

THE ASCENSION, SIGN OF HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE

The Feast of the Ascension

May 27, 1979

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23

Mark 16:15-20

My dear sisters and brothers

When I was a seminarian I heard a story that today, in our present situation, comes to mind once again and I want to share it with you. This is the story of a sailor who was on his first ocean voyage and was sent to fix something on the mast of the ship. From that highest point on the ship the sailor was watching the stormy sea below and he felt faint and thought he was going to fall into the ocean. The captain saw what was happening and said: *young man, look upward!* These words saved the young man. As he looked upward he no longer saw the raging ocean that made him dizzy and was now able to do his task calmly.

This story comes to mind because many of our sisters and brothers in El Salvador find themselves in a similar situation. They see the stormy seas of our history and they are confused and almost hopeless. Therefore at this time, on this feast of the Ascension of the Lord, it seems appropriate to cry out: *look upwards!* The body of the man Jesus, who is at the same time God, rises above the changing tides of the things of this earth and views the world from a perspective of eternity. At this hour of confusion I believe this is the best orientation and guidance.

Our situation is very tense. Many deceased persons have presenting themselves before the court of God and have become aware of their behavior here on earth. We can say that our country has been converted into a war zone. Many homes are in mourning and yes, many of these people are filled with Christian hope and they are praying calmly. But other people dwell on feelings of vengeance, resentment and violence. Many people are wounded. There are two forces that are in a bloody confrontation and both cause great fear. We see that there is much hatred and fear and people are tense and alarmed. In this present situation of a state of siege some people have become more timid while other people have become more aggressive. Thus we are invited to live this mystery of the Ascension of the Lord at a time when everything on earth seems to be telling us to flee. But as Christians we do not flee, rather we incarnate ourselves more profoundly into the present historical situation but we do so with the perspective of heaven. Christians judge history with the criteria of eternity.

The call that we make from the Cathedral today takes on the form of a symbol --- the symbol of a ship that is being repaired after the storm. It is unfortunate that our radio station is also being submitted to a time of trial and a technical defect does not allow us to transmit the Mass and the homily today. The Cathedral was occupied and we were unable to worship there. Finally this week, thanks to God, the Cathedral opened her doors for worship once

again. The rector of the Cathedral prayed the usual prayers of amendment so that this ship that travels on the sea of history could once again become a place of worship.

Those who enter this ship realize that this is a symbol of unity and doctrine, the calm and eternal voice of the Church. Even when this voice becomes transformed by other voices that find no other channel where they can express themselves, the voice of the Church continues to be known and wants to be the voice that preaches the eternal message of the Lord. Despite the distortions and ill-will and slanders and defamation the voice of the Church wants to be that voice that from the heights of heaven draws all things unto herself so that we can speak about the meaning of death and life, the meaning of government and the struggle for just demands, the meaning of well-being and misery and living on the margins of society and the meaning of sin. The Church wants to speak about all these realities so that, illuminated with the vision of eternity, we make this earth what it was meant to be, a foretaste of heaven and not a war zone or a place where passions run wild. Indeed, as sisters and brothers, as children of God, we are all on a journey toward heaven, toward the head of the body. In our opening prayer we lifted up our hearts and minds: *The head of the Body has entered heaven and brought with him all those who wish to follow him with love and faith and hope.*

Only Christ can give meaning to our life and the feast of the Ascension provides us with the sure perspective of eternity. This is the true Easter grace that we have been reflecting on during these days following the resurrection of Jesus. The fulfillment of so many of God's blessings which reach a culmination in the message of the Ascension is the wonderful gift of Jesus who ascended into heaven and speaks to us about the true meaning of life and death.

Therefore I entitle my homily: *the ascension of the Lord: a proclamation of human transcendence.* I will develop the following points: First: the risen Christ, source of Christian transcendence; Second: the Church, a mission of transcendence in the midst of the world; Third: all people have a transcendent vocation.

