

## LENT, RENEWAL OF OUR ALLIANCE WITH GOD

**First Sunday of Lent**  
**March 4, 1979**

*Genesis 9:8-15*

*1 Peter 3:18-22*

*Mark 1:12-15*

My dear sisters and brothers.

The season of the Liturgical Year which was initiated on Ash Wednesday is the most important season of the year. Let us live this season of Lent with the same desire to follow Christ and with the spirit of our authentic, evangelical Church. The essential element of Lent is discovered in the fact that this is a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter. The paschal mystery is the life and resurrection of Christ. Through his death, the Redeemer paid the debt that resulted from the sins of humanity and through his resurrection the Redeemer offers new life to all people so that they might participate in the merits of his cross and the life of his resurrection. It is necessary to prepare ourselves and dispose ourselves for the celebration of Easter. We must repeat here the words proclaimed by Jesus in today's gospel: *repent and believe in the gospel* (1).

May Lent be a season of repentance and a time to deepen our faith in the Good News! The feast of the resurrection is not only a feast of Christ but rather a feast of Christ who is the head of all of us who are part of the human race. On Easter Day, 1979, we have to be the body of Christ --- our life, our flesh, and our concrete situation has to be the body of Christ. The baptized people of El Salvador have to become like the mystery of the incarnation of Christ who appears alive and glorious. Let us give honor to the Redeemer in whom we believe and whom we await! Let us prepare ourselves so that we are not dead cells in the living organism of Christ, but rather cells clothed anew in spring, robed anew with great hope and divine life. The history of Lent provides us with a wealth of material to assist us in our preparation. There were three groups that prepared themselves for Easter.

The *catechumens*: these were the men and women who during an extended period were formed in Christian doctrine and now felt ready to receive baptism during the Easter Vigil. During the season of Lent the catechumens were prepared in a special way for the reception of this wonderful sacrament that would incorporate them into the death and resurrection of Christ.

Another group was called the *penitents* and this group was composed of all those persons who had sinned because of human frailty, weakness or maliciousness. They had separated themselves from the body of the Church and during Lent they readied themselves to receive the absolution that was given to them on Holy Thursday. This action was extended to them during the Mass of Reconciliation and prepared them for the Easter Vigil celebration because they were dead but given new life and, like the prodigal son, they returned home. These two groups, the catechumens and the penitents were the object of the special kindness of the Church's mercy, the ever fertile Mother who in every baptism gives eternal life to a new son

or daughter and who in very sacramental absolution raises up people from the death of sin to eternal life.

The name that is given to the third group of Christians is very beautiful: the *faithful*. These people are aware of their lukewarmness, their weaknesses and their temptations, but thanks to God, they were faithful to their baptism and did not betray their fidelity to the Lord. Nevertheless this group also prepared themselves for Easter so that their faith might be deepened.

Thus, on Easter, we have a risen Church, an Easter celebration which involves everyone, beginning with Christ the head and including the last person who was just baptized. This can be said because the catechumens who had prepared themselves are now baptized at the Easter Vigil and the penitents are restored from sin to reconciliation and the faithful continue to walk with the Lord.

My sisters and brothers, I provide you with the liturgical panorama of Lent and Easter and say these things to you now because the Easter Vigil ought to be the culmination of this Lenten season. The young women and men who were confirmed last year on the feast of Pentecost have stated some months ago that the Easter Vigil celebration will be led and organized by the young people --- and these young people are now preparing this celebration. Other young women and men and other communities are also preparing for the celebration of this holy night of Easter.

We have to struggle against a temptation that can destroy the celebration of Holy Week: traveling to the beach and resort areas. This is a time of rest and I know that many people do not undertake these journeys with any evil intent. But if we are truly following Jesus during Lent and following the cross then as members of the Church at least on Holy Saturday we should accompany Jesus and sing the glory of the resurrection that takes place in our own lives. Let us organize our vacation time during Holy Week so that Holy Saturday becomes the culmination of our vacation: a participation in the grace of Easter. My beloved sisters and brothers in all the communities and parishes of this Diocese, let us prepare ourselves for this Holy Night! May it be the final brush-stroke of this time we are beginning with Lent.

