

EASTER, CELEBRATION OF THE NEW COVENANT

Second Sunday of Easter
April 22, 1979

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31

My beloved sisters and brothers.

I speak first to those who are listening to this celebration on radio and who have expressed their unhappiness with the interference in the broadcasts of the previous Sundays. I believe that the letter that was published in Friday's edition of *El Mundo* is good news. This letter from the President of ANTEL states: *Fulfilling orders from on high, orders of the President of the Republic and in my position as President of ANTEL, I want to inform you and the citizens of El Salvador who are deserving of all our respect, that this Institution has not interfered with the transmissions of Radio YSAX in any way, as maliciously implied by other publications. In this regard, I consider it opportune to communicate to you that ANTEL, as a state institution charged with the technical control of the installation and operation of equipment such as broadcasting, sound, television, ham-radios, and citizen bands, has ordered that an investigation be conducted by the Department of Radio-electronics to discover who is responsible for the interference mentioned above. After this investigation has been completed, they will proceed, in accordance with the law, to punish those who have provoked this situation. The letter concludes by stating: Faithfully following the order of the Supreme Court, I reiterate that at no time have we violated the right of free expression, a right that is consecrated in our Carta Magna and we have respected the rights that pertain to the use of the different means of social communication in our Republic.*

I want to thank the President and ANTEL and I hope that this promise will be effective and that we can once again freely communicate with you. As ANTEL has just admitted, they have in their hands the power to remedy these very disgraceful situations when they arise. I hope that now the voice of this Pastor will be heard by the faithful who are interested in listening to his words.

The Word today is not mine. In fact, it is never my Word but the Word of God and I simply comment on this Word and apply it to our reality. Today we find ourselves celebrating the Second Sunday of Easter. In order to understand Easter it is necessary to understand the three great days of Holy Week that are referred to as the Easter Triduum. During those days we celebrated the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. These three aspects of Good Friday and the silence of Saturday and the joy of the Easter Vigil set a framework for the whole year and are the primary characteristics of our faith.

This past week is referred to as the Octave of Easter and concludes with today's celebration. After the celebration of the Easter Triduum, we celebrate fifty days of the Easter Season. Today we are celebrating the second of seven Sundays that comprise the Easter Season. This celebration will be crowned with the feast of Pentecost which means: fifty days, the fullness of Easter, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I want to remind you that every Sunday when we gather for the Eucharist, even during the cycle of Ordinary Time and every weekday when we celebrate the Eucharist, we celebrate Easter. Every Sunday Christians gather to celebrate the Mass and at the same time celebrate these three great events: the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. Therefore, every time that we assist at Mass --- on the occasion of the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony, First Communion, or a funeral --- let us remember that we are celebrating Easter. Every Mass is a celebration of Easter. Thus after the Words of Institution, the priest says: *Let us proclaim the mystery of faith* (Sacramentary, Eucharistic Acclamation). The people respond with an Easter proclamation: *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again* (Sacramentary, Eucharistic Acclamation). Christian people live with this hope. Christ lives and we walk toward the encounter with him. Every Sunday and every Mass that is celebrated is a reminder of this presence and hope.

My dear sisters and brothers, the Liturgical Year revolves around this mystery. For this reason Holy Week is like the sun of the Liturgical Year, especially the celebration of Easter. During these seven weeks, I want to inscribe very deeply in your hearts the meaning of Easter and want to connect the preaching during this time with the preaching that was done during the time of Lent. I would hope that the primary objective of my preaching would be seen as a type of catechetics, a preaching of the Word of God. Naturally there are people who are just waiting to listen to political aspects or polemics. They believe that my preaching is political and polemical and that when I preach, I am subversive. The primary objective of my preaching is to announce this mystery.

I remind you that the uniting theme of our preaching during Lent was: the Covenant of God with his people --- the covenant of the Old Testament, the covenant that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets. Then, as we entered Holy Week with the celebration of Palm Sunday and during the Easter Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil, we entitled our preaching: the celebration of the New Covenant. We now continue in this same line of thought and will develop the theme of the fruits of this New Covenant.