What is transcendence? Transcendence means breaking through limitations. It means not letting oneself be imprisoned by matter. It means saying in one's mind: I am above all the things that try to enchain me. Neither death nor life nor money nor power nor flattery --- nothing can take this transcendent calling from me. There is something beyond history. This is something that moves the threshold of matter and time. There is something called the transcendent, the beyond, the eschatological, the final goal. God, who does not let anything contain him but who contains all, is the goal to which the risen Christ calls us.

The risen Christ, source of Christian transcendence

First, the risen Christ, source of Christian transcendence. What does the Church celebrate on this feast of the Lord's ascension? As an historical event, it has historical dimensions. Forty days after rising from the dead, after having spoken with his disciples about the Kingdom of God and after having appeared to them and others on innumerable occasions...All of these historical events are used by the evangelist to create a context for the ascension. Forty days should not be understood as an exact chronology of the passing of time. In the gospel this is a symbolic number, the time that was necessary for the message of the resurrection to be understood by a group of people who would then be charged with communicating this good news to the world. Forty is a number that symbolizes perfection, a number of fullness, a number that symbolizes the coordination between the time when the

message was brought to the apostles and the time when they were commissioned to proclaim this message of Christ who is completely joined to humankind.

In our teaching about the Ascension we do not focus on the number of days, forty days, that passed from the time of the resurrection until the ascension. We are celebrating a theological event: the glorification of the Son of God. Before he died Jesus summed everything up in one word, the hour of glorification. He included in this his resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit --- all of this is one theological event. *It is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go and am not glorified by the Father, I cannot send you the Holy Spirit who breathes his divine life into us: the Church* (1). The theological event that we celebrate today is of great importance to us because Christ ascended to the Father with all his merits and teachings, with the whole Church. Thus Jesus and the Church together have been assumed into the glory of the Father. For this reason Jesus is presented to us today as the road toward transcendence.

The gospel tells us: *the Lord Jesus Christ, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat the right hand of God* (2). The expression *to sit at the right hand of God* should not be understood literally because God has no body, no right or left side. This concept is taken from Psalm 110, a psalm that sings about the regal dignity of the king of Israel: *The Lord says to you, my lord, "take your throne at my right hand."* (3). For people from the East, for the Jewish people, rule and authority were a participation in the life of God and so the king is seated at the right hand of God and participates in the royal dignity of God. This also explains the concept in our Creed: *He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.* These words signify that Jesus ascended into heaven in order to participate in the authority, the greatness and the glory of God. This man, born of woman but also the incarnation of a divine person, a man of flesh and bone like ourselves who bears within himself our humanity ... this man, Jesus, participates in that which is divine. Christ is God and also man and this God-man is seated at the right hand of God and rejoices in all the prerogatives of God. With Christ we have also been raised up and because of this we have received a divine vocation. Jesus is the path toward transcendence and lifts us up beyond and above history.

Today's first reading invites the apostles and us *to wait for the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak* (4). Jesus is one who gives everything and therefore people have to wait for that transcendence, the power which is able to transform the world.

The second reading speaks of this transcendence as *the Father of glory ... the surpassing greatness of his power* (5). It is there that true transcendence is found and from there is derived the intelligence of human beings and the organizing abilities of women and men. In fact all the abilities of the human person flow from this *power*, the source of transcendence, and everything in turn is oriented toward transcendence.

The Sacred Scriptures speak to us today about the power of the Holy Spirit. We are told that Jesus was *moved by the Holy Spirit* (6) and taken up into heaven. The road of transcendence can only be traveled with the strength of the Spirit and transcendence is the triumph of Christ over all of nature. One day Jesus said: *When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me* (7). Today Jesus appears in the fullness of the life that he was destined for.

Saint Paul discovers the secret of God's plans and sees Christ as the culmination of all of God's ideals. *Everything was created by him and for him.*(8) Every creature, even the most intelligent creature, is still only a creature. All creatures have no reason for existence except that of being oriented toward the One who made all things and for whom all things exist. The second reading refers to Christ as the one who plans all things and is in all things ... *the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way* (9). In other words, creatures experience an emptiness when they try to separate themselves from the Creator. Just as a ray of light becomes darkness if it tries to separate itself from the source of light so too the human person and everything that exists, experiences this emptiness when separated from the fullness of the One who gives them being. The human person becomes an absurdity when no longer oriented toward God. Christ today appears as the key to history and the source of transcendence.