Naturally in the center of all of this is the risen Lord, Christ whom Saint Marks says *was driven into the desert by the Spirit* (2). Let us enter into the desert with Jesus! Let us allow ourselves to be led by the same Spirit of renewal. Figuratively speaking, the desert is a place of prayer and austerity and renewal. If there is any country that needs the desert, that needs prayer and renewal, then it is ours. How beautiful it would be to see all the people of El Salvador use this season of Lent for introspection. We are responsible for the evil that our country is suffering. We want to blame others and do not look at ourselves. Lent is an invitation to enter into the desert with Christ and reflect on ourselves.

For this reason the Pope this afternoon is going to begin his retreat. Together with his intimate collaborators he is going to begin a week of reflection. In our attempt to imitate him here in this Diocese, the Archbishop, together with a group of priests, will also begin our retreat. We call upon everyone to examine their fidelity to the Lord. If unfortunately we find ourselves among the sinners, then let us do penance! We have been baptized but Lent has valuable baptismal elements which ought to make us reflect upon the great dignity of baptism and which on Easter should lead us to live anew the wonderful dignity of baptized women and men. My homily this morning will follow this line of thought. Lent is a time to renew

our covenant with God. I want to give special attention to the word, *covenant*. Therefore I will develop the following three points: First, the covenant, a sign of our salvation: Second, Christ, the primary element of the covenant: Third, baptism, an insertion of our life into the Christian covenant.

### **The covenant, a sign of our salvation**

Today's first reading speaks to us about the first covenant that appears in the Bible. One of the beautiful elements of the Lenten season is that we are able to review salvation history, God's plan to save humanity, a plan of love and goodness. The first time that the Bible uses the word *covenant* occurs during the time of the flood. Covenant is another word for *pact* or *testament* --- Biblical words that are used to speak about God's relationship with people. This relationship can be summed up by the words that God spoke through the prophet Moses: *I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God* (3).

The first reading today is the epilogue of the account of the flood. The Bible says: *God regretted that he had made man on the earth and his heart was grieved* (4). This is a Biblical expression that refers to the weight that people's infidelity put on God. As a result God decided to open the floodgates and punish people (5) --- again Biblical language that refers to the flood which, as Saint Peter tells us today: *God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water* (6).

When the time of punishment had been concluded God still loved people and pronounced the words that have become the theme of this homily about the covenant. As God pointed toward the rainbow he said: *I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings* (7).

What then is the meaning of this pact, this covenant? The covenant was a frequent and often repeated event among people of the East. To make a covenant meant a reciprocal relationship between two parties who had duties and rights that arose from this reciprocity. For example, marriage is a covenant between two people who promise to give themselves to one another until death and as a result of this relationship both parties have equal rights and duties. A covenant also imposes conditions. According to ancient traditions, especially among Eastern people, a pact or covenant is made between equal parties and therefore the reciprocity is balanced. But sometimes a conquering people will establish a covenant with a conquered nation and impose conditions. A new covenant formula appears in the Bible that does not appear in other religions: God takes the initiative in establishing a covenant with the people. Among other people the covenant was considered sacred and in these cases God intervened, not to establish the covenant but to protect the people who had made the covenant. Therefore any breaking of the covenant was sinful, an offense against God who had witnessed the covenant.

The Bible reveals to us the one true God and speaks about the creation of man and woman and then says that God chose a people in order to establish a covenant with them. In this case the covenant is not simply a series of reciprocal duties and rights. In the language of the prophets, the covenant that God established with people appears as a grace, a gift, a promise of salvation. This makes the covenant unique and foreshadows the covenant that

Christ will establish. Therefore, it is easy to see how the covenant became a testament since it was passed on as a gift from parents to their children. Finally, the Old Testament, the covenant of the Old Testament, is fulfilled in the New Testament, the new covenant.

This sacred covenant was established in the midst of a very impressive ritual. The covenant is called a covenant of blood because the blood of both parties was mingled together. Our ancestors considered blood as a symbol of life and thus the covenant was ratified with the life of both parties.

Remember that Moses sprinkled blood over the people to signify the fact that God had established a covenant and sealed the covenant relationship with the blood of sacrificial offerings. (8) The action of Moses foreshadowed the blood that one day would be shed on Calvary: the blood of God. In the Old Testament, however, the blood that was shed was the blood of lambs, pigeons and other animals. This shedding of blood represented the life of the people and expressed the reality that they had entered into a special relationship with God and committed themselves to worship and adore God and fulfill the other obligations of the covenant relationship.

