

## LENT, A RETURN TO GOD'S LAW

**Third Sunday of Lent**  
**March 18, 1979**

*Exodus 20:1-17*

*1 Corinthians 1:22-25*

*John 2:13-25*

My dear sisters and brothers.

We want to thank the German Broadcasting System for the service that they are providing to the Church. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to send a greeting to our sisters and brothers in Germany who have understood our situation and have come to our assistance. May the example of the people gathered together here in the Cathedral and the example of those who are listening to me on their radios, as well as the example of the people who have come together throughout the Archdiocese --- may the example of all these people communicate a message of faith, hope and love to these people who visit us. Indeed, may our visitors find in the voice of the Church and in the voice of the most humble priest who preaches the Word of God --- may they find a message of hope for their lives.

A time to prepare ourselves for the Easter celebration --- this is the message of Lent and during these Sundays all my pastoral efforts are dedicated to the realization of this objective. We are celebrating the third Sunday of Lent and therefore let us be mindful of the goal of our Lenten journey: it is a journey with Jesus who carries his cross, who fasts in the desert, who walks toward the final *it is finished* (1) and moves beyond the cross toward the glory of the resurrection. My sisters and brothers, all our anxieties, like heavy crosses and Lenten fasts, will bear fruit. Therefore, let us maintain the perspective of Lent. The glory of the Risen One is also our glory and our inheritance to the degree that we unite ourselves to his liberating efforts and unite ourselves to his pain and suffering.

The Paschal Mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the goal of our Lenten journey. I want to share with you words that are fitting today because last Thursday Pope John Paul II published his first encyclical. This letter outlines his program and his ideals. The title of this letter is derived from the first two Latin words and indicates the Pope's faith in Christ, in this person in whom all of us place our hope and dreams. The encyclical is called *Redemptor Hominis*, which means, *The Redeemer of Man*. The Pope begins his letter with the following words: *The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history* (2). In the same Introduction the Pope develops the idea of faith in Christ: *This act of redemption marked the high point of the history of man within God's loving plan. God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time Unique!* (3). These are words that the Pope wrote in his encyclical. You can see what a beautiful concept it is to view Christ as a pilgrim who journeys with us through history. He is one among millions of people and we could easily lose sight of him but he is unique among these millions of people because he is the person in whom God realizes his plan of salvation.

Lent is a journey toward the event that gives true meaning to the history of all people and each person. It is for this reason that we cannot live Lent and Holy Week without thinking about the implications of these celebrations for our personal lives. As men and women and as a people, the Savior is not lost in the present crossroads of our history. The people of El Salvador, each one of the millions of women and men in our country, we all know that God loves us and as the Pope says loves us *with an repeatable love*. Each one of us has a unique relationship with God who respects our individuality. God loves us as a people and does not confuse the people of El Salvador with other people. In the history of salvation which we remember as a Lenten journey toward Easter --- in this history of salvation God has a plan for every people and for each person. During Lent I have tried to focus my Sunday homilies on the theme of the covenant.

On the first Sunday of Lent we reflected on the Biblical readings and remembered the covenant that God established with Noah after the flood. The sign of this covenant relationship is seen in the rainbow. This can be seen as God's covenant with men and women as they live in the vast, natural, human cosmos. Thus the Pope is able to write in his encyclical: *The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history* (4). The rainbow that appeared after the flood is a sign of God's covenant with humanity in their natural environment. All of nature had been renewed after the flood and in this purified state all of nature was given to women and men. Christ is the true rainbow because on the Easter of his resurrection, nature is renewed and given to women and men who have been cleansed from sin and who now know how to relate to nature better than they did last year. Therefore, during Lent we prepare ourselves for the renewal of nature and humanity, the renewal of history and ourselves, the renewal of the members of the cosmos and history.

On the Second Sunday of Lent we reflected on the covenant between God and Abraham. This was an election from within the whole cosmos. God chose a people that would come to life in the sterile womb of the elderly Sarah and her husband Abraham. Isaac was born and he is the beginning of a people in whom the promises of salvation would be fulfilled because from this people the Savior would be born: the Redeemer of man. This was announced to Abraham who had been chosen from among all others but not chosen in some exclusive or segregationist manner. The Jewish people who are descendents of Abraham are the missionaries of history. Through a descendent of Abraham, Jesus Christ, they bring us God's blessing and yet the destiny of this people, the destiny of the gift they bring us is a gift of God, the gift of the Redeemer of men and is not given exclusively to the Jewish people. As Saint Paul says: *There is no distinction between Greek and Jew* (5).

When the Jewish people fulfilled their mission of bringing us a Redeemer, all people of the world had a right to share in this gift. This characteristic of faith was given to the father of the People of God. Faith is what distinguishes people from that moment on. Faith does not simply distinguish Jews from non-Jews, but is even more fundamental because it distinguishes believers and non-believers: *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned* (6). The covenant with Abraham is the origin of the chosen people and is the source of blessing for all other people. We are already God's chosen, working for redemption.

