

THE PROPHET, PRESENCE OF GOD IN SOCIETY

July 8, 1979

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Ezekiel 2:2-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

My dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

I believe that today, in the situation in which our nation lives, there is a great advantage to coming to Mass every Sunday. On a natural level it provides a true therapy not only because it is like leaving the plains of contaminated air and rising up to place oneself very near to God but also because, inspired by faith, we come to live anew the covenant with God. Thus our Sunday celebration supposes the renewal of the rights that we have before God who has promised to be our God, who has promised to treat us as friends who are speaking with another friend. It also supposes the renewal of our duties toward God. Let us not act in a way that would enable God to reject us as a people who have not been faithful to his covenant.

Each Sunday your presence before God in the filled Cathedral consoles me. I am also comforted when I consider the fact that through the radio there are many good people listening and reflecting with us. There are many ecclesial base communities and Christian people who are unable to come to Mass. Many others are ill people or live in poor huts and are unable to leave because they cannot pay for transportation. I am also consoled that among those listening to me are people who simply listen to criticize us or look for something to surprise us with later on. There is much hope in the fact that no one can be indifferent to Christ: they will either pay him tribute by loving and following him, by devotion and obedience to him or else their tribute will consist of hatred and separating themselves from God, slander, contempt and rejection. If it were not worth it we would all be indifferent but before Christ no one can be indifferent. This word that I represent runs the same fate: a homage of love for which I am profoundly grateful or a homage of hatred for which I am also profoundly grateful.

We are a people consecrated to God. Incidentally, as we look today at the Biblical readings that illuminate our reflection and our reality, we find a theme that is of interest to all of us and so I repeat: we are a people consecrated to God. Let us distinguish this: when we say People of God we are not referring to people in general. It would be pretentious of human groups to want to constitute themselves as interpreters of the people. People are very autonomous and different. No one can claim for themselves: *I am the voice of the people*. Therefore the People of God is a group of people who follow God; it is a group of women and men who, inspired by faith, come together on Sunday to allow their conduct to be inspired by the divine Word, to make themselves more pleasing to God and from this union with God to be a people that becomes light for people in general. This is the Church.

I would like you to be very clear about the fact that my preaching and our mutual reflection is done as the People of God, as a group that is very distinct from people in general. We respect the ideologies and the way of thinking of those who do not want to be part of the People of God, but

from the perspective of our identity as a People of God, yes, we have something to believe and we demand that our way of believing be respected. We also demand respect for the freedom with which God has sent us into the world to love it and to proclaim his message to all people. The Word of God cannot be chained.(1)

Therefore, today let us immerse ourselves in our reflection and let us do this as the People of God. Those who do not experience themselves as part of this People of God because they do not have faith in Jesus Christ, I am grateful for your attention in our reflection and I respect your personal way of thinking. At the conclusion you can tell me whether it is right or not to proclaim these realities.

I entitle this homily: the prophetic presence of God in society. I will develop the following points: First, the initiative is God's [it is God who wants prophets]; Second, the prophet is an instrument of God [the prophet goes forth because God commands him to do so]; Third, society receives or rejects God in the person of the prophet.

The initiative is God's

In the first reading we encounter Ezekiel, one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, professing a great truth: *the Spirit entered me and ... I heard the one who was speaking say to me: son of man I am sending you* (2). What a beautiful definition of a prophet. The Spirit enters into a person who is nothing but a son of man, a son of Adam (as this phrase has sometimes been translated). We are not God and we do not possess absolute truth. We are children of the earth. Our only greatness is an openness toward God and an ability to speak like the prophets: *Here am I; send me* (3). But the initiative to send the prophet does not originate with the prophet. No one can constitute themselves as prophet of any other people as long as God does not call one, as long as God does not consecrate one, as long as God does not send. These three realities unite the prophet with God: God takes the initiative in calling, consecrating and sending forth the prophet.