The Bible also describes another way of ratifying the covenant: an animal was slaughtered and then cut in half. (9) Those who established the covenant then passed through the middle of the slaughtered animal. This symbolized that a pact had been made and that this was a sacred action. Thus if anyone did not fulfill the covenant, their life would come to an end and they would also be slaughtered and cut in half. This expressed the seriousness of the covenant, the pact, the testament. This word *covenant* is taken from the customs of the people and used in God's revelation, the Bible, in order to express God's kindness toward the people --- God's commitment to save humanity. Today when I have speak about Lent as a time of renewing our covenant with God, I say this because I want to invite everyone to remember that as the People of God, as people who have been baptized, we have a commitment to God.

What is the theological explanation of the covenant, especially the covenant that appears in the Bible and the covenant that we renew today during this time of Lent? The explanation is very simple. According to God's revelation, every sin is a breaking of the covenant. Those who sin have disobeyed a law and this separation from the Supreme Legislator, our God, involves disobeying the Ten Commandments and results in alienation and other tragic consequences.

Theology states that when we sin we separate ourselves from the principle of our existence and life. This separation is an intimate separation because sin results in a certain disorder in our lives. Our own sad experience reveals to us the reality of the bitterness of sin. We experience a certain disorder within ourselves. We ourselves feel this bitterness and those who do not experience this are in a worse situation because they have become a lost cause. Hopefully during this season of Lent we will all experience our brokenness that results from our alienation from God.

From this inner brokenness and lack of peace in our hearts there arises another form of alienation: an alienation from our sisters and brothers. In the Bible Cain killed Abel and divisions appeared and multiplied (10). In our times too there are divisions, so many things that separate us, that sew hatred and violence, the consequences of sin. And this brokenness

is the result of breaking with God. When we love God and relate to Him, we love our neighbour, even though he might be an enemy.

And there is another fateful rupture: the rupture with nature. When we disobey God, there is an immediate reaction. The Bible tells us that before Adam sinned he had dominion over creation (11) but when he sinned the inner disorder resulted in fear. He feared that the wild beasts would no longer obey him (12). This tragic relationship with the cosmos is a consequence of sin.

At this time, however, the covenant is meant to draw together all these broken relationships. People who renew their covenant with God should also renew their covenant with nature, with their sisters and brothers and with themselves. During these first three Sundays of Lent we are going to reflect on the three covenants that are referred to in the Bible. The covenant that we reflect on today was established after the flood and we are told that God will preserve nature and provide people with natural resources: *This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you* (13). This is a cosmic covenant. The rainbow is a cosmic phenomena. This does not mean that the rainbow was invented. Indeed, the rainbow can be explained scientifically. God did not invent the rainbow but gave it a religious meaning. It is as if one of us were to point to the rainbow and say that it would be a witness to the promise that we make and therefore each and every time that we would see a rainbow we would be reminded of the promise. Thus the rainbow is a sign of the covenant. The rainbow is a sign of God who says that he will never again destroy the earth with a flood. (14) God will preserve nature but people must make every effort to establish justice so that the things that God has created are organized according to his plan. Saint Paul reminds us about this reality when he speaks about the fullness of time and says that all of creation groans beneath the weight of sin. (15) Saint Paul reminds us about this covenant of the rainbow, the covenant that demands that the things of nature be preserved for the happiness of all people. Thus the material things of creation should not be monopolized by just a few people nor should they become the object of envy and discord. Rather they should be used as God intended: with love. Yes, they should be used with love and used for the happiness of all people.

Today as we reflect on the rainbow as a sign of the cosmic covenant that God established with humanity we ought to examine how we use the goods of the earth. Have we made these goods idols? Have we enabled them to be enjoyed by all? Have we placed them at the service of people and enabled all people to rejoice because the covenant ought to put an end to all forms of alienation and class struggle and violence? Hatred would cease to be a reality if we were aware of the fact that God, the Creator of all, desires to establish a covenant with his children and wants his children to be sisters and brothers --- thus establishing the reality of community that we have continually preached and that is based on God's revelation. It is for this reason that I can never proclaim violence or hatred or guerrilla warfare. Those who say otherwise are slandering me because what I am preaching now is a gospel demand, a demand that I must proclaim in the name of God who established the cosmic covenant.