### **The People of God have a law**

Centuries later came the third covenant which is the focus of today's Biblical readings. Here we are dealing with Moses. The book that sets up the framework for the third Sunday

of Lent is the Book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible. The first book is the Book of Genesis and then the Book of Exodus follows. Exodus is like a dogmatic book because it contains the doctrinal nucleus of the people who are born from Abraham and the patriarchs. Because of hunger the people went to Egypt and remained there for four centuries and became an enslaved people. God had not forgotten his promise! The promise that God made to Abraham will be fulfilled.

The Exodus describes the wonderful moment when God chooses a leader who will free the people from slavery and, after a journey of forty years in the desert, will bring them into the Promised Land. Three months after the people had left Egypt, liberation became a definitive characteristic of the People of God. Freed by the marvelous work of God, the people had walked in the desert for three months and in today's reading we find them before Mount Sinai. Something great is going to occur there. God reminds Moses that he had made a promise to the people and that this promise will be renewed. The people must purify themselves during three days and then God will come to speak with the leader of the chosen people: Moses. Moses commands the people to purify themselves and says that no one should touch the mountain because in three days God will touch the mountain. The Bible describes how the people experienced the presence of God. God spoke to Moses: *You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle's wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore if you harken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine* (7).

My sisters and brothers, notice the fact that God calls them the People of God --- this is not the same as talking about people in general. People of God: *among all the people you are mine. I have chosen a people with whom I will establish a special relationship.* This is the People of God and it is good to be mindful of this fact. When we call our Church the People of God here in El Salvador this should not be confused with some democratic or political meaning of the word, as though all the people of El Salvador form the People of God. Only those who are baptized, *only those who have remembered the promises, only those who remember how God bore them up on eagle's wings, only those who have faith* (8) - this is what characterizes true descendants of the People of God. Not all the people of El Salvador belong to the People of God just as not all people during Moses' time participated in the covenant relationship that God established with the chosen people. A group of the people was chosen by God not because of some whim but because God found in some people a response of faith and hope that on the eve of the establishment of the great covenant with Moses led God to tell the people: *you shall be my special possession ... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation* (9). This is what God desires as he chooses people. It is a calling of humanity to become part of those people who repent of their sins and through faith incorporate themselves into the life of God who makes no distinction between Jew and non-Jew. The only door to enter is the door of faith in the Redeemer of humankind.

Moses calls the people together and tells them about all the things that God said. The people give this beautiful response: *Everything the Lord has said, we will do* (10). Look at how God has psychologically prepared for the moment when he will speak. He reminded people of their origins and spoke about the conditions for belonging to the People of God. He demanded holiness and offered them the privileges of holiness, *a priestly people, a holy people, a people who belong to him. Let us do everything that the Lord says* (11).

The Book of Exodus then begins to describe for us the wonderful theophany (12). There was thunder and lightening and smoke --- the glory of God descended upon Mt. Sinai. Moses, who had been charged by God, ascends the mountain to talk with God. There God communicates to him the words that were proclaimed in the first reading: the Ten Commandments. From that moment on the Decalogue became the essence of the People of God. The Decalogue, together with the laws of the covenant that were written down in the following chapters of the Book of Exodus, constitute the heart and soul of the Pentateuch. The first five books of the Bible are called the Law and Jesus, the prophets and the Jews refer to these books in that way. Remember the numerous occasions when Jesus says: *the law and the prophets* (13). We now stand before the Law and the Law of God is constituted the wisdom of the People of God.

The Law of God contains a preamble that we have heard today: *I, the Lord, am your God* (14). There is also an historical preamble: *I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery* (15). We should not forget these preambles. If we want to discover the true meaning of the Law of God, the law that many people ridicule, then, my sisters and brothers, we must remember that God has given us his law, a law that is valid for every era. The law is not just meant for the Jews. In the Decalogue God has summed up the whole of natural law and the laws of the Old Testament are valid in the New Testament.

When Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, recalls the establishment of the Decalogue, he says: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill* (16). Jesus also reminds the young man who seeks the road to salvation: *If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments* (17). The young man asks: *Which ones?* . Then Jesus begins to speak to him the words that were proclaimed today.

The commandments of God's law have a theological preamble: *I, the Lord, am your God* (18). There is a difference between the Decalogue and other contemporary law codes. Biblical students have found many texts from that period but have noted one significant difference. In the other law codes, the laws of the people are presented casuistically: *if someone does something* ... a punishment or a reward follows. The Law of Moses is quite distinct. It does not say: *if someone does something*, but rather states: *do this ... don't do that* ... There is no casuistry. The law comes from One who is sovereign and supreme. This sovereignty is presented in the beginning, *I, the Lord, am your God* (19). No person is able to rise up in rebellion against the Lord who has given people life and existence. Even though people might call themselves atheists: *I do not believe in God*, the fact is these people are living because God has given them their being. God is able to say to the most hardened atheist, to the most incredulous people, to those who ridicule the Church: *I, the Lord, am your God. I have implanted my law in you. You must fulfill this law.*