The Church, a mission of transcendence in the midst of the world

Today we heard the final words of Saint Mark's gospel proclaimed: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature* (10). The second reading, which is a reflection on the glory that Christ assumed on the feast of the Ascension, presents us with the image of Church as the body that brings to completion the existence of the glorious head: Christ. Thus in light of this perspective of the Church, in light of this body of Christ, Christ is seen as the king of the universe. What an honor for us who are members of the Church! We are the fullness of Christ, the complement of God who became man. The Church has to continue to carry on in history the great mission of our Lord, Jesus Christ. If the mission of Jesus was one of transcendence then the Church cannot be understood apart from a profound sense of transcendence.

What does this mean? In today's gospel we are told that the first believers in Christ performed signs: they were not harmed by poison and spoke new languages. (11) These were signs of God's power and showed that the power of God, who created all things, was with the Church. There is no vanity or sense of exhibitionism, there is no game involved in these charisms and wonderful signs of curing and speaking new languages. All of these occurred at the time when they were most needed --- as Saint Augustine said: *these things were done in order to water the tree, the Church*. Every new tree needs to be watered and cared for, but once the tree grows stronger and larger it no longer needs the same care. When the tree flowers ... each flowering and each branch is like a sign of new life that indicates that there is life and tenderness and freshness in the tree and this continues for centuries and perhaps even for thousands of years ... this is also the life of the Church. The Church continues to be this wonderful work of God that is present in history and will be a part of history so long as she orients people toward transcendence. My dear sisters and brothers, I want to highlight this reality so that at this time when there is so much confusion we might understand what the Church is and what the Church is not.

In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* the Pope says (12): *Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. He himself is our way "to the Father's house"* (13) *and is the way to each man*. What a beautiful image! Christ is the path that leads us to the transcendence of the Father but is also the path that leads the Church to the encounter with women and men. At this time, you are for me not some multitude but rather a body of women and men. Each one of you has a path that connects you to God and the mission of the Church to preach, sanctify and guide places each one of you in contact with God. The Pope says: *Jesus Christ is the way to each man* (14). The paths that you traveled today, the paths that gathered all of us

together in the Cathedral --- these are the paths of the Church. At this time my word is traveling along the path of the Church to each of you and would have no effectiveness if they were not traveling on the true path that is Jesus Christ. If I do not preach Jesus Christ to you and if I do not call out to all of you, those who are just as well as those who are sinners, those who are oppressed and those who oppress others, then I would not be traveling on the paths of the Church. All of us have to walk along this path if we want to be saved and the Church is charged with walking the difficult path of Christ, accompanying each person.

On this way leading from Christ to man, on this way on which Christ unites himself with each man, nobody --- listen well to these words --- nobody can halt the Church (15). I am happy that this morning your applause is for the Pope and I am also happy that my thoughts coincide with his. The Church only desires to bring Christ to women and men and nobody can stop the Church from walking on this path. *This is an exigency of man's temporal welfare and of his eternal welfare* (16). Notice that man's temporal welfare does not mean that he must become involved in politics. When the Church speaks of temporal welfare she knows that this will never be achieved as long as people do not respect the path that connects them with Christ. *This is an exigency of man's temporal welfare and of his eternal welfare.*

Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it.(17) *In various passages in its documents, the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in "the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity" (18) in all its aspects, so as to make that life "ever more human"(19). This is the solicitude of Christ himself, the good Shepherd of all men. In the name of this solicitude, as we read in the Council's Pastoral Constitution, "the Church must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person"(20).* This situates the Church in the midst of complex political situations but does not make her political. The Church draws near to the political arena in order to defend the transcendence of the human person and in order to speak to all regimes, totalitarian or democratic, communist or socialist: the Church does not profess a belief in any system because she wants to say to all the different systems that the human person and his/her transcendence is most important and therefore this transcendence, this union of men and women with God, must be respected by every political system.