Next Sunday we will reflect on the covenant that God established with Abraham. This refers to another form of alienation that God wanted to eliminate. We will speak about the chosen people of God formed from Abraham's offspring and the sign of this covenant is not the rainbow but circumcision which becomes a sign of belonging to the Jewish people. Circumcision is demanded of all the descendents of Abraham, of all the members of God's

chosen people who are brothers to one another and who unite themselves together around the promises that God has given to his people.

Then, the following Sunday we will reflect on Moses. The covenant that God established with Moses enabled the people to experience a unity among themselves and with God. The sign of the covenant with Moses is the Sabbath. Here we refer to a respect for the Sabbath which now as Catholics we call Sunday, the Lord's Day. When we come to Mass on Sunday we fulfill the covenant that God established. Every Mass on Sunday is a realization of the covenant that leads us to respect the covenant and to experience God as the only true God. Before this one true God we must destroy all the idols that want to take the place of God, idols that want to become rooted in our hearts or in the hearts of our people: the idol of power and money and luxury, the idols of possessing things that alienate us from God. Sunday must be for us an occasion to renew our covenant with God.

Lent, this long season of Lent, is like one extended Sunday during which time we should reflect on the following: God wanted to establish a covenant so that women and men would be more united and so that all of creation would be used in accordance with God's will. Therefore, we should experience ourselves as sisters and brothers. My sisters and brothers, this is the meaning of the covenant. Lent is a season during which we remember God's ancient covenants so that we might live this covenant relationship in the present time and in the midst of our current problems. This covenant relationship, however, should be lived with the understanding that God watches over us and hopes that we will fulfill our commitments.

### **Christ, the key of the covenant**

What role does Christ play in this plan of God, this God who wishes to establish a covenant with humanity? Today the Sacred Scriptures tell us: *The Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts and the angels ministered to him* (16). What a beautiful image of Jesus! Jesus is driven by the Spirit!

The second reading goes deeper into this concept of Jesus being driven by the Spirit. Saint Paul tells us: *For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who has once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water* (17).

In both readings from the New Testament, Christ appears as the culmination point of reference. All the covenants that God had established with the former people of Israel were images and promises that would be fulfilled and accomplished in Jesus' redemptive activity. The true rainbow is the open arms of Jesus on the cross. Saint Paul says that true circumcision is the faith that Christian women and men profess in Jesus Christ. (18) The true Lord's Day is the worship that the people render to God. The signs of the covenant, the rainbow, circumcision, the Sabbath --- these have no meaning apart from Christ who fulfills them. Jesus is the realization of all of God's promises to save the world.

As Jesus enters the desert of Lent to dwell among the jackals and the wild beasts, as Jesus is able to rely on the angels who serve him, he presents us with an image of cosmic redemption, the image of one who dominates the wild beasts and is able to make the angels

serve him. Jesus has command over all things and will unite all of creation with the true Kingdom of God.

To enter into Lent with Jesus means that we take ownership of Jesus' covenant to save the world. It also means that we collaborate with Jesus in the salvation of history. On the last night of his life, when Jesus shares the bread and wine in order to leave us a reminder of his life and passion, he says: *this is my blood, the blood of the covenant* (19). Look at how all of God's love is offered in that cup of wine! Look at how God and humanity become reconciled in that cup of wine! His blood is shed for the forgiveness of all sinners who repent. Lent is the realization of the eternal covenant of God, but we must be aware of the fact that this realization is accomplished through Jesus Christ. Lent is a call to reconciliation.

It makes no sense to enter into Lent in order simply to fast and obey the Church's law concerning the observance of this penitential season. If this were so then the Church would simply become an annoyance because, like the Pharisees, she would only be concerned about fulfilling the law, about external appearances. Remember last Sunday when John's disciples and the Pharisees manifested this attitude and criticized the disciples of Jesus: *We fast so why don't your disciples fast* (20). Jesus responds and says that the Spirit gives life while the letter of the law destroys. While the groom is at home with the bride, the friends of the groom do not fast. This is a time of happiness and joy, a presence of salvation. Even though people will practice austerity and self-discipline and self-denial, even though people will fast and walk on their knees to holy places, yet if their hearts are filled with hatred and resentment, all of this is meaningless. Renewal in Jesus begins with love and fidelity to the Lord. This is true religion and this is Jesus of the covenant: Jesus filled with love, Jesus who reconciles, Jesus filled with goodness!