And the other historical preamble: *I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery* (20). The Exodus marks the origin of Israel as a people. The covenant that was established between God and Moses is a covenant that was made in the name of all the people, while the covenant between God and Abraham was a covenant with an individual but an individual who would be the father of a future people. But now these people exist and so the covenant is established with the people and has a communal significance. The people came into existence as a result of liberation. How wonderful to reflect on the meaning of liberation, especially at this time when there is so much talk about liberation! God is the great liberator: *I have given you freedom, but not freedom to do whatever you like.* Freedom is given for a reason. Saint Paul says: *for freedom Christ has set us free* (21). Whenever there is liberation there is a reason. God frees Israel from Egypt

in order to establish them as his own people. This is not done with the harshness of the Pharaoh but rather Jesus has said: *My yoke is easy, and my burden light* (22), and no one is able to live without the law. Those who do not obey the law of freedom of the children of God fall into slavery to their passions. Those who do not obey the law of God believe they are free. Yet there are no greater slaves than those who rebel against God's law. They are slaves to something: the flesh, money, politics, luxury, pride. The freedom that God offers has a path that must be followed: the law of God. My sisters and brothers, it is good to remember this because now that the Church offers us this passage about the Ten Commandments for our reflection, I would like us to enter into the intimacy of our hearts and examine whether we are fulfilling this covenant with God.

Let us look at our relationship with God. God does not command us because of some whim. God gives us an ethics that is based on dogma, that is, an ethics based on truth and revelation. God has revealed himself as an eagle who carried his people on his wings. (23) God has revealed himself as the liberating power of the people. God has revealed himself as the principle of love for humanity. We must remember these revelations that constitute our dogma otherwise the law of God becomes something that is hateful. Why do so many people fail to fulfill the law of God? This occurs because they have separated themselves from this revelation of love. Who fulfills the law of God with joy and pleasure? ... those persons who have not forgotten the revelation of God who has revealed himself as Father and who imposes his law on us for our good. Mindful of these dogmatic principles, the people of Israel and we, as Christians, who have been given a great revelation in Christ, must fulfill the law.

I believe that here we are touching the core of our situation in El Salvador. Here we are touching the root of so many disorders in our social life. If we ask: why are there strikes and abductions? Why are there divisions and violence? Why so many crimes and so many people who have disappeared and so much torture? There is only one answer to these questions: people have forgotten the law of God. My sisters and brothers, one day the corruption of our system will be pointed out; one day the abuse of power that becomes thievery will be pointed out. We can describe very painful situations of people who ought to give us an example of honesty in their governmental positions, in their business, in their management of money. Why do people take advantage of these situations and positions? Because they have decided to act selfishly rather than act on behalf of the common good. If only many accounts could be audited, many public works accounted for! Those who should have been our models have not respected God's law: the law makers, those with authority. And for the people, naturally the example of those in power spreads doubt, uncertainty and the desire to profit as well. So we have a corrupt country from top to bottom because all have forgotten, we have forgotten God's law.

It is necessary to be reminded now about these commandments, one by one, and then we can see how easy things would be if we returned to God. The title of my homily, which I forgot to mention, is: Lent, a return to the Law of God. I will develop the following three points: First, the People of God have a law; Second, the law of God is necessary but is not enough; Third, Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the power of God that saves. The title of the homily is a synthesis of what I want to share with you: Lent is a return to God's Law.

In this first part of my homily I remind you that the People of God have a law that was solemnly given to them on Mount Sinai. This same law is given to us in 1979, during this time of Lent and we, as a community, a nation, a people who govern and are governed, as

people and as Christians --- we, all of us, are invited to examine our lives. Lent will become a time of renewal if we hold up a mirror and notice our disfigured faces, the distortion that has occurred because we are not concerned about making the law of God a part of our lives.

As our catechism tells us the Ten Commandments that appear in today's first reading are divided into two parts. The first three commandments deal with people's relationship with God and the remaining seven deal with people's relationship with their neighbor. What a complete moral treatise! And all of this is contained in the first reading.

As our catechism states so simply, the first commandment is: *To love God above all things.* The Bible states this more fully: *I, the Lord, am you God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall have no other gods beside me. You shall not carve images for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their father's wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation, but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments (24).*

Some Protestants find here a way to accuse Catholics of worshipping images. This is not the time to speak at length about this but in passing I want to tell you that God is not prohibiting the use of images of saints but is prohibiting the use of images of God. The images of the saints are depictions of persons whom we know are in another life and we use these images in order to make them present to us, just as my mother is present to me and whose picture I have at my bedside but I know that my mother is not on the bedside table but simply a picture of her. On the other hand, the images that are prohibited are the idolatrous images, the cultic images. As modern investigators have examined this practice they have discovered great distinctions between the people of Israel and neighboring peoples who did not have this prohibition. In the excavations of these various people they did not find a single image of the divinity of the Jewish people. Yet they found the divinity of other people represented in the form of serpents or other animals, etc. In order to avoid this danger of idolatry God commanded the people not to make images of the divinity nor to attempt to represent God with other visible images because the day on which a Jewish person should be found kneeling down before an idol, then that person would have betrayed the whole Decalogue. The Lord says: *I am a jealous God; I do not want you to adore anyone but me (25).*

This is the meaning of the first commandment which as you can see has great significance in our time. What are the idols of the present era? We have spoken about this many times and for this reason there are many people who are sinning against the first commandment. They have erected idols: money, power, pride, worship of self, etc. This first commandment presents us with an opportunity during Lent to dethrone all the idols that are not the true God. This is the time to examine your life and your criteria and give greater value to God in your life.