The Second Vatican Council explains this initiative of God in the document on Divine Revelation: *In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature. Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself* (4). This is God's initiative and from Him comes the idea of communicating with people and revealing his infinite mystery. We would not know his plan of salvation unless he willingly told us: *I want you to know my plan of salvation, my love --- I no longer call you slaves but friends* (5).

Today's gospel presents Christ as the source of prophecy. He arrives in Nazareth and is accompanied by his disciples. This is the second time and this time the conclusion is going to be disillusioning or, we might say, a failure. But I am more interested in repeating the phrase of Saint Mark: *he began to teach in the synagogue* (6). This is what it means to be a prophet: to teach, to be a teacher.

To be a prophet does not mean that one is able to foretell the future (a popular idea that many of us have). A prophet is one who speaks in the name of another. Christ not only came in the name of another but he was also God. He was God and is the eternal Word. The Spirit of God anointed him, anointed the eternal Word with a human nature that allowed him to speak a language that people would understand. The origin and the source of his words come from the same initiative of

God. Today, let us look at Jesus during our Sunday reflection not as a prophet but as God who has taken the initiative to come and bring to the world the fullness of God's initiative.

Paul received his vocation, his consecration and his mission to be a prophet to the Gentiles from Christ. The Christians in Paul's time were skeptical about him: *If you are a persecutor, how can you say that you are going to be an apostle?*(7) Christ says: *Do not call him a persecutor. I have converted him. I have made him an apostle to carry my name to the Gentiles* (8). This was the great mission of Paul, to bring the gospel not to the Jews (the other disciples were given this mission), but to the Gentiles. He, Paul, the lowest, the persecutor, is chosen for an arduous mission and Christ took the initiative in all of this: *Go to the Gentiles and proclaim salvation*. Paul said: *I am not worthy to be called an Apostle but he has chosen me and also made me an Apostle* (9). This is the origin of the meaning of prophecy: God takes the initiative.

The prophet is no more than God's instrument

I believe that it is here where we can elaborate on the Sacred Scriptures that were proclaimed today. Prophecy always existed because it was a necessity in every religion to experience certain individuals as interpreters of the will of their gods even though they might be false religions. There were also prophets --- perhaps false prophets or even many times false prophets --- but as we have repeated many times, salvation is not a reality that is exclusive to the Bible or the Church. God has thousands of roads and makes use of natural religion to bring his message (by means of inspired men and women) that was certainly salvation for many people who were not baptized but who, without any doubt, rejoice in heaven. Perhaps these persons have a higher place in heaven than those who were baptized because they were faithful to listening to the voice of the Spirit who spoke to them through intermediaries. Here though we refer in a special way to the classical prophets, to those whom God called and whom Scripture refers to as God's instruments.

Let us look at how Ezekiel is presented today. *The Spirit of God entered me and set me on my feet* (10). This is the first effect. Man is nothing but a son of Adam, clay, a creature, in the midst of the lies of the earth. If God can call a son of the earth and make him capable of receiving the Holy Spirit, then the first thing that this piece of clay experiences is that God sets him on his feet, elevates him and so there is a vertical dimension that unities him with God in the name of whom he must now speak.

Another effect: *"I am sending you to them to say: "The Lord Yahweh says this".* (11) The prophet, filled with the Holy Spirit, goes out into the world and becomes what we have set as the theme of today's homily: the presence of God in society, in history, and in the world. People can no longer say that God is not speaking: *thus says the Lord*. (12) People will either pay attention or not, but the prophet has become the presence of God in the midst of society. Many times God will disturb and upset us but have no fear. The people will say: *There was a prophet who proclaimed to us the presence of God* (13).