Easter is an appropriate time to remain, like the Apostles, before the empty tomb and reflect on the meaning of the fact that a Redeemer died for us and has been raised so that we too might be restored to life. This restoration of life involves the Christian in a series of tasks that must be undertaken throughout one's life: reflection on the Messianic fruits and gathering in the rich harvest of redemption. During the time of the Old Covenant the prophets announced this promise and hope. Thus the prophets gave this covenant a more comprehensive name: testament --- the Old Testament, the New Testament. Saint Paul says: *A will is not meant to have any effect while the testator is alive* (1). Look at the death of Christ on Good Friday --- I entitled the homily of that day: the price of the fruits of the Covenant. It was necessary for Christ to die and in obedience suffer the death-penalty. By embracing all this suffering, he presents himself to the Father and is raised to new life. The Father fulfills his promise and the Evil One is conquered and all the fruits of the New Covenant are bestowed. Thus we call this present time the Christian Era: the era of the New Testament, the New Covenant.

On this Sunday as usual I give you a general title for the homily: *Easter, a celebration of the fruits of the New Covenant*. With these words we can come to a greater understanding of the meaning of the Easter Season. Each Sunday we will unfold, one by one,

the riches and the fruits of the New Covenant: First, the gift of the Spirit; Second, the gift of faith, (a community of faith); Third, the gift of supernatural love (a community of love).

The gift of the Spirit

My first thought as I read the gospel is focused on this gesture of the Risen Christ who breathes upon the apostles. It is as though the Eternal Father, in creating a new creature from the clay of the earth, breathes forth the Spirit of life and says: *Receive the Holy Spirit* (2). Let us pause and reflect on this gesture that is similar to that recorded in the book of Genesis. (3) Christ, in this New Covenant, is a new Creator, a creator of a new Spirit: *Receive the Holy Spirit*.

On the night of Holy Thursday, Jesus spoke to his disciples: *I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you* (4). In other words, the condition that the Father placed upon Jesus in order that he might restore people to divine life that was lost by sin and in order to send the Spirit of God who would give people new life was that he must die, be buried and then raised up. Then this concrete man, Jesus of Nazareth, embraced by the Divine, glorified and adored as God, as God and together with the Father, will send the Spirit of God.

According to the gospel of Saint John, it was unnecessary to wait for the feast of Pentecost, that is, fifty days after Easter. The very resurrection of Jesus was his glorification and on the night of his resurrection, Christ appeared in the midst of his Apostles with this creative gesture that bestowed upon them the new Spirit: *receive the Holy Spirit* (5).

What does the Spirit give the newly born community of the Apostles, this community that no longer has a traitor, this community that is breathed upon by another, this community that will be followed by others, this community that is now composed of those who fill this Cathedral, this community that is now listening to my voice by radio? We are the community that, in the voice of the Spirit and in the promise and the breath of Christ, has received the Spirit. *Receive the Holy Spirit* (6). Christ explains: *as the Father has sent me, so I sent you* (7). Thus the Church is born with this breathing of Christ on the Apostles and the mission that the Church carries on in the world for all ages is the same mission as that of Jesus who was crucified and raised to new life. The Church celebrates the liturgy and preaches the Word for just one reason: to save from sin, to save from slavery, to overthrow the idolatries, to proclaim the one God who loves us. This is and will continue to be the difficult task of the Church. She knows that in fulfilling this mission, she, like Christ who fulfilled his mission through the cross and humiliation, must never betray this message and, if it is necessary, she must suffer martyrdom, the cross, humiliation and persecution. She has the same power: the power to forgive (understood as the Word that denounces sin and calls people to conversion).

What else has the Spirit given if the Church has already received the life of Christ and the power to forgive? On the night of the resurrection, Christ said: *Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain, they are retained* (8). In other words, only God can forgive the sins that offend God. The Church is a presence of this merciful God in the world. As Christ forgives those who ask for pardon, so too does the Church forgive in the same way. For as Saint Paul says: *[we are] ministers of reconciliation* (9). There is the baptismal font to reconcile those newly born with the grace of God. There are the confessionals for those who repent --- there they receive the absolution of

the Church through the priest, her representative. When Scripture says that the Spirit has given the Church the power to forgive, it implies that she has been given the ability to preach conversion. Thus the Church calls injustice by its proper name and she speaks to sinners: repent because God wants to forgive you. She expresses her solidarity with those who suffer and says to them: courage, God is with those who follow his paths. This is the mission of forgiveness, of reconciliation; this is the mission of the Church. Behind her firmness, the Church, like a mother who knows how to hold in tension her children's weaknesses and injustices, corrects, guides and orients people so that ultimately she might have good children, who are worthy of the Divine adoption.