In our catechism we are told that the second commandment is the following: *Do not take the name of your God in vain.* The Bible presents this commandment in a longer form: *You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. For the Lord will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain (26).* Here reference is made to those who use the name of God and swear to something that is false or use the name of God as the

foundation for a curse. The Israelites had such respect for the name of God that they would not pronounce the name of *Yahwah*, but said, *Adonai*, which means, *Lord*. The revelation of the holy name is *Yahweh* and not Jehovah as the Jehovah Witnesses say. Jehovah is a corruption of the word *Yahweh* and does not exist. *Yahweh* is the correct name. *Yahweh!* But this name was so holy and people had such great respect for the second commandment that they would not pronounce the word *Yahweh*, but replaced it with the word, *Adonai*, which means Lord.

The Third commandment marks the relationship of people with God and is also the sign of God's covenant with Moses (27): the Sabbath. The Sabbath, the Sabbath rest, is like the rainbow, a sign of the covenant. Sunday is also a sign of God's covenant with the people. For this reason, when we come to Mass on Sunday it is as if we, the people of God, were here renewing the covenant with God. It is wonderful to see all of you here on Sunday. My sisters and brothers, I thank you for your presence here in the Cathedral because you give so much life to this commandment. You might ask: *why do we not keep holy Saturday, as the Bible says?* Saturday is a word whose root means rest. It is not as such a day of the week, but rather a day of rest. For the Israelites, Saturday was a day of rest but when Christ rose on Sunday, the first Christians changed the day of rest to commemorate the Resurrection which is the basis of our hope. Thus the Council stated: *Catholics come and gather together for Mass on Sunday in order to renew the covenant with God and in order to give thanks for the hope of redemption that they bear within their hearts* (28). Therefore, we come together on Sunday to renew the covenant and to make holy the Day of the Lord! Coming together on Sunday is part of our commitment to the Lord's covenant. We see in this Assembly that which I have already mentioned: the assembly called together by Moses when God was about to talk to them. I look at you, my sisters and brothers, and I know that my humble ministry is nothing other than the ministry of Moses: to communicate the word of God ... *thus says the Lord.*(29) How pleased I am when in the intimacy of your hearts you speak to me with words or write me letters that contain the same response that the people proclaimed to Moses: *Everything the Lord has said, we will do* (30). How wonderful to meet people! The other day a priest told me that a man wanted to go to confession who had not done so for forty years. He said he wanted to be converted, as he had heard about here in the Cathedral. When they say I preach political matters, I refer to these testimonies of conversion to God. That is what I seek: conversion to God. If I point to political matters here, it is often because of the corruption of political affairs, so that those whom God loves, even when they are mired in sin, might also be converted.

Then follow the seven commandments that deal with our relationships with our neighbour. The fourth commandment deals with the relationship of men and women with their parents. Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians calls this *the first commandment with a promise* (31). It is good to know that the only commandment that has a promise of blessing is the one that God pronounces: *Honor you father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you* (32). I believe that it is enough to appeal to the experience of good children and bad children. Good children have such joy! Bad children carry around so many thorns! What tenderness in the elderly woman who says: *my son never forgets about me!* What bitterness in the man who says: *my children do not even remember their dad!* If this commandment were fulfilled there would be joy in so many homes and hearts.

The fifth commandment is brief but powerful: *You shall not kill* (33). Here the sacredness of human life is proclaimed. Remember that all of these words are written under

the heading: *I am the Lord, your God. I have given you life and health to your brother and you are going to take his life?*(34) Look at the bloodshed that is diminishing the joy and the sacredness of human life. People are ordered to kill. People are paid to kill. People earn a living by killing others. People are killed as a result of hatred. How many hidden crimes are revealed in the bodies that are found in so many different places in our country! Many times the origin of the arrest of these people was the result of official orders but the motive of these arrests is often assassination. What has motivated these assassinations? Who has been given money to have these assassinations carried out? What interests motivate this bloodshed? *You shall not kill* . How horrible to kill another!

Would that I were being listened to by those whose hands are soiled with murders! They are many, alas. For torturers are also murders; one who begins to torture does not know where it will end. We have seen torture victims taken to hospitals to die under all sorts of deceitful stratagems. Torturers too are killers, murders; they do not respect the sacredness of life. No one may raise a hand against another because human beings are God's image. *You shall not kill*. I also wish to mention the enormous disgrace of killing that takes place in the mother's womb. Abortion, too, is murder, an abhorrent crime. In this case it is one's mother who abuses and kills! *You shall not kill*. When Christ perfected this commandment he said: *When you begin to hate, you have also begun to kill* (35). Thus Jesus came to perfect the commandments with the evangelical counsels so that people would find happiness in obeying the law of God.

We could continue to speak at length about this commandment which is so often forgotten, tragically forgotten! Hopefully in light of my words, which repeat the words of God, we might respect human life, especially if a person is in the hands of another who is making him suffer. Respect these people! *You shall not kill!* Do not kill these people who are in your hands! Where are those people who have disappeared? In what prison are these people languishing or perhaps dead? Have they been killed? Let us know so that at least their mothers, who weep because of this uncertainty, would be able to place some flowers at the place where they have been buried. *You shall not kill* even though you have tanks and high caliber rifles. Why did bystanders die during the strike that took place a few days ago? Is there no other way to disperse a crowd except by firing bullets into their midst?<sup>1</sup> At least nine families now mourn the unexpected death of loved ones --- unexpected and perhaps imprudent, imprudent on both sides. *You shall not kill*. I would hope that these words would be engraved in the consciousness and the hearts of all who are in positions of authority over other people. *You shall not kill*. The law of God commands this!