The prophet, a piece of clay from the earth, is given a mission by God. For example, God spoke to Moses and said: *I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt* (14). How inadequate Moses felt: *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt* (15). These are impossible missions, missions that are infinitely and completely beyond man's capacities, missions that can only be accomplished by God. When God tells the prophet Jonah: *Set out for the great city of Nineveh and preach against it* (16), the prophet preferred to flee because the mission is so great. God forces him to fulfill the mission of preaching to the people of Nineveh. The first thing that the prophet experiences is his own smallness, his inadequacy before

so great a mission. Nevertheless, God tells him: *Do not say you cannot do this. I will go with you* (17). No one can oppose this presence that accompanies the prophet.

This naturally brings with it the danger of vanity. Here the second reading speaks to us as the prophet wards off the danger of vanity. His mission is almost identical with the message of God so that many times the people believed that he, like John the Baptist, was the Redeemer.(18) They want to worship Paul and they want to offer sacrifices to him. He tells them: *Be careful, we are men like you. Adore and obey God. We are simply inadequate instruments through whom God speaks. We are human persons and so direct your homage and respect and obedience to God* (19).

Saint Paul defends his prophetic mission in the second reading that is taken from the letter to the Corinthians and says that he had a wonderful vision that made him feel superior to all other people. He had seen the majesty of God, the outcome of history, the terrible end of evil and good people. He knows this better than anyone else and is able to feel almost like a God. Nevertheless he says: *I refrain from boasting so that no one may think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me because of the abundance of the revelations,. Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep from being too elated* (20). This is one of the most difficult phrases in the Bible. What is this thorn in the flesh? According to modern commentators this deals with some illness, a chronic illness. Who knows if this was a pain in his eyes, attacks of some kind, or something wrong with his stomach? What is certain is that this thorn made him experience uselessness that led him to say: *What I am doing is not my work, but God's. God has placed this thorn in my side so that I might not become arrogant* Look at how one is able to view illness and pain and humiliation when one has faith: the thorn of Satan --- he is the only one who can place obstacles before the Kingdom of God.

Paul then proclaims the passage that was read today. In light of this weakness he asked the Lord three times to remove this thorn but the Lord did not do so.(21) Rather the Lord said: *my grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness* (22). What a beautiful revelation by the prophet! Health is not necessary. Therefore with our weakness we are instruments that God wants because the weakest and the most useless will give greater light to the majesty and power of the Lord. Saint Paul humbly concludes: *I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong* (23).

Brothers and sisters, what a beautiful experience it is to try and serve Christ a little and in return receive from the world broadsides of insults, calumny, loss of friendship, being considered suspicious. All this was prophesied and St Paul exults in it as he exults in his weakness. *“The more useless I appear to others, the more contemptuous through persecution, the more useless to those who perhaps thought me great and now see me as a plaything, as rubbish, I fill myself with joy because, as St Paul says, the strength of Christ is in me, for when I am weak, then I am strong”*. (24)

What paradoxes, those of them prophet! “When I am weak, then I am strong”. Because it is God's work, we do not fear the prophetic mission the Lord has entrusted to us. I can imagine someone saying: *So now he thinks he is a prophet!* No, it is not that I think I am a prophet, it is that you and I are a prophetic people. Everyone who has been baptized has received a share in Christ's prophetic mission.

Christ, the great prophet, who came to bring us the prophetic mission, becomes the messenger -- the one who sends other messengers, the apostles and their successors so that the command of Christ reaches the ends of the world. Here we are not only speaking about the hierarchy and so my sisters and brothers I ask all of us to reflect on the beautiful words of the Second Vatican Council that are spoken to you: *The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals* (25). This means that in you, the People of God, we find all of this: bishops, priests, religious women, Catholic institutions, faithful people, Christian families --- we all form the People of God and Christ, the prophet, has made us participants in his prophetic mission. The Spirit of Christ has anointed us from the day of our Baptism and so we form a people and we cannot be mistaken in our belief.