In today's second reading from the first letter of John, we find that this Spirit that has been given to the Church *testifies, and the Spirit is truth* (10). In other words, this Church that is animated by the Spirit of God bears within herself the ability to preach the truth. My dear sisters and brothers, this ability to speak the truth means that she will suffer interior torments just as the prophets suffered. It is easier to preach lies, to silence the truth, to accommodate oneself to the situation so that one does not lose any advantage, so that one maintains flattering friends and power. What a horrible temptation the Church must face! Nevertheless, the Church that has received this Spirit of truth must be willing to remain faithful to the truth and if it is necessary, willing to lose her privileges. She will lose these privileges but always speak the truth. And if the Church is slandered, know that this occurs because she speaks the truth. This is the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church on the night of the resurrection.

The Spirit gives the Church another ability. Today when John speaks about the blood and the water, (11) it is because there is arising in the primitive Christian communities these signs that are known by all: the sacramental signs. Water cleanses the individual of original sin; bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord; the hand of the priest absolves and anoints --- all of these are signs of the presence of the Spirit in the Church. They are the sacraments that sanctify people. They are also the sacraments that make holy the different situations in the life of humankind and the situations of the family and society. Therefore, the Spirit that is breathed forth by Christ gives the Church the ability to sanctify, to convert and to nourish herself from the life of God. Those who are holy can become more holy. Let us continue to be that community that is truly a People of God, a people pleasing to God.

This is the reason for the Church's preaching. Naturally, my sisters and brothers, this is very difficult because when one preaches virtue and confronts evil, then she provokes conflicts with evil. When one preaches justice and confronts injustice and abuse, again she provokes conflicts. The gospel that the Church preaches will always provoke conflicts. The Church wants to be consistent with her founder and with the Spirit that has been given to her in order to bring her message to the world. If she betrays this Spirit, she loses her advantage as she confronts the world of the sinner. It is better to remain with Jesus who died but rose on the third day than to retain the advantages of Jesus' persecutors in order to save her life in this world and then ultimately lose that life. (12)

The gift of Christian faith

As Jesus breathes the Spirit on his Church, he creates a community of faith. Thus the Church is a community of faith. In other words, the Church is not a community with political

ideals, subversive, communist or composed of sociologists. Indeed the Church has faith criteria that characterize her whole life.

The Thomas event and the second reading explain for us the meaning of faith in God and are a beautiful commentary on this thought that I want to further explore: the Easter gift of faith, the gift of the New Covenant that enables us to believe in Christ as the mediator of this Covenant between God and humankind.

It is very interesting to examine the experience of Thomas. Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to his disciples. When Thomas arrived, the Apostles, his companions, told him: *We have seen the Lord* (13). Thomas wants to test them. Look at how Thomas' attitude is similar to the critical spirit of our modern era. Today, technology wants measurements and concrete evidence.

So Thomas says: *Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my hand into his side, I will not believe* (14). *Now a week later...* (15). Notice the expression here... *a week later...* it is as though John wants to highlight this Sunday gathering, highlight the following Sunday. It would be as though I were to say to you today: *Next Sunday we will meet*. I would be insinuating that people would come together for the Sunday celebration. *...Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst...* Christ in his risen body had no need for someone to open the door and so in his spiritual body he presents himself once again to the Apostles. We might say *a ghost*, but nonetheless, Jesus confronts the doubting one: *Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side and do not be unbelieving but believe* (16). The gospel does not tell us if Thomas put his fingers and hands into Jesus' hands and side, but we do know his reaction of faith: he fell to the ground before Jesus and spoke the beautiful words that are preserved for us in the gospel: *My Lord and my God* (17). This is faith and it is no longer necessary to touch and see.

When we want evidence and want to experience the truths of our faith, we are imitating the doubtfulness of Thomas. Christ said to Thomas: *Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed* (18). You and I, my beloved sisters and brothers, have faith because we have not seen but still we believe. Many say that this is stupid, but I say to you that there is no greater wisdom than that which is preached by Christ today: faith. This is the victory that overcomes the world. Today Saint John says in his letter: *Who is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (19).