There are so many things that could be said about the sixth commandment: *You shall not commit adultery* (36). When we look at our present situation in light of the law of God, we are surprised that God is still patient with us and does not treat us worse than we are being treated now because of our own fault. Here we speak about the holiness of marriage and state that sexual relations are only permitted within the context of marriage and therefore, in order to guard the holiness of this act that is a collaboration with God, the Creator who makes life fruitful, God forbids sexual relations outside of marriage. In this regard we cannot ignore the great business that occurs in motels and houses of prostitution here in El Salvador. So much grief and misery! So much exploitation of the dignity of women --- exploitation of their health and the life of the nation! And yet all of this creates good business for some people and if one were to believe this we would be surprised when it was said that this is a business of Mr. .... My dear sisters and brothers, God will rain down fire on this Sodom. These are houses of sin that are occupied day and night. There seems to be so much time to offend

God. There is no discipline and the law of God is so easily violated. *You shall not commit adultery*; you shall not fornicate!

The seventh commandment in the Decalogue is: *You shall not steal* (37). My sisters and brothers, we could easily make an examination of conscience about the way in which theft has become so present in our environment. Those who do not steal are considered stupid or foolish. Those who are involved in business deals or public works and do not take their “cut” --- money that at times amounts to millions of dollars --- are spoken about as people who do not know how to take advantage of the situation. *You shall not steal*. How different would our country be if there were not so much theft! I want to be just to the many people who have money and are honest and who complain that they are blamed for everything. This makes us look somewhere else and so we say: are the fourteen families the only persons responsible for all of this? The names of these people continue to multiply. Former officials seem to be well provided for --- property, houses and businesses are multiplied. Has everyone been dealt with fairly? If so, then, blessed be God, but if at the bottom of this the seventh commandment is violated then the Lord cannot be blessed. *You shall not steal* is the truth and those who steal, steal from the people who live in misery --- yes, you have stolen from them! How many things could be said about this commandment that does not seem to have any importance! My sisters and brothers, stealing is always a sin! The law of God is always the same: *you shall not steal*.

The eighth commandment follows: *you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor* (38) --- the law of sincerity. I want to give thanks to God because the Church has a language of sincerity. This is so important in an environment where no one believes in anything and yet still believe in the Church. Thanks be to God that the Church has preserved this sense of credibility and this ability to dialogue and that people know that the Church does not deceive, does not lie. When speaking about this commandment that deals with truth and lies, how many things must be cut away! Who believes in the news that is published in our newspapers especially when this seems to favor certain interests? It is good --- and here I congratulate people for this --- that you are learning how to read the newspapers and listen to the radio and view your television. Not everything that is communicated in the media is the truth. There are many lies. There are many sins against the eighth commandment. A modern writer states: *If we woke up one day and were resolved to fulfill the law of God, and then if we came home and read our newspapers, we would find that many homes had not been faithful to their initial resolution*. Ah! Yes, at this time we are forbidden to lie.

It is certain that this would create more confidence in the relationships between people. But what has happened in our midst? My sisters and brothers, there is such a lack of confidence that when we are talking to someone, we look in all directions to see who might be listening. Spying is also a sin against the eighth commandment because many times the information that is communicated by spies is motivated by hatred or vengeance. I have seen many people suffer because of misinformation, false testimony that was given against them. Indeed, this is what is happening to the communities of our Church; they are the victims of this sin: false witness. I remember when they faced me with so-called arguments for the expulsion of some priest, I was able to see the lies and insolence which formed the base of unjust decisions, inspired by sin against the eighth commandment. Brothers and sisters, we need a conscience that leads us always to speak the truth. It is better not to speak, though often keeping silence is often cowardice when we should be speaking to denounce the sin of false witness.

Now we speak about the last two commandments: *You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife* (39). These are precautionary commandments so that people do not violate the sacredness of property or the holiness of marriage.

As you can see and as the Bible tells us, the commandments that were given to us on Mount Sinai are wonderful expressions of our relationship with God and our relationship with our sisters and brothers. I would hope that during this season of Lent, we would once again reflect on our lives and ask ourselves how we are fulfilling these commandments.

After this (giving people the Decalogue) the ceremony on Sinai concludes as Moses commands the people to slaughter some animals in order to seal the covenant that had been established with God.(40) The blood of these animals is sprinkled over the people in order to sign them with the blood of the victim and seal the promise that they had made: *Everything the Lord has said, we will do* (41). The Ten Commandments of the law of God are humanity's response to the covenant that God wants to establish with them. To fulfill the commandments is to ratify each day the agreement that was signed with God: *I will be your God and you will be my people.*(42) Let us not glory in being the People of God as long as the law of God is violated and trampled upon.

