

THE EASTER CHURCH

**Second Sunday of Easter,
Parish of the Resurrection,
Colonia Miramonte
April 17, 1977**

Acts 5:12-16

Revelation 1, 9-13, 17-19

John 20:19-31

My dear brother priests and beloved faithful.

On this the patron feast day of Resurrection Parish and in response to the very kind invitation of Father Navarro, I have the pleasure of making the ambo of this parish the seat of the Archbishop, the seat of the Diocese. At this moment let us feel that in this church is the cathedral of the Archdiocese. At the conclusion of this Easter Week, here, in this parish, I want to present to the Diocese my first Pastoral Letter that speaks precisely about the Easter Church¹. I am not going to tire you and read the letter to you, but rather invite each one of you to study it. In fact, I recommend that all those involved in our pastoral ministry study this letter during this Easter season, during these fifty days between Easter and Pentecost, during this time when we celebrate the greatest liturgical feast, when we celebrate the center of the Church's life: Jesus' death and resurrection.

Let us take advantage of this time to deepen our faith in the paschal mystery that has inspired this humble letter. In this letter I speak to you in the same way that the beloved disciple John has just spoken: *I, John, your brother* (a). Thus I speak to you as your brother and friend, for this is how I want to be viewed in my pastoral ministry and how I have spoken to you in my Pastoral Letter. I, therefore, give thanks to God who has prepared this unexpected portico for me to enter as I begin my new hierarchical ministry. I also want to give thanks to Bishop Chávez y González for the rich inheritance that he has left us, for his good will and his tireless efforts during 38 years of our agitated history. He knew how to steer the ship of the Church with great acumen.

The Easter hour

During this time of change I have been entrusted with this pastoral ministry that has a rich history. In 1842 the Diocese of El Salvador was erected as a suffragan of the Republic of Guatemala. It was only in 1913 that it was elevated to the category of an Archdiocese, and became independent from Guatemala as an ecclesiastical province. Then the dioceses of San Miguel and Santa Ana were erected and San Salvador became the metropolitan diocese. Thus began a series of archbishops: Bishop Pérez y Aguilar, Bishop Beloso y Sanchez and Bishop Chávea y González. Now a time of change has arrived and yet if I wanted to qualify this time I would call it the Easter hour. Yes we are passing through this beautiful time of Easter that coincides with the celebration of Easter in our liturgical calendar. In this parish that bears the Paschal name, in this parish of the Resurrection, I want to express my joy and give thanks to the Lord, because only the Spirit of Risen Christ, who lives and builds the Church through the ages, can explain the great inheritance that my Venerable predecessor has left us. Only the divine impulse of the Spirit of Easter can explain this unexpected beginning.

My reflection brings us back to the Passover that flows toward Christ, our Passover. All the liberating efforts of the Old Testament and the wonderful actions that God performed to express his desire to free the people and offer his salvation to people --- all of this becomes a reality in Christ the Lord. It becomes a reality not only for Israel but for all people who believe in this Christ. Therefore we are able to say: Christ saves the Republic of San Salvador in their own history and all the marvelous deeds of the Old Testament become present in this Passover, in this Passover of El Salvador, in this our Passover.

These reflections should be considered from a pastoral context and viewed in light of the readings that we have just heard. This Sunday had at one time been called "White Sunday." Those who had been baptized during the Easter Vigil would remain clothed in their white garments during the Octave of Easter to remind themselves of their baptismal commitment. Then on White Sunday they would renew their commitment and put aside their white garments and clothe themselves in their ordinary garments. They knew, however, that even though they lived in the midst of worldly people, they carried within themselves a faith and a hope that made them feel like the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Christianity was always this way. Therefore at this Easter hour of our country and Archdiocese, I am very happy, my beloved sisters and brothers, to see that so many people have recovered an authentic understanding of the meaning of baptism, and I hope that that you will embrace my humble letter and resolve to live together as a Christian community.

Christ continues to save the world through his Church

In the first reading today we heard that the first Christians presented themselves to the world as a community that bore witness to their faith. Their love for one another was so great and they lived such authentic Christian lives in the midst of a pagan environment that they were admired by everyone. Yes, they placed their light on a lampstand and as a result their number increased and many came to believe in the Lord. They believed in the Lord because their community was not simply a human society. So too the parish and the Diocese are communities that bear within themselves this breath that Christ exhaled on the night of the resurrection. He breathed relief over that new born community and said: *Receive the Holy Spirit* (b).

My dear sisters and brothers, the action that I described above is similar to the action that occurred in Paradise when the Creator breathed life into the first man and made him intelligent(c), capable of love, indeed, a marvel of creation; the same can be said about the wonderful action of redemption that restored the harmony that was destroyed by sin. Redemption has lifted up creation to a Divine level and has given human friendship a sense of relationship with the Divine thus forming people into a Divine family. Human groups were given a sense of community that makes the Divine history of Christ present in the world. Christ continues to save the world through his Church. The parish is Christ's Church and the parish united with the bishop is the diocese, and the bishop united with the Pope is the great international Catholic community. From this perspective then we live at this time and we experience this breath of Christ.