My sisters and brothers, what comfort this gives me! You cannot be mistaken when you listen to a bishop and when you come here (with such a constancy that moves me profoundly) to the Cathedral to listen to my poor words. There is no rejection. I experience that credibility in the words of the bishop is becoming more firmly rooted in the hearts of people. I feel that the people are my prophet and with the anointing that they received from the Spirit of God at the time of their Baptism you are teaching me. The Spirit also makes the People of God incapable of accepting an erroneous or mistaken doctrine. You, as a people, would reject such a doctrine in the same way that an organism rejects foreign elements that at different times attempt to enter the body.

It is beautiful to think that with great fidelity I try to bring the gospel to you and to preach the gospel to you and that you desire to be faithful to Christ and not to me. This coincides with the surety that there exists an infallibility that the Council proclaimed (26) --- an infallibility that is not the result of any human effort or fanaticism or partisan spirit, but the work of the Holy Spirit who anoints the people and the hierarchy so that they might always live the truth that Jesus brought to the world. In this sense you and I are prophets. We are a prophetic people: a husband is a prophet in his home, a wife is a prophet for her husband and her children, young people are prophets in their schools. If we really want to live this mission of truth that Jesus brought to the world to illuminate the lies of the world, then we have to actualize this difficult mission.

But there is no need to rely just on our own strength. No, we are not liars but we have a proclivity to sin and are inclined toward evil passions. How evil the Church would be if she depended on human strength alone! Like Ezekiel, we are pieces of clay, but on the day of our Baptism the Lord elevated us, set us on our feet, made us children of God, anointed us with his charism, with a vocation and sent us forth together as a People of God, as bishops, pastors, chaplains, women religious, parents, workers, professionals. If we truly live the beauty of our faith then together all of us form the prophetic people of God.

The Council states: *Christians and non-Christians live together in the world and no one makes any distinctions. Nevertheless in the heart of the Christian there is an anointing that makes him responsible for this world and perhaps are not able to see this responsibility.* This morning I want to appeal to this prophetic vocation which all of you, my sisters and brothers, have. I want to tell you what I said to you once before: *If some day they take the radio station away from us, if they close down our newspaper, if they do not let us speak, if they kill all the priests and the bishop too, and you are left as a people without priests, then each one of you must become God's microphone.*

Each one of you must be a messenger, a prophet. The Church will always exist as long as there is one baptized person and that one baptized person who is left in the world is responsible before the world for holding aloft the banner of the Lord's truth and the banner of his divine justice.

It is for this reason that we are saddened when we think of the cowardice of so many Christians and the betrayal of others. What are those people who have been baptized doing as they hold high political positions? Where is their baptism? Baptized people among the professional or workers or in the market place --- wherever there is a baptized person, there also is the Church; there also is a prophet; there is someone who in the name of the truth illuminates the lies of the earth. Let us not be cowards who hide the talent that God has given us on the day of our baptism! Let us live the beauty and the responsibility of being a prophetic people!

Those who laugh at me as if I were foolish believing that I am a prophet ought to reflect. I have never believed that I am a prophet in the sense of being the only one who is a prophet. I know that you and I, the People of God, form a prophetic people. My one role is to arouse in the people their prophetic sense that I myself cannot give but that is given by the Spirit. Each one of you can say with complete truth: *The Spirit has entered in me on the day of my Baptism and sent me to the society of El Salvador, to the people of El Salvador.* If today people are in a difficult situation it is because the prophetic mission has not been fulfilled by many people who were baptized.

Thanks to God, I can also say that here in our Archdiocese there is a prophetic awakening in the ecclesial base communities, in groups that reflect on the Word of God, in the critical conscience that is being formed in Christians who no longer want to be a mob of Christians but Christians who are aware of the need for catechesis before being baptized, Christians who realize that before marrying they need to be instructed so that they understand their commitment and are able to be in reality an honor to the People of God. I rejoice and I want to congratulate the Archdiocesan Church for the efforts that are being made to awaken the prophetic sense of our Christians. This charism will never be lacking among us.