### **God's Law is necessary but not enough**

Here I want to focus on today's gospel. What is occurring in today's gospel? Jesus makes a whip of cord and drives out of the Temple those who made the Law of Moses a business, those who had made the Temple a marketplace and a den of thieves instead of a sign of union with God.(43) With this holy sign Jesus purifies the Temple, a place of sacrifice and worship that because of so many laws had become a place of legalism that was far from and lacking in spirit. The gospel of Saint John is very graphic as he weaves together all these signs of the Jewish people. In today's gospel for example, we see the sign of the feasts, the sign of the Temple, the sign of sacrificial institution. All of these are simply signs, the letter of the law and legalism is not spirit. What God desires above all else, is spirit.

I have already referred to the encyclical letter of his Holiness, John Paul II and I want to read to you a part of this letter where the Pope speaks about redemption and humanity.(44) He says that the letter of the law is not enough but that the spirit is necessary: *Already in the first half of this century, when various State totalitarianisms were developing, which, as is well known, led to the horrible catastrophe of war, the Church clearly outlined her position with regard to these regimes that to all appearances were acting for a higher good, namely the good of the State, while history was to show instead that the good in question was only that of a certain party, which had been identified with the State.* Here he refers to military regimes that came into existence before the Second World War, especially those regimes in Germany and Italy that gave birth to the concept of national security which today inspires the military regimes of Latin America. The Pope says that because of the tragic history of the violations of human rights in these countries that glorified themselves in seeking the common good, the United Nations was formed and the Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated.

The Pope refers to this when he says: (45) *While sharing the joy of all people of good will, of all people who truly love justice and peace, at this conquest, the Church, aware that the "letter" on its own can kill, while only "the spirit gives life",*(46) *must continually ask, together with these people of good will, whether the Declaration of Human Rights and the*

*acceptance of their "letter" mean everywhere also the actualization of their "spirit". Indeed, well founded fears arise that very often we are still far from this actualization and that at times the spirit of social and public life is painfully opposed to the declared "letter" of human rights. This state of things, which is burdensome for the societies concerned, would place special responsibility towards these societies and the history of man on those contributing to its establishment.*

So then we glory in the fact that human rights coincide with the law of God for as the Pope says: *The declaration of human rights accepted by many nations serves as a new Sinai and should have inspired a new respect for God and the human person. Therefore we might ask if at the present time the Law of God and the declaration of human rights are fulfilling the letter of the law while their hearts are far from what was expected of all of this.*

Here then it is right to review the past week. Before looking at these events from the perspective of the Church, I prefer to look within the Church so that each day she might be more faithful, more consistent and more inspired by the true word of the Lord.

### **Life of the Church**

The first news that I want to share with you and which I have already spoken about refers to the encyclical letter of his Holiness, *Redemptor Homimnis* which has been commented upon throughout the world. There are three great concepts that the Pope shares with us --- concepts that are engraved in his heart: Christ, the Church and the human person. These concepts are the heart of this encyclical that fully supports the Church's role with regard to the Word of God and the rights of God and the rights of women and men. We are preparing an edition of this letter that will soon be published. In my interview next Wednesday I will give you some more information about this marvelous document.

Today we begin a period of voluntary offering. El Centro Ana Guerra de Jesús which in previous years has taken charge of this collection, will today take up this collection in all our churches and gather together the fraternal help that you might wish to give in order to confront the problem of world hunger and support the works of human promotion that are carried on by the Church.

Tomorrow is the feast of Saint Joseph and various congregations and communities will celebrate this day as their patronal feast day. I want to remind you that El Seminario San José de la Montaña has been placed under the protection of Saint Joseph. We also want to place our vocational work under the patronage of Saint Joseph. Among the parishes that will celebrate their patronal feasts are San José Villanueva (I will celebrate with this community later this morning) and San José Cortes (I will visit there this afternoon). Speaking about the seminary, I want to remind you that we will have three meetings with three groups of seminarians from Chalatenango where we have a minor seminary --- San José de la Montaña is a minor and major seminary. As part of our vocational ministry I extend to all of you an invitation to participate in the priestly ordination of Ezequiel Gámez which will take place on Saturday, March 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm in the parish church of Santa Lucía in Suchitoto.

I want to advise you ahead of time that on Good Friday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, we want to intensify our prayer and penance in every part of the Diocese. Let us pray often because as the Pope says in his encyclical: *prayer is the door that sanctifies the Church.* Be alert to those celebrations that are often organized during Holy Week without the authorization of the

pastors: processions, Stations of the Cross, etc. I want you to know that the pastor is responsible for all these activities and therefore, people must be in union with the pastor to carry out these activities.

I want to announce to the different communities that are listening on the radio: if you want to take advantage of the services that we are going to broadcast from the Cathedral, we will begin with the celebration of Palm Sunday at 8:00 am. The blessing of palms and the procession will begin in the church of El Calvario at 8:00am and proceed to the Cathedral where we will celebrate Mass outdoors, in front of the Cathedral. On Holy Thursday we will broadcast the Procession of Silence which is a tradition in many communities. We invite people to come together and between 10:00pm and 12:00am we will transmit a service of the Word that we hope will unite the message we want to share with this multitude of people. We hope that this procession will be orderly and carried out in a very devout manner. On Good Friday we will begin our broadcast at 11:00am, the time when we will celebrate the Stations of the Cross and we hope that this radio transmission will also help other parishes that will be celebrating the Stations of the Cross at the same time. The Sacred Burial Procession will begin at 6:30pm at El Calvario. Finally, the Easter Vigil, the goal of our Lenten season, will be celebrated in the Cathedral at 7:00pm and will also be broadcast on the radio.