YSAX has once again received interference and we are saddened by the fact that ANTEL has been unable to correct this situation. I want to interpret this applause as a repudiation of this unworthy action that opposes the right that we have to express our faith. I am speaking about nothing else but our faith!... I believe that they continue to listen to us speak on the radio and so I hope that this message that I am trying to communicate and that is based on the gospel, I hope that this will make everyone reflect on this most precious gift of our religion, the gift of faith.

To believe does not simply involve feeling --- placing our hands into the wounds of Jesus. Faith is not based on scientific evidence but is the acceptance of the Word of God. It is the acceptance of the word of those witnesses who experienced the Paschal mystery with such conviction that the whole world now says: Christ is present! Christ is present through

the Spirit that has been given to the Church! Christ lives in the holiness of the people who follow him! Christ is present in the courage of those who preach his gospel to the world! Christ gives witness to the Holy Spirit and to the community that accepts him and experiences his presence! My sisters and brothers, this faith makes the community that gathers to reflect on the Word of God a very beautiful community.

Saint John ends his gospel with the words: *These are written that you may come to believe* (20). According to the Greek verb that is used here, John indicates continuity. He is saying, continue to believe, continue to grow in your faith. Each Sunday that you come to Mass, the preacher comments on the Word of God and you reflect on this Word in your small communities or in your homes, and you read this written Word. You do this so in that you might continue to grow in faith. The Word of God is a leaven that allows us to believe in the true God.

Our faith has a content. When we listen to John Paul in Puebla, it seems that we are listening to a synthesis of our faith, for he invites the Bishops, the teachers of our faith, to proclaim the truth about Christ, the truth about the Church and the truth about humankind¹. The truth about Christ is what the gospel now proclaims to us when Thomas says: *My Lord and my God* (21); and when John writes: *So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* (22)... Also the interference with our radio station is a further sign that the faith has no free expression among us. This is persecution of the Church! Not to allow its ministers to preach. Among the kinds of persecution is this: to oppose freedom of preaching; this is to prevent ministers of the Word from carrying out Christ's command to announce his message. This is authentic persecution of the Church.

The gift of supernatural love

And finally, dear sisters and brothers, the third Easter gift we receive today is a gift of love that helps us form a community of God's children. It is also called the Church. Not only a community of faith, but a community of love. Let us understand this well.

In today's first reading there is a beautiful description of the community where all its goods were shared. (23) All were welcome. No one suffered want since those who possessed land or houses sold them, brought the money and put it at the disposition of the Apostles. Then it was distributed according to the needs of each. Commentators on this passage speak of a utopia, an ideal that some achieved. The same Acts of the Apostles speaks of three people: Joseph Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira (24). They were extraordinary examples. In the case of Joseph Barnabas (25), it was a real act of love that led him to hand over all his goods to be shared among his brethren. Ananias and Sapphira (26) pretended to do the same but lied and cheated. When Peter asked them: "Have you given everything?", they replied yes; and Peter said: "You should not lie to the Holy Spirit" (27). And to set an example for the people of God who should not be hypocrites, he gave them the punishment of immediate death. There was no obligation to sell one's goods or hand them over; but the person who pretended to do so hypocritically and hold on to them selfishly, merited such punishment. On the other hand, the person who gives with love, even though not renouncing their property, shares possessions until unjust inequalities vanish in a society called Christian but where the spirit of brotherly love doesn't exist.

We can learn this supernatural love, as the Pope says, from affective and effective love. Affective love leads us to God first and then leads to love of one's neighbour. St John,

a balanced man, says something in his letter we have heard many times: “A man who does not love the brother he can see cannot love God whom he has never seen” (28). But today he says the opposite: “We can be sure that we love God’s children if we love God himself” (29). Both are needed. If the greatest commandment, as Christ says, is: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (30); the second resembles it: “You must love your neighbour as yourself”. To love one’s neighbour is proof of the love we have for God and to love God is proof of the love we have for each other. In a truly Christian heart there cannot be love for God without love for others and there can not be love for others without love of God. The true balance of a community of love is described in the opening phrase of the Vatican Council which says: “The Church is the sacrament which unites people with God and people among themselves” (31). This is the community which the Spirit of love creates among Christians.

Love which is based on faith in God. The person who believes in the Father who begot them believes also in the children begotten by the Father. (32) It is the comparison we find in the second reading, that we become children of God, that when we pray the Our Father we feel that nobody is excluded, that there are not different categories of people, first class or second class, that all are equal in God’s heart. How wonderful will be the day when this gift of the Spirit becomes real, this love which creates a community of love.