When Father Rafael Palacios was murdered in Santa Tecla and his body laid out there, I said that he was still preaching, still calling attention not only to the crimes outside the Church but also to the sins within the Church. The prophet also decries sins inside the Church. And why not? We bishops, popes, priests, religious women, Catholic educators --- we are human and as humans we are sinful and we need someone to be a prophet to us also. We need someone to call us to conversion and not let us set up religion as something untouchable.

Religion needs prophets and thank God we have them because it would be a sad Church that felt itself the owner of the truth and rejected everything else. A Church that only condemns, a Church that sees sin only in others and does not look at the beam in its own eye (27)- this is not the authentic Church of Christ. For this reason with the kindness that only a son can have, a son will speak to his mother: *Mother, you have a spot on your face. Do you want me to clean it? Mother, your dress is wrinkled. Do you want me to fix it?* We speak such words to our mother because we love her and because we love her we have even greater care for her. Yes, there is a way to criticize and when we in the Church respond to criticism with insubordination and caprice, then this is wrong. When criticism is made prophetically, when the prophet speaks to the Church and says: *thus says the Lord* and reads the gospel because perhaps the bishop or a priest is not acting according to the gospel, then the bishop or priest has to change and become converted with the love that we must have as we love and follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

Society receives or rejects God in its prophets

El Salvador would experience the presence of God if people who were baptized would be true saints and prophets. Thanks to God there are holy parents who denounce the sins of their children, holy workers and bosses who reject the injustices that are committed in the workplace. Thanks to God there is one or another prophet and as a result a critical sense is emerging among the People of God. For this reason people experience the presence of God.

Yet the lot of the prophet can be nothing other than that which is recounted to us in the Sacred Scriptures. In Saint Mark's theology (the evangelist that is being reflected on this year) the first part of the gospel concludes with this sad ending. The first part of the gospel presents Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus does not preach often but works many signs and wonders. The prophets speak more with actions than with words but when he does speak his presence either attracts people and causes people to reject him.

Christ went to his people – the last episode in the first part of Mark's gospel -; he had already been and they had praised him, but now he comes after they knew better what he was preaching and what he required, and this seemed hard to his fellow countrymen. So they reject him. As we heard in today's gospel they have some doubts: *Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hand! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us?* (28). See, even Jesus receives this reaction of the people! How tremendous to see the reaction of the people faced with a prophet! In all of the questions that the people posed there are also insults. The Jews never criticized a person's mother rather it was always the father who would be criticized because this would give legitimacy to their words. Son of so and so were names of men. When it is stated: *Is he not the son of Mary?*, there is a perverse suggestion in these words. It would be as if in our environment someone were to use the very offensive words: *son of a*, a single, unwed woman. The insults against Jesus came to that extreme.

In passing I want to clarify something here for those who believe that Mary had other children and that Jesus had brothers and sisters. Today's gospel refers to Jesus' brothers as James, Joses, Judas and Simon,(29) but do not think that these were Mary's children. In the gospel of Saint John we are told that Joses and James were sons of Mary, Mary of Clopas. Mary married a man named Clopas and had two children: Joses and James. Here the gospel refers to these men as brothers of Jesus but as you can see they are not sons of Mary, the mother of Jesus but of another woman who perhaps was related to Mary or Joseph. In eastern languages step-children and other close relatives are also referred to as brothers.

Therefore let us remove this idea from our heads because many Protestants speak about Mary giving birth to other children. On the one hand Catholics do not believe this because of a dogma of faith that states that Mary was always a virgin¹. Therefore as Catholics we have to respect this truth about Mary. There would be nothing wrong if Mary did have other children with her legitimate spouse --- what is wrong with that? But those who want to criticize us for this belief want to offend us because of the honor that we give to Mary, the Virgin mother. There are many profound studies about this theme, but this is outside the scope of this homily. But we can see here that when people do not want to believe the prophet they will resort to these very human dimensions. What little faith they have in the parents of Jesus! They are unable to see in Jesus the divine element that is seen in his most blessed mother and therefore only look at the human element. It is as if God could not create from the earth a human person and stand this person on his feet. Jesus is more than a prophet and so let us look at the reaction of the people to their prophets.