I also ask forgiveness of the communities San Pedro Perulapan, El Paraíso, and Monte San Juan because extraordinary circumstances did not permit me to accept the invitation that was extended to me. I hope to visit you in the near future. I want to denounce the sacrilegious theft in Villa San Cristóbal, in Cuscatlán. I want to unite myself with the joy of the Josephite community in El Colegio Cristóbal Colón where they celebrate a beautiful week in honor of Saint Joseph. I had the pleasure of inaugurating this week, last Monday, with the celebration of a youth Mass. I want to express my gratitude to the Luisa de Marillac School in Santa Tecla for the donation of food, clothing and other items for people in need, especially for those in the women's prison. I was very pleased that a poor school was helping other poor people.

### **Events of the Week**

From the perspective of the Church that lives in the midst of these and other situations, we want to focus on two principal events: the conflict between labor and management and the freedom that was granted to the prisoners accused of violating the Law of Public Order.

With regard to the conflict at Constanca y Tropical the work of the Archdiocese is known by all of you. Nevertheless I am saddened by the lack of respect that the military authorities showed to two priests whose presence had been requested by the strikers to guarantee their safety at the conclusion of the strike. The priests were not allowed to enter the place where the strikers were gathered but had to remain on the bus of the Red Cross and were not even allowed to open the windows of the bus. The same thing occurred at the time of the occupation of the offices of the Organization of American State and the Mexican Embassy. I want to say clearly: the priests did not go there to meddle in these matters but were present there because their presence was requested by those persons who trust the Church. Therefore just as the Red Cross and the Human Rights Commission was allowed to enter this place, the same respect should have been shown to the priests.

I want to clarify one of my statements that was published by the press because my message about the conflict in Constancia y Tropical was distorted.<sup>2</sup> There was no mention of the fact that I had said that the root of the malaise will continue as long as there is a lack of social justice in relationships in El Salvador. The press also omitted my congratulations to the workers at Constancia for their calmness, firmness, courage and ability to dialogue. I extended the same congratulations to management. I thanked both sides for the confidence that they showed in the Archdiocese and ultimately have received expressions of gratitude from management.

Even though, thanks be to God, this strike has ended, the Church will continue to be attentive to see what happens because the sad experience of other situations that have been resolved in the past has shown us that little by little repressive measures have been taken against the workers. This led to the destruction of the workers union and the assassination of one or more union leaders. May the Lord remove from everyone's mind this spirit of vengeance and may we all rejoice in the peace that resulted from the resolution of this conflict.

Other conflicts are still being negotiated: PRONAC, STECEL, the bus drivers on route 5 and 28 and conflicts in other factories. We always appeal to the ability of the people of El Salvador to dialogue, when they want to do this. The union of El Seguro Social denounced the Administrative Council for violating their collective bargaining contract. The union of the workers in the coffee industry denounced the firing of 2,836 workers from La Compañía Salvadoreña de Café.

Besides these events that have involved our priests we are also saddened by the fact that other situations have continued to cause death and injury to so many people. I call your attention to this fact because I would hope that these things would cease. The people who organized themselves in order to put pressure on the military to retreat from the positions that they had taken up around La Constancia y Tropical took possession of the Cathedral<sup>3</sup> and burned buses. I want to make my own the words of a statement that was published concerning this event: *The popular movement led by FAPU and BPR and others etc. should understand that they can rely on the sympathy of the people and the support of the workers but that their radicalism hinders their development and only heightens the passions of people which ultimately causes greater harm than good in the causes where people need to be united. We must admit that the support of these groups has been of service to our people.*<sup>4</sup> In other words, the language of the Church is a firm NO to violence and a NO to identifying herself with any one of these groups. It is sad that people must have recourse to these means in order to counteract the violence against which these organizations struggle. It would be good to take the time to reflect in order to prevent greater evil in all of these situations. I want to state that that I am not in agreement with the occupation of the Cathedral and I am saddened that people have recourse to this means because they cannot find other channels for their voices to be heard. With regard to this last mentioned labor conflict, the body of the union leader, Oscar Armando Interiano García, has been identified. He was arrested on February 13th and was thought to have "disappeared." Then on February 27<sup>th</sup>, as you already know, his body was found.

The Chamber of Commerce<sup>5</sup> has said that it must be remembered that these incidents, strikes and other conflicts that have been declared illegal and that provoke agitation and discouragement among the workers also discourage people from investing in the country, and this results in unemployment and less money coming into the National Treasury. The

President sees these strikes as a pretext for subversive elements to create agitation and asks the workers to propose their demands through legal channels.<sup>6</sup> I want to gather together all these criteria in order to speak the Church's mind in this regard: all of this is valid when there exists legal channels for this to take place. But we are mindful of the fact that the Minister of Labor has announced a reform of the work code and confessed that there is a lack of legal channels<sup>7</sup> and this highlights a contradiction in the government. Therefore it is necessary to find legal channels so that situations that might turn violent have a legitimate escape. In my Third Pastoral Letter<sup>8</sup> I pointed out the services that the Church is willing to provide and we do this not to foment agitation but to provide escape valves. All of these matters should be organized and resolved in a way that is desired by all those involved in the conflict.