In the paschal atmosphere of the gifts of faith, spirit and love, I invite you to consider the events of the week.

Life of the Church

Within the Church, which today we have called a community of faith and a community of love, let us consider recent events. For my part I inform you, as someone returning home, that this week I was in Costa Rica with the Central American bishops. There were four from Costa Rica, six from El Salvador, four from Honduras, three from Nicaragua, six from Panama. We felt that such important events as the Puebla meeting and the *visit* of the Pope to our continent should be considered in the light of the reality and teaching of our Central American countries. And so we gave pastoral priority to these areas for study:

One group studied “*the church unity that must be lived deeply between bishops, priests, religious and laity*”²

Another aspect of our meeting revolved around the *type of vocational promotion that we must carry on in order to have a sufficient number of priests and ministers who are prepared for the evangelizing work in the special circumstances of our people*³.

A third aspect of the study of SEDAC (Secretariat for the Episcopal Conference of Central America) in Costa Rica was: *the attitude of the Church toward other Christian denominations and the profound social-political implication of the advance of numerous sects that constitute a serious threat to the unity of our people.*⁴ While we have defended true ecumenism and the sincere efforts being made by Catholics and Protestants toward unity, nonetheless we also said in Costa Rica that there was great danger of division, especially with those sects who have no understanding of ecumenism and who, from a social and political viewpoint, seem to support the maintenance of these unjust situations in our countries.

Finally, we studied: *the tense relationship between the Church and the State in the majority of our countries where the functions of the State are based on the policy of National Security*⁵.

As you can see these themes are clearly related to the ecclesial problems and the Church's relationship with civil authorities, especially the governments of Central America. *In all our deliberations we considered the fact that our countries are predominantly Catholic and with reason, therefore, they hope that their bishops will provide them with orientation and guidance. This line of thought makes us more conscious of our responsibility and impels us to point out the roads that will not only lead to the formation of lively and active communities but that will also lead Christians to search, in a realistic way, for solutions to the grave social-political problems that afflict our nations.*⁶

We said: *The Church cannot renounce her evangelizing mission that, if it is authentic and genuine, leads her to defend human rights and proclaim liberation from every form of slavery, especially sin. The Church does this even though she might lose certain privileges and suffer persecution and martyrdom.*⁷ It was very pleasing to find such committed individuals among the bishops of Central America, bishops who are committed to pastoral lines of action that, thanks to God, we are also living here in our Archdiocese.

Note the following words: *Nevertheless the Church can never accept ideologies or methods that utilize class struggle, deceit or terrorism to achieve its goals. We do not believe that violence is a sign or an adequate way to resolve the problems of our countries because we are conscious of the fact that the gospel of Jesus offers us the only valid way to shape a just and human society that satisfies the vital needs of all people. Therefore, it is necessary that everyone who believes in Christ must be willing to put aside their attitude of selfishness and their desire to accumulate the goods of this world and then seek justice with effective and legitimate means. As pastors, conscious of the fact that our mission is neither political nor technical but eminently spiritual and religious, we want to fully assume the ideas presented in Puebla and accept the teaching of the Holy Father. We accept the commitment to promote, in our respective Dioceses, a deeper knowledge and the application of the pastoral lines of action and the options that the Church in Latin America has assumed. We are sure that this contribution of ours will enable our nations to achieve that desired peace which can only come about as the fruit of justice and truth.*⁸ As you see, the ideals of the meeting of the Bishops of Central America are a reflection of the commitments that were made in Puebla and a reflection of the teaching of the Pope.

At this time of communion and as a community of love, we remember our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua. In speaking with the bishops of Nicaragua, I became aware of the suffering of the people there. During this past week, the Pope expressed his concern and sadness for the suffering and privations that the people of Nicaragua have experienced. He asked all Catholics to pray for them and to ask that these people be protected from attacks and reprisals.⁹ Previously, thirty Bishops in Puebla, who expressed their solidarity with the Archdiocese of San Salvador, also expressed their solidarity with the people of Nicaragua and stated: *Nicaragua appears to be a clear example of martyrdom in which people are submitted to tyranny of every kind.*¹⁰ They are hopeful that very soon a new Nicaragua will come into existence, a Nicaragua where the people will be able to shape their own destiny as an expression of equality among all people.

