *El Mundo*⁷. I don't claim to understand anything. I relied on the account of the reporter who described the unlawful events surrounding the cruel death of the Guzmán brothers.

In reality, using the words that Jesus spoke to us this morning, we would call this: *old cloaks and old wineskins* that Jesus desires to renew. Jesus did not come in order to mend but rather to recreate. The new wine is a sign of the new messianic gifts that cannot be put into old structures. If we use the comparison of Jesus, then we must keep in mind that the disciples of John wanted to preserve the custom of fasting as prescribed by the Mosaic Law while Jesus came to bring something that was superior to the Law of Moses. For this reason he says: *we are not going to put the ideals of Christianity into the molds of the Mosaic religion*. In life everything is in evolution. The Church must be renewed. We cannot preserve old traditions that have lost their meaning and even more we cannot maintain those structures in which sin has enthroned itself and from which come abuses, injustices, and disorder. We cannot call a society, a government or a situation Christian when our sisters and brothers suffer so much in those inveterate and unjust structures.

As we said last Sunday when spoke about the Message of Puebla, it is necessary to open wide the doors to Christ, to the new wineskins of the gospel and to the just and holy structures that the Lord brings. Here we do not refer to legalistic forms that hide injustices but rather structures where the justice of God encounters the way for all the people of El Salvador to live in the light of Christ, to live in the peace and joy and love that Jesus has bestowed upon us.

One cannot live as a bridegroom or a bride in a home where problems exist such as those that existed in the time of Christ and that exist here in our Archdiocese. There does not exist that confident love that enables us to love Christ when people are employed or work or live in structures and legal situations that are opposed to the free expression of love for the Lord. If the bridegroom and bride are given the ability to actualize their love, if Christ is the bridegroom of this Church which is the church of El Salvador, then, my sisters and brothers, let us encourage this love and let us enable the bridegroom, Christ, to be found here in this house where he ought to feel at home. Let us strive to make our country a place where our love for Christ is extended to others with the joy and kindness of the bride who feels understood. So be it.

¹ Discourse of John Paul II to youth at the general audience (21 February 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 25 February 1979.

² See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 February 1979.

³ See *Orientación*, 25 February 1979.

⁴ *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 23 February 1979.

⁵ *La Prensa Gráfica*, 23 February 1979.

⁶ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 22 February 1979.

⁷ See *El Mundo*, 15 February 1979.

Marginal References (1) Jn 11,16; (2) Mk 8,34; (3) Gn 3,19; (4) Mk 3,6; (5) Mk 2,18; (6) Mk 2,19-20; (7) Ez 11,19; (8) Ho 2, 16.17b; (9) Ho 2,21; (10) P 31-39; (11) Ep 5, 25-32; (12) P 583; (13) P 583; (14) Gn 2,24; (15) P 583; (16) P 583; (17) 2Cor 3,1b-3; (18) 2Cor 3,5; (19) P 645; (20) 2Cor 3,5; (21) Jn 3,30; (22) Lk 2,25-38; (23) P 641; (24) Mk 2,21-22.