The transcendent vocation of every person

Finally, sisters and brothers, a third thought: the transcendent vocation of every person. On this feast day and in light of what we have been saying here today it is clear that we, even if one of us were atheist and gloried in not believing in God, do not define our nature or our relationship with the Creator. Even if we protest before God, nevertheless we are still transcendent beings oriented toward God. Even for those who are incredulous, the words of Saint Augustine, the great humanist who walked along the paths of unbelief and was unhappy --- his words take on great significance because he was able to say: *you made us Lord for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*¹ Only God is the center of gravity in whom women and men find rest, like when the stone falls and lands in the bottom of a great abyss or when Jesus ascends to God.

Therefore as Jesus ascends into heaven, with all his muscles and sinews, with all the physical characteristics that he inherited from his mother ... Jesus is showing us the true

transcendent destiny of our life. The Vatican Council states: *The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light* (21). If it were not for Christ, the Son of Man, all people would be nothing but absurd. If the struggles for dignity and freedom and equality have meaning it is because these struggles are viewed in light of Christ.

Thus the Pope speaks to men and women today, to men and women who struggle for freedom and the other just demands of people: *Do not be afraid of Christ! Open to him the doors of politics, the doors of the economy, the doors of sociology.*² Because everything recovers meaning when it is illuminated by the light of God who became man. If this were not so we would simply have a reality that reflects what we have seen during these days: blood, violence, vengeance and hatred. When people's faith fails to make them other Christs, then they become like wolves who devour other people.

Today's Word places us before the dilemma of life or death. When Jesus commanded the disciples to preach his message he said: *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned* (22). There is no more frightening *anathema* because God condemns no one but rather God calls all people: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature* (23). People condemn themselves. Those who open themselves to the message of salvation will be saved because they have found the paths of God. Those, however, who place greater trust in their own abilities, who believe they are wiser than God and reject the commandments and the demands of faith --- these people cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. If there is any place that people are free to enter, it is heaven. No one is forced to enter there! Those people are saved who freely desire to be saved. Those who freely do not want to be saved will go somewhere else and Jesus has spoken about all of this today.

I would like us to focus on the second reading where the problem of the transcendence of the human person is presented with inimitable brush strokes. Saint Paul speaks to us this morning words that appear to be a prayer that was offered in the name of Jesus who ascends to heaven: *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ* (24). What a wonderful expression! For Saint Paul God is always the God of Jesus Christ, and therefore the God of Christians can be no one but the God of Jesus Christ who identified himself with the poor and sacrificed his life for others, the God who sent his Son Jesus Christ to make an unqualified option on behalf of the poor. Thus Jesus despises no one and calls everyone to enter the life of the poor so that they might become like God. No one is condemned except those who reject the call of the poor, humble Christ and those who prefer the idolatry of wealth and power over the call of Jesus.

Saint Paul refers to God as *the Father of glory who gives us a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in a knowledge of him* (25). To come to a knowledge of God is both a privilege and a grace. My sisters and brothers, many people believe that they know God and yet they adore idols. The Church does not want to be an accomplice of these false gods. The Church has chosen a very clear path to encounter the true God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and not become involved in the adoration of false gods and the practice of some hypocritical piety. The true God should illuminate our eyes and heart so that we can find the true God and not fear the idols that want to enter into competition with God and who, according to today's reading, are conquered by the one true God.

May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come (26). This then is the Absolute, power, glory, riches, and truth. Let us not fantasize about the struggles for the things of this earth.

Among the good and just things of organizations that seek the realization of the just demands in the midst of so much sin and injustice, it is sad to see the narrow vision of some *who* limit themselves to seeking worldly goods or freedom on this earth or equality here and now. In my Pastoral Letter I wrote about the service that the Church is able to provide to the achievement of the just demands of people.³ I did so precisely to include all those noble efforts on behalf of freedom and justice into the liberation of Christ that is above all the powers, not only of this present era, but also of all future eras. Therefore today when I speak about the transcendent vocation of the human person I want to remind you, my sisters and brothers, about the calm thinking of the Church. The present time is appropriate for this reminder and I am happy that I had to opportunity to say these things during a period of calmness, when the storms were not raging out of control as they are at the present time. *To struggle for justice in a popular organization it is not necessary either to be a Christian or explicitly to accept faith in Christ. One can be a good politician or work hard to bring about a more just society without being a Christian, provided that one respects, and takes account of, the human and social value of the individual.*⁴