At this time of joy and communion with our brothers and sisters who rejoice and suffer with those who suffer, I invite you, my sisters and brothers, to express your solidarity with the Congregation of the Sisters of the Assumption. Father Francisco Coll Guitart, a Dominican missionary from Catalán, founded this Congregation during the last century. The members of this Congregation are involved in many works in our country. They direct the high school of Our Lady of Fatima in Santa Tecla, the Catholic high school in Suchitoto and also the high school in Quezaltepeque. They also direct the school of San Martín de Porres which is an annex to the Church of El Rosario and the Escuela Masferrer in Santa Tecla. In Santa Tecla the Sisters are involved in works of human development and in Chiltipán the Sisters are involved in a missionary pastoral ministry. As you see the Sisters are involved in at least seven different works and so at this time of communion in the Archdiocese we wish to express to the Sisters our gratitude and our congratulations because their Founder is going to be the first person beatified by John Paul II. This action of the Holy Father is a sign that the life of Father Coll is worthy of imitation --- he is a Christian who has achieved life in the Kingdom of Heaven and has left behind on earth this wonderful foundation of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Assumption. I personally want to thank the Sisters for they have asked me to participate in the beatification ceremony that will take place next Sunday in Rome. Therefore, with the permission of the community of the Archdiocese, I will be in Rome next Sunday and will participate in the Beatification of Father Coll.

Naturally, everyone who goes to Rome, especially if one is a pastor, has a desire to see the Pope. I will see the Pope and speak with him. I have never been opposed to the Pope's pastoral lines of action. I follow everything that the Pope says. I know that many people have denounced me in Rome. I know that Rome has received a distorted vision of my pastoral ministry and I know that the Pope is going to ask me about this. I will tell him: *Holy Father, you sent an Apostolic Visitor¹¹ who was able to speak with many witness and with many people. I simply submit myself to whatever Your Holiness pleases. On my own behalf I want you to know that I have preached the gospel and I am willing to continue to preach in defense of this beloved people that that Lord has entrusted to me; I am willing to continue to preach the gospel of the Lord.*

When I return from Rome, and I hope I will be there for only two weeks, I want to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of the newly Blessed Father Coll. I want to celebrate this Mass with all the Sisters of the Assumption in the Archdiocese. Thus we will be able to see how a Saint in heaven is able to realize concrete works here on earth. This is the image of a Church that never forgets the world even after she has ascended the heights of eternity.

After Mass, I will visit San Pedro Perulapán where we will renew our baptismal promises. This evening at 7:30pm I will celebrate the patron feast of the parish of the Resurrección. This will take place in Colonia Miramonte and there we will celebrate the Mass for their patron.

Events of the week

My sisters and brothers, this Church that attempts to build a community of faith and love and that, as I have just said when referring to Father Coll, for all eternity works here on earth, this Church is a Church that is always concerned about the social, political and economic concerns of people. She is not an expert in these matters, but is a prophetic voice

that speaks to experts about their obligations to manage these earthly affairs. In this sense I want to address some of the news that was given to me when I returned from Costa Rica.

In the first place, the cotton growers¹² and also some of the coffee growers in Santa Ana¹³ as well as some of the people involved in the production of henequen¹⁴ have petitioned the government for economic incentives for their investment. Without these subsidies they will be unable to plant their fields, their business will be reduced and a greater crisis will develop, especially for those workers who have no other income except that which is received from the produce of these lands.

Commenting on this situation, I would say that the Government, if they are able, has an obligation to provide these subsidies to everyone who produces these crops in our country. But I would also say to those who produce these crops: do not allow yourselves to be led by the logic of the present situation, a logic that implies that one does not plant fields unless a great profit is guaranteed. The growers themselves have stated that this crisis will affect especially the workers. Therefore I would say: since the Lord is gifting us with rain, we should ask the Lord for a normal winter, a winter that waters our fields and implies that he wants everyone to be happy. I invite the coffee, cotton and henequen growers to keep in mind the Christian principle that the Word of God has placed before us today: the principle of sharing. In other words, one should not invest money with the sole hope of receiving great profits. Even though one might not obtain great profit, even though one might have to risk a loss, the objective of cultivating the land ought to have a Christian and human objective: providing work and sharing the material goods of the earth that the Lord has given us to manage. Let us live as brothers and sisters, as Christians. Let us not allow anyone to die of hunger simply because we were unwilling to take the risk and expose ourselves to receiving smaller profits this year than in previous years.