### **Baptism, the insertion of our life into the Christian covenant**

How does this covenant that God gives us, how does this become ours? If Jesus died and rose twenty centuries ago then how do we, poor women and men of the twentieth century, participate in the redemption that occurred so long ago? This morning Saint Peter has given us the answer in the second reading when he unites the rainbow to the flood and says that the rainbow was merely a sign. Saint Peter states that in reality *the rainbow and the flood prefigured baptism which saves you now. It is not the removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God* (21).

Baptism is an essential element of Lent. Why does Jesus' Lent become our Lent? Because through our baptism we have been incorporated into Christ and everything that Jesus did was done for us and is passed on to us through baptism. Why can we hope that our sins, no matter how great, are forgiven? Because Jesus died on the cross for these sins and through baptism the redemption from sin becomes ours. Why do I, a mortal person, feel my life is growing old, my strength declining, that I am approaching the grave and feel the weight of mortality, of limitations, of illness and sin? How can I hope for eternal life, a resurrection and not death? Because baptism has brought this new life of the resurrected Christ and his glorious life is ours through baptism. Everything that is Jesus' becomes ours because we have been baptized.

My dear sisters and brothers, what a great glory is ours! Thus Lent is a time that awakens in the heart of every Christian an awareness of their baptism. We pray that on Holy Saturday we might experience the reality that all the merits of the cross and all the joy of the

resurrection will also become the merits and joy of those who live on the margins of society, those who are unemployed, and those workers who have been deceived and had their just wages denied them. We say the same about those employees who are just and attempt to live their Christianity as persons who have been baptized and thus honor all the members of the Church. In these cases many other people have been incorporated in the household of these just people. In turn these individuals have become a part of his life because Christ is the head of the family and for everyone else there are no categories: *for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons* (22). How beautiful is the equality that is given to us in baptism! Through baptism we are all equal, living members of Jesus' saving action. If we have some worth it is not because of our money or talent or some other human characteristic. Yes, we are all worthy and our worth is measured by the degree to which we have inserted ourselves into the life and merits of Jesus Christ, into his cross and resurrection. This is the way that we measure a person's worth! When Pope Paul VI spoke about human promotion he said: *A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has.*(23) And a man is precious for what he is to the degree that he clothes himself in the divine life that Christ gave to the world. Even natural values are of little importance since Christ's redemption proclaims that these are precious only when they are baptized by Christ and then incorporated into his divine merits.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is the Lent that we are invited to live and therefore it is good to look at Jesus during this season of the Liturgical Year. During Lent Jesus is in the desert but not isolated from reality. Jesus of the Lenten season 1979 is involved with the People of God here in El Salvador, here in our Church and in the situation of our people. This is Lent, 1979!

### **Life of the Church**

I want to remind you that in his desire to actualize the message of Lent, the Pope has outlined, in a beautiful way, the spirit of Lent for this year 1979. He says: *Lent must mean something. It must show the world that the whole People of God, because it is made up of sinners, is preparing in Penance to re-live liturgically Christ's passion, death and resurrection*<sup>1</sup>. With regard to depriving ourselves during Lent --- what is the meaning of this? The Pope says --- and I want you to keep these words before you: *going without things does not consist only of giving away what we do not need; sometimes it also consists of giving away what we do need, like the widow in the gospel* (24) *who knew that what she was giving away was already a gift to her from God. Going without things is to free ourselves from all the slaveries of civilization that are always urging people on to greater comfort and consumption, without a thought even for the preservation of our environment which is the common heritage of humanity.*<sup>2</sup> Notice the words that are used here! Even though we do well in the area of material possessions we are nevertheless victims of a consumer society, victims of a society that urges us on to greater comfort. We consume these goods because advertising is a powerful influence and so we buy things that are beyond the limits of our salary. We want to live comfortably. We want to consume things and yet believe that our consumption does not make us victims or slaves. Do you understand how during this Lenten season your austerity can break the chains of slavery?