I want to be very clear about this. No organization is able to claim for itself the name Christian. If we are dealing with a political organization, believers and non-believers can decide whether or not they want to join such an organization. No one is able to identify an organization with the Church (and this is especially true when an organization is involved in terrorist activity) as if to say that aside from the violence, all the just demands of people are specifically Christian and protected by the Church. This definition is clear.

*Those, however, who claim to be Christians, and who organize as such, have the duty of confessing their faith in Christ and, in their social and political activity, of using methods that are consonant with their faith.*⁵ I go on to explain how political fanaticism and euphoria for the just demands of people can make us forget the demands of our Christian faith and forget that politics is not the only dimension of the human person. For a Christian, faith is the primary element.⁶ Therefore I have stated that in the beginning some Christians have been motivated by their Christian faith to make a commitment on behalf of the poor but then unfortunately put aside their faith and no longer find any value in their faith. We might say that they took advantage of what was of use to them at the time and then cast it aside. This can also happen when individuals want to use the Church but then when the Church is no longer useful to them, they forget about it and cast it aside. We are not surprised by this and so I only ask you the following: be sincere and do not use a faith that you do not profess, do not use this to obtain political objectives, no matter how just they might be.

My sisters and brothers, we want to be very clear in our reflection because we do not want to oppose the just demands of the people. We have promised to support these demands and our pastoral commitment places this responsibility on us. The Church of Vatican II, of Medellin and Puebla is very clear in asking pastors to stand with their people when they cry

out to have their just demands heard. The Church, however, cannot identify herself with any organization, especially when these organizations want to travel along paths that are not the paths of the people's faith. People must be faithful to their faith and if some people want to join an organization and also want to remain faithful to their faith, then they should keep in mind the words that we have spoken: the primary point of reference for Christians is not the political framework of some system or group but rather faith in Jesus Christ. We should never betray this faith and we should be willing to leave everything else behind. This is what I mean when I say that the human person has a transcendent vocation.

My sisters and brothers, it pains me to think that during these days so many deceased persons have presented themselves before the tribunal of God. It is certain that God has been mindful of the just motives of each person. We are not in a position to judge anyone who has died. God is the only judge. It is also certain, however, that before the tribunal of God that which is most important is the transcendence of those who tried to be just, who looked for justice, the justice of Jesus and kingdom --- there is no other justice. The justice of the Kingdom of God shines forth for all eternity! My sisters and brothers, I want you to be clear about all of this because this is the Church that we are building.

At this time, my sisters and brothers, we reflect on the specific events of our history and Church, but we also remember our transcendent mission and meaning. So let us remember that the source of transcendence is the Risen Christ. I would hope that the principal aspect of my message, a message that is proclaimed each Sunday here in the Cathedral or when the Cathedral is occupied then in some other church --- I would hope that my message echoes the words that were spoken by Jesus in today's gospel: *Go out to the whole world: proclaim the Good News to all creation.* (27) Please do not distort our message! If we have to speak about the sad realities of our situation and if touching these realities burns people, know that this is not our intention nor do we want to provoke anything like that. Rather we want to illuminate these realities so that they might be seen and cured. Thus we speak about the meaning of conversion and the Kingdom and eternal life.

Life of the Church

I rejoice in the fact that our church is no longer occupied and that we are once again able to celebrate the Eucharist here. I want to express my gratitude to the rector of the Cathedral, Msgr. Modesto López, for his prudence and loyalty in managing this difficult situation. I unite myself to the concerns of the other pastors who also had to endure this test of their priestly fidelity because not only was the Cathedral occupied but so also were the churches El Rosario, Concepción, and the church in Suchitoto where a viewing was held for one of the members of FAPU who was killed.

I am concerned that we are unable to make use of our radio station. There have been some technical difficulties and I hope that very soon I will be able to communicate with all of you through our radio.