I also want to call attention to the fact that these communications of the large producers have been published in the press¹⁵ and made known on the news and they are given a hearing with government officials. On the other hand, when the poor ask that prices be lowered and that their situation as *campesinos* be given justice, there is no space for their communications in the papers and they are not given a hearing in the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock or the Banco de Fomento Agropecuario (Bank for Agricultural Development). This is an indication of the injustice of our situation. I do not speak these words as a provocation but as a simple commentary, spoken in the environment of a family and in light of the Word of God that today invites us to form a community of love, a more fraternal community in which we are concerned not only about our own advantages but also concerned about justice. This should be applied above all to those government officials who must be concerned about the common good.

In light of today's gospel, I also want to speak about a situation that directly confronts this spirit of love that ought to guide us as a community, that is, I want to speak about this situation of violence. My dears sisters and brothers, not only those persons of good will who listen to me but even those who have lost faith in the power of love and have placed their trust in arms and repression and violence --- this is not the way to act!

For example, this week I have been saddened by the news of the attempt made against the life of Doctor Fernando Augusto Méndez.¹⁶ Also the interference with our radio station is a further sign that those who perpetrate this violence do not want to listen to the voice of justice.¹⁷

If this wave of violence does not cease we can find ourselves in a worse situation. I see that the people of El Salvador are very capable of dialogue and very intelligent. I appeal to people to use this ability in search of a solution to the problems that we now confront for between April 10-19 there have been 85 assassinations.

The extreme right has shown that they are a repressive force. I therefore invite the government to act in the same way they did when the President began his term of office and the Jesuits were threatened and the UGB (White Warrior Union) was effectively prevented from carrying out their bloody plans. It appears that the government was able to restrain this violence and so now, in this situation when new voices of clandestine organizations¹⁸ refuse to listen to the government's voice, the government must use the same methods to make these people listen. Do not have recourse to violence, but once again call people to live in harmony as sisters and brothers.

Repressive violence is never justified, not even as a pretext for combating communism. Yes, communism is a reality but it is a phantom that is used in many situations and is a pretext for those who want to confuse the demands of just people with communism. I said the other day: not everything that is labeled as leftist is Marxist or communist. Certainly some of this violence is due to communism and the Church can never support this tactic of violence and hatred. The left, however, is also just in many of their demands and the Church will defend the just demands of those who suffer. The Pope had given us a very useful insight when he said: *The most effective way to combat communism is to practice social justice that creates the prerequisites for a more human and secure life.*

During this wave of violence, I want to call attention to the need for mercy and justice in the area of Cinquera where ten military operations have taken place resulting in **at least 12 deaths and 49 persons captured. This is perhaps an unnoticed area yet** the people there have suffered greatly.

I invite you, just as I was invited, to look at some of the slum areas: in Model #1 and #2 and in Las Mercedes 130 families are in danger of being displaced.¹⁹ Where can they go? As the Pope said in his letter *Octogésima Adveniat: Is not the rise of an urban civilization which accompanies the advance of industrial civilization a true challenge to the wisdom of man, to his capacity for organization and to his farseeing imagination?* (33). The Church is unable to offer a technical solution but she calls attention to this matter. The matter is not resolved by displacing 130 families. Therefore a more worthy solution must be found to resolve this matter. The Church is proud of the work she has undertaken in Minimum Housing which is a contribution to solve these kinds of situations.

My dear sisters and brothers, we could continue to speak but I want to conclude with one more point. As we are united and in solidarity with those who suffer, we call upon the Ministry of Labor to investigate the truth surrounding the Salvadorian workers who have returned from Saudi Arabia.²⁰ I must communicate to you that I am also saddened by the situation of our countrymen in the United States. When Bishop Rivera returned from Venezuela he said: *I was on flight 503 from Guatemala to El Salvador. Though I have taken this flight many times, this last time was an invitation for deep reflection. The majority of the passengers were young workers and campesinos from El Salvador who had been deported from the United States. They traveled by plane to return to their place of birth --- disillusioned, misunderstood and deceived. Since it was impossible for them to obtain a visa,*

they embarked upon an adventure and entered by whatever way they could. Some have been able to avoid the immigration authorities and have remained there working. Others have been able to legalize their situation. But those whom I met on the plane were deported and returned to their place of origin. Almost every afternoon more people who have been deported from the United States return to El Salvador on flight 503. This made me think: a country that sees her children leaving for so many different places must surely be a nation that is living a very difficult situation. I asked myself: why are people leaving El Salvador? Why are we being deported from so many different countries? These questions tormented me and merit a response. We all must attempt to respond to these questions. Perhaps when we have further knowledge of the Puebla document we will be able to respond.