The Pope said: *The Lenten fast enables us to identify ourselves with those who are hungry. Do not wait until it is too late to help Christ in prison or without clothing, Christ persecuted or a refugee, Christ who is hungry or without a roof. Help your sisters and brothers who lack the bare necessities to escape from inhuman conditions and to reach true*



*human advancement*.<sup>3</sup> Lent enables us to open our eyes to the misery of others. When we speak of the Church of the poor, we are simply inviting the wealthy to turn their eyes toward the Church and make concern for the poor a personal matter. In Puebla we spoke about this<sup>4</sup> and showed how Jesus confronted this problem and as a consequence at the end of our life we hope to hear these words: *whatever you did for one of these least sisters or brothers of mine, you did for me* (25). The Pope describes Lent, 1979 by using the faces of the imprisoned, the homeless, those who lack clothing or are persecuted or tortured --- all of this is part of Lent, 1979.

The Pope also spoke with a group of young people and said: *you are at the age when you pose the profound question: what is the meaning of life? We know unfortunately that a large part of modern, atheistic, agnostic and secular thinking affirms and teaches that the question, what is the meaning of life, is an illness of the human person, an illness that must be cured and courageously confronted with the absurd: death and nothingness. There are many young people who seek meaning in life by avoiding vices and senseless violence and cruelty, but still cannot find meaning*.<sup>5</sup> Lent is a time for youth to reflect and to give meaning to their lives.

As I said before, the clergy of the Archdiocese that now enters the season of Lent is going to begin their retreat this week. I ask for your frequent prayers so that those of us who, together with the Pope, will make our retreat might become holier and better able to serve our people. Thursday of this week we will have a clergy meeting in order to become more familiar with the document of Puebla and to explore how we can give life to this document in our diocese.

I want to invite you to participate in a ceremony next Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, at 10:00am that will take place in the Basilica of San Miguel. Together with all the bishops and priests and the People of God we are going to present the document of Puebla to Our Lady of Peace and entrust her with this document so that it might become enfleshed in our ministry of evangelization in our country. I beg you to be present for this celebration and hopefully our Archdiocese will participate in a very lively way!<sup>6</sup>

I will give the blessing and then continue my homily. If anyone is in a hurry to leave, they can leave after the blessing. "The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, descend upon you. Go in peace".

There are some announcements that I believe will be good to keep in mind. First is the pilgrimage of the Archdiocese to the shrine of Our Lady of Peace. This will take place on March 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am. In the next clergy meeting the priests will plan their participation in this event and we hope that the religious and the laity will join together with us in this spiritual visit to the Virgin during which time we will place the document of Puebla beneath her feet.

Following the spirit that the Pope has shared with us, we will organize during this Lenten season a campaign of voluntary sacrifice. This is a world-wide campaign against hunger and will be directed by the Centro Ana Guerra de Jesús and there will be further announcements about this campaign.

Next Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, in the parish of Aguilares and Paisnal we are going to celebrate the second anniversary of the tragic death of Father Rutilio Grande and the two *campesinos*

who were assassinated with him. People are preparing for this celebration with a nine day novena that began last Friday. All the priests will celebrate a triduum of Masses and there will be numerous celebrations of the Word so that we might be able to reflect on the message that Father Grande has left to his parish. On Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup> the faithful will begin to gather together in the parish of Aguilares and at 8:00am will process to the church in Paisnal where Father Grande and his companions are buried. I want to let you know that the spirit of this pilgrimage has been explained by the pastor and the leadership team of the parish: *This is a pilgrimage that has a character of penance and atonement. Therefore this time we will process in silence. Silence does not indicate a passive attitude but rather is a clear sign that the People of God listen to and respect the Word of God. We are a people who do not shout out words of hatred and vengeance because we have committed ourselves to walk through this world with Jesus and as we walk we build the Kingdom of God.* This pilgrimage is a celebration of the Church and as such no group --- and this includes Christian groups --- should attempt to take over this pilgrimage. From the Church in Aguilares we will process together as Church. Thus all Christians are invited to come to Aguilares next Sunday at 8:00am.

This Friday the community of San Pedro Perupalán will celebrate their patronal feast, Saint Frances. The beloved pastor, Father Solórzano, has invited me to participate but because of the retreat and my pilgrimage to San Miguel, I cannot go there until Sunday. Therefore next Sunday at 10:30am we will be in San Pedro Perupalán in order to greet the people of that parish and to celebrate the liturgy of Confirmation for some young men and women who have been prepared for this sacrament by Father Solórzano and his catechists.