My sisters and brothers, we rejoice at the release of seventy-five persons who had been sentenced because of violations of the Law of Public Order.<sup>9</sup> This is what we have requested. But we do not want to forget the families of those persons who have disappeared because we, as Church, and many other institutions have been advocating for them. We also want to say that the abolition of a law is not enough if there is not a spirit of seeking the common good. Why were the bodies of the Martinez brothers<sup>10</sup> from Chalatenango discovered in some other place when it is known that they were arrested in front of their houses? I have personally seen the mother and the wives of these Christian brothers weep. The same thing occurred in the case of the catechist, Juan Antonio Fuentes who was arrested on February 22<sup>nd</sup> in his house; several people witnessed this event. Then his body was identified in Sensuntepeque. The continuation of these massive searches and the continued disappearances of our citizens indicate that the abolition of the Law of Public Order is not enough. As we said before, we also need a spirit that seeks for true peace and justice for our people.

We are concerned about the news that we received concerning those persons who have been abducted and we hope that people will take advantage of this time and the possibility to negotiate this matter so that the lives of these people might be saved. We are happy that the child from San Miguel, Carlos Mario Villatoro, has been found. With regard to the kidnapping of this child I want to publicly express my admiration for a Marist Brother, a religious who offered himself as a hostage in exchange for the freedom of this child. This was not necessary but the gesture of this Brother was very striking. And here I can say the same thing about other priests and religious of the Archdiocese. I want to congratulate and thank those priests and religious who at a given moment, when volunteers were sought to go and protect the strikers from the ring of military personnel who surrounded them, these priests willingly offered to go on this mission. Again they did not have to do that but the gesture of these priests and religious stands as a cause of admiration among us.

### **Christ is the fullness of the Law**

We are going to draw near the altar with this third point which is only hinted at: the law is necessary but the letter of the law is not enough, the spirit of the law is necessary and only Christ is the fullness of the Law.

Let us be mindful of this fact as we journey during Lent toward Calvary and the Resurrection. Saint Paul has said (47) that neither the sign that the Jews look for with their boastfulness about the Temple and miracles nor the wisdom of the Greeks --- none of this will save humanity. Salvation is found in the saving power of the crucified Christ. This morning Jesus reminds us of this sign with his gesture of driving out of the Temple those who

had profaned this holy place.(48) Jesus presents himself as the Temple, as the place where God is found, as the perfect worshipper of God and the Saviour of all people.

I hope that all of these reflections on the covenant and our national reality will enable us to understand the words of Saint Paul: *Let us not place our hope in the law or in the power of men or in signs created by human beings. Yes, we work in the midst of this world and we work with human means but our hearts find their hope in the great sign of Christians: Christ Crucified! The Risen Christ!. So be it!*

<sup>1</sup> On March 12, the security forces and the army suppressed a concentration of popular organisations in the vicinity of the factory La Constancia. See Comunicado de la Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador, *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 13 March 1979.

<sup>2</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 15 March 1979.

<sup>3</sup> The occupation was carried out by members of the Bloque Popular Revolucionario on 11 March 1979. See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 12 March 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Manifiesto of the Sindicato Textil de Industrias Unidas, SA to the working class in general and the people of El Salvador (8 March 1979), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 12 March 1979.

<sup>5</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 15 March 1979.

<sup>6</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 March 1979.

<sup>7</sup> See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 15 March 1979.

<sup>8</sup> See *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, (6 August 1978).

<sup>9</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 March 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Guadalupe Efraín Martínez and Alfredo Martínez. See *Orientación*, 25 March 1979.

*Marginal References* (1) Jn 19,30; (2) RH 1; (3) RH 1; (4) RH 1; (5) Gal 3,28; (6) Mk 16,16; (7) Ex 19,4-5; (8) Ex 19,4; (9) Ex 19,5-6; (10) Ex 19,8; (11) Ex 19,6; (12) Ex 19,16-18; (13) Mt 22,40; (14) Ex 20,2a; (15) Ex 20,2b; (16) Mt 5,17; (17) Mt 19,17-19; (18) Ex 20,2a; (19) Ex 20,2a; (20) Ex 20,2b; (21) Gal,5,1; (22) Mt 11,20; (23) Ex 19,4; (24) Ex 20,2-6; (25) Ex 20,5; (26) Ex 20,7; (27) Ex 20,8; (28) SC 106; (29) Ex 19,7; (30) Ex 19,8; (31) Ep 6,2; (32) Ex 20,12; (33) Ex 20,13; (34) Ex 20,2<sup>a</sup>; (35) Mt 6,21-22; (36) Ex 20,14; (37) Ex 20,15; (38) Ex 20,16; (39) Ex 20,17; (40) Ex 24,5-8; (41) Ex 19,8; (42) Lv 26,12; (43) Jn 2,13-25; (44) RH 17; (45) RH 17; (46) 2Cor 3,6; (47) 1Cor 1,22-23; (48) Jn 2,21.