I am saddened by the sacrilegious theft that occurred in the Church of Tocanacatepeque. There a relic of their patron Saint Nicholas, a chalice, paten, and a holy water container were stolen.

In our Church, devotion to the Virgin has not decreased during the month of May. While it is certain that other concerns are very much on our mind, for example, the violence that we

have experienced during these past days, yet we continue to think of Mary, our Mother. We have placed before her the difficult situation of the Church. On May 24th, the Salesian Community, with great ceremony, celebrated the feast in honor of Mary, Help of Christians.

I am happy that the base communities of faith have celebrated a week of prayer that continues today and tomorrow. Today people will gather in the parish of Miramonte and tomorrow in Los Pinos --- prayer services in these places will begin at 7:00pm.

On Thursday, May 31st, we will conclude our celebrations of the month of May with the liturgy that reminds us of the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth.

I want to remind you that next Sunday is the feast of Pentecost. This marks the solemn conclusion of the Easter season and we celebrate on that day the wonderful revelation of the Church that was achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit. On this same day we will also celebrate Seminary Day. I hope that all people will experience the need to pray and provide moral and economic support to the work of forming our future priests. I also hope that next Sunday our celebration of Pentecost will be distinguished by the fact that it will be a celebration of our young women and men. Those young people who have not been confirmed should prepare themselves in the same way that many are presently doing so that next Sunday at 8:00am we can celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation, the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. Through this sacrament we confer upon people that power which is proper to young people who desire to commit themselves to the Lord.

I am also grateful for the many expressions of solidarity that have arrived in our offices. So many institutions and individuals have expressed their solidarity with us during these days when our people and our Church have lived through some very difficult moments. We received letters from the Secretariat of Justice and Peace in Barcelona and Paris, the Committee for Freedom in Santo Domingo, the Ecumenical Service d'Entraide in Paris, the Ecumenical Institute for the Development of Peoples also in Paris, a French commission for Justice and Peace and about two hundred priests, seminarians, religious and lay people from San José, Costa Rica.

Events of the week

This week as Church we look with sadness and concern on the continuation of the bloodshed and the consequent tense situation of our people.

A demonstration of the BPR was broken up in front of the Venezuelan embassy, resulting in fourteen dead and sixteen wounded. The Minister of Education, Dr. Carlos Antonio Herrera Rebollo, was assassinated. Thus we pray together for his family and extend to them our condolences during this time of pain and suffering. We do the same for his faithful chauffeur, Fabio Rivas. As we pray for these men so too I ask you to keep in your prayers those people who were killed in front of the Venezuelan Embassy and others who have died in different parts of the our country. Two more assassinations have been attributed to the UGB.⁷ They assassinated the accountant Carlos Humberto Montoya Ortiz, treasurer of La Fundación Promotora de Cooperativas which is supervised by the Chancery. He was a wonderful collaborator with the Church and so at this time the Church unites herself with the suffering of his family and we pray for his eternal rest. News was published about a confrontation near the Chilean Embassy in which three people died (two civilians and a policeman). The burning of buses continues in San Salvador and Santa Ana.

Combined military operations by the army, the security forces and ORDEN have multiplied. Villages have been surrounded and *campesinos* arrested and four of them have been assassinated. Here I want to mention that several *campesinos* have been arrested but have not been brought before the courts (I say this here with the hope that this will be helpful to those individuals who have been abused in this way). We hope that these people do not join the ranks of those who have disappeared. The following families are concerned about this and I share the same concern: Andrés Molina Clímaco from San Nicolás Lempa, Jorge Antonio Ascensio Alvarez from Zacatecoluca, Herminio de J. Orellana from Tecoluca, Adilio Pedro Abrego from Tablón in Chalatenango, Lucio Cándido Alfaro from Tecoluca, Luis Alfredo Amaya Dubón from Jiquilisco, Slavador Arana Flores from San Salvador, José Milagro Clavel Romero from El Tablón in Chalatenango, Edgar Antonio Fuentes, a worker from San Salvador, Marta Alas from Reubicación in Chalatenango, Cecilio Alas from the same place and Miguel Guillén --- other people have also been arrested but at the present time we have no further news.