The celebration of the ecclesial base communities in the parish of Zacamil was held in the boarding school of San José and resulted in a true community celebration. This leads me to call upon all the parishes and ask them to become interested in creating in all the towns and villages these small communities that were praised and recommended in the document of Puebla.

The vicariate of Asunción celebrated the liturgy of Ash Wednesday in the parish of Corazón de María and I had the privilege of presiding at this celebration. I am grateful for the presence of so many communities that participated in the liturgy. I also want to congratulate the parish team that is ministering there in a very collaborative way. For example, this Tuesday a new course will begin in El Centro de Promoción de la Fe. I also congratulate this team because they have taken very seriously the task of sacramental preparation. I am sad, however, that in this sector, in San Benito and Colonia Escalón etc., there are some pastoral ministers, very often not from our diocese, who do not respect the pastoral norms of the Archdiocese. I again invite you to help us carry on a true pastoral, sacramental ministry and to do this in the way that the Church in our time is asking us to do it.

Last Friday we celebrated in the center El Despertar in San Antonio Abad the forty day anniversary of the death of Father Octavio Ortiz and the four young people who were assassinated with him. It was very impressive to see a bouquet of flowers presented to the mother of each one of the deceased. There were many tears and a great sense of solidarity at that moment.

I want to forewarn certain groups of ORDEN who, against the will of the pastor, organize processions, stations of the cross and even take up collections. I want to make it clear that the

pastor is the person of authority in each parish and in the respective towns and villages that form part of the parish --- no one else can claim that authority. In a special way I want to denounce the situation in the parish of San Martín in the village of San José Primero where a group of people want to take the keys of the hermitage and organize their own patronal feast. Such a celebration would not be Catholic since this is against the pastor's wishes. If a priest were to lead people in this kind of action against an authorized pastor, then the priest himself would be excommunicated and would have no authority to celebrate the Mass or any other sacrament. I therefore ask you to be very careful because these types of celebrations can only create a true schism in our church.

### **Events of the week**

I want to take advantage of this opportunity to tell you that the community that I have described has also experienced significant events in the civic area.

I believe that one of the most important events of this past week was the repeal of the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order.<sup>7</sup> We want to affirm the fact that the government's action was on target. Perhaps this was a gesture of good will and if other gestures and steps are taken then people will have greater confidence in the government --- it is precisely this confidence that we have lost. We do not want to be naïve but we hope for better things in the future. We are still far from giving credibility to the government's sincere desire for peace and justice because while the Law of Public Order has been repealed we continue to lament events, events that have occurred during the past week and that we must point out. But if we must say something positive about all of this then we must point out the fact that the government has recognized its errors and has begun to correct them. The Church experiences a certain satisfaction for having pointed out this error in time when we contrasted this pseudo law with the definition of law according to Saint Thomas Aquinas: *law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by one who has care of the community and promulgated*<sup>8</sup>. Only then can it be said that a law has the support of God. Otherwise the legislator loses his authority and becomes a despot whose principle of action is against the law: *sic volo, sic iubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas*, which means, this is what I want so this is what I command, the reason arises from my whim. God desires that this glimpse of rationality continue to grow and illuminate the irrational events of our situation. Let us educate ourselves in movements and gestures of peace!

On February 28<sup>th</sup> we commemorated the second anniversary of the events that occurred in the Plaza Libertad when many citizens lost their lives because they protested the election results<sup>9</sup>. What stood out on this occasion was the military occupation of the city: streets, plazas, terminals, etc. A sincere respect for the human person and his/her political rights would enable us to avoid this ugly spectacle of repression in our own city.

We are saddened by the national tragedy of the fire that occurred in the warehouses of Hospital Rosales. In accord with the Pope's thoughts that were read this morning, we ask you for your fraternal assistance. We are saddened by the fire in La Cooperativa Algodonera in Usulután that occurred on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

We are saddened by the death of the ex-alderman of Aguilares, Nicolás Alás, who died on February 28<sup>th</sup>.