I want to congratulate the beloved priests of the Vicariate, the beloved pastor of the parish of the Resurrection, beloved collaborators, the parish commission and all the vibrant forces that work here and all of your friends who have come to participate in this meeting of the parish with their bishop --- I congratulate you and thank you for building up this Church,

not the material church of brick and mortar but the Church that is a community of persons and that continues to give life to this breath of Jesus, to this breath through which Jesus made us aware of the presence of the Divine Spirit, the presence of the redeeming power. This is Easter, the Easter that the Church continues to live as a community and that ought to bring about this transformation that arises from the deep breath that Christ exhaled over us as he established the Church. Through this action Jesus transmitted the power of Easter, that is, he passed from death to life in the fullest sense of those words.

For death is sin, mediocrity, injustice, disorder, abuse of human rights, disorder in all human realities --- all of this must remain buried in the tomb of Jesus and then raised to new life, that is, pass from death to life.

Life then is justice, respect for the human person, holiness, and every effort to make today a little bit better because each man and woman and young person and child feels that his or her life is a vocation from God, a vocation to become present in the world. The wonderful act of creation is not the only way in which we become present as the image of God, but rather this same image of God becomes present in the wonderful work of redemption that lifts up on high nature, society and friendship. This is Easter and a parish that bears the Paschal name of the Resurrection has to live in an intense way this communal sense of passing from death to life, from imperfection to perfection, to an ever deeper holiness.

For only in this way, my dear sisters and brothers, can we take advantage of this Easter gift that Jesus bestowed upon us. Today's readings tell us that more people became integrated into this community because the love that was shared among the first Christians was very attractive. My dear sisters and brothers, this love is the power of Easter and not violence or hatred or resentment or calumny. At this time the Church has become the victim of brutal calumnies for in the name of the Church these calumnies are raised against her. Yet in the face of these realities the Church continues to love and redeem. The Church continues to do violence to herself, to the point of becoming like Jesus who sacrificed himself on the cross in order to save the world with the power of love. These actions represent a handing over of oneself, or perhaps better stated, a missionary endeavor and all of this the world finds attractive.

Let us hope that this parish community that celebrates its feast day continues to present itself like a bright torch that attracts, joins together and unifies all the wonderful efforts of this parish and village. My dear sisters and brothers, this is our goal. We are not satisfied with a mere human society or with a friendship that is sympathetic. Let us lift up on high this love that Christ has given us as gift. For the love of God let us love our sisters and brothers, even those with whom we find it difficult to live, whom we least understand. Let us forgive and understand, for this is the power that gives life to the community of the Risen Lord.

The Church's mission beyond history

Finally, I want speak with you about the eschatological meaning of all of this, that is, I want to speak about those realities that go beyond the boundaries of history, of working at the present time for a better world without forgetting that the historical Easter is imperfect and that between the Alleluia's of this world there are many sorrows and thorns and that the earthly celebration of Easter is always centered on the cross. But through these

imperfections, these thorns and sorrows, through all these problems, a new horizon opens up before us. Indeed, when the Israelites celebrated the Passover, they were very much aware of these realities and thought about a Passover that would be a perfect banquet --- happiness with God forever. Jesus said: *I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I shall not eat it again until there is fulfillment in the Kingdom of God* (d). Let us walk with Jesus so that the Easter feast that is celebrated each year in this parish might be an invitation to work in a way that makes the world more human and more Christian. But let us also realize that there is no Paradise here on earth. Indeed do not be seduced by those redeemers who offer you a worldly Paradise --- there is no such reality. Paradise exists in the beyond and arises from a firm hope rooted in the depths of our hearts: to work at this present moment aware of the fact that the reward of Easter will be given in the measure that we have brought greater happiness to the earth, to the family and to all worldly concerns.

The Virgin invites us to live in this holy balance and in my document I conclude with the following invocation to Mary: *Our Divine Savior will not cheat us of our hope. Let us appeal to the Queen of Peace, the heavenly patroness of our people, to intercede with him for us. May the Mother of the Risen One defend our Church, the sacrament of Easter. Like Mary, may the Church live out this happy balance of the Easter of Jesus, which ought to characterize the true salvation of men and women in Christ --- namely, to feel oneself already glorified in heaven as the image and first flowering of the future life, and at the same time to be, here on earth, the light for God's pilgrimage "as a sign of sure hope and solace until the day of the Lord come"* ²(*Voice of the Voiceless, The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, translated from Spanish by Michael J. Walsh [Orbis Books: New York, 1985],p.62).

My dear sisters and brothers, I place in the hands of the faithful of this parish my Pastoral Letter for the whole diocese. I beg you to accept this offering and assimilate it, not because it is mine but because it is the Passover of Jesus that inspired its pages and ought to inspire the parish, our understanding of conversion and the community. In this way we can become in the Archdiocese that living Church that we frequently dream about.

¹ *Iglesia de la Pascua (The Easter Church)*, Archbishop Romero's first pastoral letter as Archbishop of San Salvador (10 April 1977). The full text was published in *Orientación*, 12 April 1977.

² *Voice of the Voiceless, Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, p.62.