I want to highlight here in a special way the case of the brothers Joaquín and Eduardo Gavidia who after being arrested were then assassinated. On May 22nd one body was discovered in Guacotecti and the other in the municipality of Cabañas and there were visible signs of torture on their bodies.

What has the Church done in light of these events? I have in hand a copy of the invitation that was made by the Bishop of Santa Ana, Bishop Barrera y Reyes, to the clergy and the people of El Salvador. He calls us to reflect and to collaborate in establishing a peace that is founded on justice. His final recommendations are the following: let all the parties involved in this conflict put an immediate halt to every recourse to violence. Secondly, let all adopt a sincere attitude to play our part in the establishment of a peace that we all so much desire. Thirdly, may all who have any responsibility, great or small, create the necessary conditions so that we might all draw nearer to our common objective, the objective of peace. And fourthly, may all the people of El Salvador commit themselves to pray insistently so that we do not simply remain on the level of good intentions but that we all move forward to make peace a reality in our midst. Here it is good to remember the words of John Paul I who said: *The world is on a mistaken path because there are more battles than prayers.*⁸

For my part, in light of the conflict that was violently unleashed in front of the Venezuelan Embassy and in light of the situation of various embassies, I extended a call to people and this message was published in some newspapers but not in all of them.⁹ I want to make you aware of this statement so that everyone can collaborate in achieving the desires of the Church.

Once more with profound sadness we have to repudiate the recent massacre that resulted in at least fourteen deaths and the assassination of the Minister of Education. Since May 1st, the conflict between the government and some popular organizations has claimed the lives of eighty-five people and left eighty-six persons wounded.

The continuation of this bloodshed pains us but we are even more pained by the fact that it appears that neither side involved in this conflict wants to put an end to the violence. In fact the situation appears to become more serious and numerous families from every social class of the country are in mourning. The same actions of repression and vengeance are repeated over and over again.

As the Archbishop of San Salvador I call on the consciences and hearts of those responsible not to continue their unyielding and intransigent position, but to yield and seek a way to break this endless chain of bloody deeds as soon as possible.

What matters now is not to show the nation and the world who is the stronger or the winner but who is the more responsible and humane, capable of stopping this increasing spiral of violence.

Do not allow yourselves to be led by feelings of pride or hatred or vengeance but do everything possible so that reason and forgiveness become our guiding lights.

I make a special call to those persons and institutions who have the possibility of influencing the government or the leaders of Bloque Popular Revolucionario: talk with them and try to convince them to soften their position and adopt constructive attitudes that will enable us to achieve a rapid solution to this crisis.

Once again, on the part of the Archdiocese, I offer our willingness to work together for peace.

I also direct my words in a very cordial way to the families of the victims of the violence during these days. Let us accompany them in their sorrow and offer our prayers for them and for the deceased.

I invite all Christians and people of good will to pray and do what they can so that we might end this crisis.¹⁰

Within the framework of the Church I want to share with you the joyful news that the two sisters who were forced to leave Arcatao by the Immigration Authorities have returned. We have been told that a mistake was made and that the doors have been opened for their return. These doors, however, are closed so quickly by ambiguous threats and accusations that are neither specific nor able to be proven. It is good that the Church proclaims the truth even though she is misunderstood and slandered.

Within the framework of the state of siege that was promulgated on May 24th and that will continue for thirty days I want to communicate to you and remind you that the state of siege diminishes our ability to exercise certain rights. I hope that this situation will not prohibit cultural and industrial gatherings. Our gathering this morning here in the Cathedral is perfectly legal just as the religious gathering in any other parish or town or village is also legal. All of these fall within the religious-cultural framework that the Church preaches.

I also want to remind you about some of the limitations of the state of siege. Article #157 of our Constitution which refers to religious freedom, is not affected by the state of siege. We hope therefore that this situation will not lead to the persecution of the evangelizing effort of our Church nor of those people who are involved in this process. We will continue to maintain the cultural-religious-evangelizing framework of our preaching.