The Church cannot ignore these situations. Our sisters and brothers in Saudia Arabia, in the United States and in any other part of the world where they are mistreated --- they are our sisters and brothers! They may commit injustices and do illegal things but this problem must be resolved. As I have said before, the Church is not an expert in these matters but calls upon those who have a responsibility in these matters to seek a solution. My sisters and brothers, all of us have to search for a solution to these problems that confront our nation.

Today the Church has made a valuable contribution. In the liturgy of the Word she has shown how Christ has breathed forth a new Spirit --- the Spirit of the Risen One, the Spirit of hope and faith. Through this Spirit the Christian community has come into existence --- a community of faith, hope and love. Let us make this community of faith and love come alive in our midst. May our parish communities and base communities of faith and the community of the Archdiocese be determined that this action of Jesus, this act of breathing forth his Spirit, bear much fruit among us. Let us rely on the strength of the Risen One and we can be assured that our Church will flourish if we are docile to this Spirit that was given to us, the Church, on that first Easter night. Amen.

¹ See Discourse of John Paul II on the inauguration of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

² Press release of the Bishop's Secretariat for Central America and Panama (San José de Costa Rica, 20 April 1979), *Orientación*, 6 May 1979.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See General Audience of 18 April 1979, *Osservatore Romano*, 22 April 1979.

¹⁰ See Letter from several bishops to Mons. Salazar, bishop of León and President of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua (10 February 1978), *ECA* 365 (1979), pp. 191-192.

¹¹ In December 1978 the Vatican appointed Mons. Antonio Quarracino (bishop of Avellaneda, Argentina) as apostolic visitor with the purpose of investigating the situation of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and sending a report to Rome. On completing his visit Mons. Quarracino recommended John Paul II to appoint an apostolic administrator with full powers to take over the diocese instead of Mons. Romero. See James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, Orbis Books, 1989, p. 167.

¹² See Comunicado de la Cooperativa Algodonera, Ltda, COPAL, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 17 April 1979.

¹³ See Comunicado de la Junta Departamental de Santa Ana de la Asociación Cafetalera de El Salvador, *El Diario de Hoy*, 18 April 1979.

¹⁴ See Bloletín informativo de la Asociación de Productores de Henequén de El Salvador, HENSALVA, *El Diario de Hoy*, 16 April 1979.

¹⁵ From 16 to 21 April *La Prensa Gráfica*, *El Diario de Hoy* and *El Mundo* published a variety of statements of a page or half a page by several of these organizations.

¹⁶ Dr Fernando Augusto Méndez was a member of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador and escaped unharmed from the attempt. See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 20 April 1979.

¹⁷ See Boletín de la Secretaría de Comunicación del Arzobispado de San Salvador, *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 16 April 1979.

¹⁸ We have been unable to determine whether the reference is to a communication of the FALANGE or another paramilitary organization of the extreme right.

¹⁹ See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 21 April 1979.

²⁰ See *Orientación*, 22, 29 April & 6 May 1979.

Marginal References (1) Heb 9,16; (2) Jn 20,22; (3) Gn 2,7; (4) Jn 16,7; (5) Jn 20,22; (6) Jn 20,22; (7) Jn 20,21; (8) Jn 20,22-23; (9) 2Cor 5,18; (10) 1Jn 5,6; (11) 1Jn 5,6; (12) Mk 8,35; (13) Jn 20,24; (14) Jn 20,25; (15) Jn 20,26; (16) Jn 20,27; (17) Jn 20,28; (18) Jn 20,29; (19) 1Jn 5,5; (20) Jn 20,31; (21) Jn 20,28; (22) Jn 20,31; (23) Ac 4,33-35; (24) Ac 4,36. 5,1; (25) Ac 4,36-37; (26) Ac 5,1-10; (27) Ac 5,9; (28) 1Jn 4,20; (29) 1Jn 5,2; (30) Mt 22,37-39; (31) LG 1; (32) 1Jn 5,1; (33) OA 19.