We are also saddened by the appearance of another corpse, a young man whose body was found in Lengua de Güija. *El Diario de Hoy* wrote the following and note well that I am only reading the report from the newspaper and am not insinuating anything else: *the young man was blindfolded with a piece of white cloth, his thumbs were tied with a thin cord and his hands were tied behind his back. His wrists were handcuffed and the key of the handcuffs was in the lock.*<sup>10</sup>

We are also saddened by new arrests: Eleuterio Hernández on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Marciano Meléndez Dueñas on February 24<sup>th</sup>. These two *campesinos* have not had any formal charges brought against them and they have not been released --- practically speaking, they have been abducted. We weep over the abduction of four poor children in Apopa. Their parents were working and left their children in the home alone. Several men arrived in cars and abducted them. Hopefully, as a human gesture, these children will be returned to their parents. We are saddened by the assassination of Carlos Borromeo Mata that occurred on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. He was the head of the personnel department at ADOC and was machine-gunned as he was leaving his house and saying good-bye to his son.

More weeks have passed and we have no further news about those persons who were abducted<sup>11</sup>. As a member of the mediation team I direct my words to those who are responsible for these abductions and express my concern and my desire to see a humanitarian solution to this problem --- much time has passed and the problem continues.

Macario Miranda Mejía, Oscar Armando Interiano, Santos Martínez González --- a *campesino* and two workers who were arrested several weeks ago have not yet been released.

I hope that an effort is made to resolve the following labor conflicts: Pronac, the Fisherman's Union, La Constancia<sup>12</sup>. Because of some false rumors we want to clarify the fact that the Church's Legal Aid Office has not participated in these cases.

I want to denounce the case of Jaime Baires<sup>13</sup>. I visited him on his deathbed in Hospital Rosales. He is in the burnt victims unit with serious injuries and burns over all his body. He received a degree in social and economic science in France. He was not involved in any political activity and was in our country to receive medical treatment. He left his home on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and when he passed in front of the army post San Carlos, he was arrested. It is possible that he was mistaken for his brother, Frederico, who some years ago was president of AGEUS and who today resides in Costa Rica. We found Jaime in the hospital and as a result of the tortures that he suffered his prognosis for recovery is reserved. Yesterday he was dying. Because of cases like these I want to ask that people respect the human person. Without this concept the repeal or the enactment of new laws is useless because laws are made for people. Let us be mindful of Jesus' words: *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath* (26). Many thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> Message of John Paul II for Lent 1979. *Osservatore Romano*, 4 March 1979.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See *Message to the People of Latin America*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> We have not been able to find this quotation. It is probably not a textual quotation but a commentary of the Discourse of John Paul II to young people, 28 February 1979. See *Osservatore Romano*, 8 March 1979.

<sup>6</sup> At this moment the homily was interrupted because of a blackout. Mons. Romero continued with the Mass and continued his homily after the final blessing.

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<sup>7</sup> On 27 February 1979 the Legislative Assembly repealed the *Ley de Defensa y Garantía del Orden Público* which had been decreed on 24 November 1977. See *Diario Oficial*, 1 March 1979.

<sup>8</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2q. 90a. 4.

<sup>9</sup> On 28 February 1977 the army and security units repressed a popular demonstration in the Plaza Libertad, denouncing the presidential elections of 20 February 1977 which declared general Carlos Humberto Romero, candidate of the Conciliación Nacional Party, to be president.

<sup>10</sup> *El Diario de Hoy*, 1 March 1979.

<sup>11</sup> FARN claimed the kidnapping of the following people: Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton on 30 November 1978; Takakazu Suzuki on 7 December 1978; and Ernesto Liebes on 17 January 1979.

<sup>12</sup> See *Orientación*, 4 March 1979.

<sup>13</sup> See *Orientación*, 11 March 1979

*Marginal References* (1) Mk 1,15; (2) Mk 1,12; (3) Lv 26,12; (4) Gn 6,5-6; (5) Gn 7,11; (6) 1P 3,20; (7) Gn 9,12-15; (8) Ex 248; (9) Jr 34,18-20; (10) Gn 4,8; (11) Gn 1,26; (12) Gn 3,9; (13) Gn 9,9; (14) Gn 9,15; (15) Rm 8,22; (16) Mk 1,12-13; (17) 1P 318-20; (18) Gal 5,6; (19) Mk 14,24; (20) Mk 2,18-19; (21) 1P 3,21-22; (22) Gal 3,28; (23) GS 35; (24) Mk 12,41-44; (25) Mt 25,40; (26) Mk 2,27..