With the promulgation of this state of siege we hope that what has occurred in past times will not be repeated here, namely, that the exercise of the rights of some (the left) is suppressed while the crimes of others (the extreme right) are authorized and this leads to the

slander of the Church and her ministers. We want the law to be applied equally to all. If rights are limited then please limit the abuse of the Church and let the Church be respected as stated in the law which guarantees us this right.

The French and Venezuelan embassies continue to be occupied. The government has offered an alternative to those people who are occupying the embassies: hand yourselves over to the authorities or seek asylum in Panama. Panama has offered asylum to the occupants of the embassies but it seems that up to the present time the Bloque Popular Revolucionario has not accepted this offer. I invite all people who might be able to mediate this situation to reflect and do all that is possible so that we have no further bloodshed and can find a just and reasonable solution that will lead to a happy conclusion of this crisis.

Finally the National Forum convoked by the President of the Republic has held its first session. You are aware of various statements that express the skepticism and lack of credibility in this invitation to participate in these meetings.¹¹ Some very significant people were absent from this meeting. The Episcopal Conference was invited and sent two representatives. I want to make clear here my own desires: My belief is that credibility and trust must be the basis of dialogue and these must be constructed with deeds. I believe in the need for a true dialogue --- this is both necessary and urgent. This dialogue, however, must be founded on trust and credibility and this is what I would ask of the Forum if they are to be effective. Deeds speak louder than promises.

I want to conclude by sharing with you some hopeful news. The two bankers who were abducted by FARN appear to be alive and there is still the possibility of negotiations.¹² I hope that this is true. Once again I speak out on behalf of the lives of these two persons and hope that we do return again to a situation that will not disturb the well-being of people.

This Sunday the Pope has ordained 26 new bishops in Rome. Among them is the new bishop of Estelí, Nicaragua. As you know Bishop Obando, the Archbishop of Managua, has been threatened and we have been informed that he was called to Rome where he is certainly participating in the ordination of the new Nicaraguan bishop. Again we join together in prayer for our sister country, Nicaragua.

My sisters and brothers we conclude by drawing near to the altar with a clear and enlightened vision of Christ ascending to heaven as a perspective of transcendence. Let us remember this message of transcendence and not allow ourselves to become caught up in the material world in which at times our lives seem to become stagnated. Let us look beyond these realities, beyond history and time, and focus our eyes on the person of Christ who from eternity tells us that he is the Head and wants to make all of us members of his mystical body. Then after having fulfilled Christ's mission on behalf of freedom and the dignity of people in this world we will be able to rejoice in eternal justice around the throne of the Father of glory. So be it.

¹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, I,1; PL. 32, 661.

² See Homily of John Paul II on the official inauguration of his pontificate (22 October 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 29 October 1978.

³ See *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, (6 August 1978), p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 32-33.

⁷ See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 26 May 1979.

⁸ Call of the Bishop of Santa Ana and his clergy to the people of El Salvador (25 May 1979), *Orientación*, 3 June 1979.

⁹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 May 1979.

¹⁰ “Alto a la espiral de violencia”, message of Mons. Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador (23 May 1979), *Orientación*, 2u7 May 1979.

¹¹ See “Documentos sobre el Foro Nacional”, *ECA* 368 (1979), pp. 464-468.

¹² Ian Cameron Massie and Michsel Chatterton, kidnapped on 30 November 1978.

Marginal References (1) Jn 16,7; (2) Mk 16,19; (3) Ps 110,1; (4) Ac 1,4; (5) Ep 1,17; (6) Ac 1,2; (7) Jn 12,32; (8) Col 1,16; (9) Ep 1,23; (10) Mk 16,15; (11) Mk 16,17-18; (12) RH 13; (13) Jn 14,2; (14) RHY 13; (15) RH 13; (16) RH 13; (17) RH 13; (18) GS 91; (19) GTS 38; (20) GS 76; (21) GS 22; (22) Mk 16,16; (23) Mk 16,15; (24) Ep 1,17; (25) Ep 1,17; (26) Ep 1,18-21; (27) Mk 16,15.