Today's first reading explains this phenomenon better. When God calls Ezekiel, he tells him: *I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have revolted against me to this very day. Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you. But you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord God! And whether they heed or resist -- for they are a rebellious house --- they shall know that a prophet has been among them* (30). The success of the prophet is not found in converting those who listen to his preaching. If this is successful, then blessed be God! God has achieved his objective through his instrument. But if the prophet does not achieve a change in those people who are hard of face and obstinate of heart, this is not important. The success of the prophet is found in the fact that people who are unfaithful, sinners, and hard of face at least recognize that a prophet who spoke in the name of God was in their midst. This is what is so terrible about society. Society rejects the word of the gospel when the word is not in agreement with their selfishness and with their injustices. Then many questions arise: *What kind of wisdom has been given to him? Who is manipulating him? These are not his words!* All of these foolish accusations, instead of leading one to further reflection to see if they are right or wrong, simply bring people to a position of rejection. People say that good advice should be accepted even if it comes from the devil and even if the devil is telling us something, it should not be rejected.

There is a frightening passage in the gospel that speaks about the condemnation of a rich man and there in hell he wants to send someone to speak to his brothers. He tells Abraham: *I beg you, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment* (31). Listen to Abraham's response: *If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.* People are so attached to their idolatry on this earth so that if a person worships gold, money, power, abuse, injustice and passion --- if his heart is so attached to these things, then even though a dead person should speak to him he will pay no attention; such people prefer their own god. Even less will they listen to the voice of a poor prophet who in the name of God tells them: *thus says the Lord, be more just and do not be so abusive!*

There is another passage in the book of Ezekiel and I do not want to lose this opportunity for us to go over this passage again. You know this passage but notice what happens when God speaks to Ezekiel: *Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me. If I say to the wicked men, you shall surely die: and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his wicked conduct so that he may live, then that wicked man shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, on the other hand, you have warned the wicked man, yet he has not turned away from his evil nor from his wicked conduct, then he shall die, but you shall save your life* (32). The mission of the prophet is terrible! The prophet must speak even if he knows that he will not be heard. If they do not listen to him then through their own fault they will be lost, but the prophet will be saved because he acted with responsibility. There was someone in their midst who said: *thus says the Lord.* If, thanks to God, the evil person listens to the prophet, he will be saved and will be the glory of the prophet who preached to him. My sisters and brothers, as a prophetic Church in a corrupt and unjust world we cannot be quiet. Were we to do so we could then be compared to mute dogs.(33) What good are mute dogs who do not guard the property?

If we want to know what is happening here in Latin America I have here the document of Puebla and I want to read you just one part. Puebla recognized that *the anxieties and frustrations that are seen in our people are the result of sin that has very broad and social dimensions. The hopes and expectations of our people arise from their deeply religious sense and their richness as human beings* (34). Look at how Puebla praises the quality of the people of Latin America! They

are worthy of a better fate! They are a people who are profoundly religious and possess a great human wealth that is too great to enumerate here. If these people, with such good qualities, are disillusioned, frustrated, anxious, fearful and suffering in the way that they suffer, Puebla asks: What is the cause? The cause is sin *which has very broad personal and social dimensions*.

Then what must the Church do in Latin America? Puebla states: *The enormously positive activity of the Church in defense of human rights and its dealing with the poor have led groups with economic power, who thought they were the front ranks of the Catholicism, to feel that they have been abandoned by the Church. As they see it, the Church has forsaken its spiritual mission* (35). The reality of Latin America is well reflected when the Church, in her zeal to convert to the gospel, sees that her place is by the side of the poor, of the outraged, of the rejected and realizes that she must speak in their name and demands that their rights be respected. But many persons belonging to the upper classes who feel as if they own the Church, think that the Church is abandoning them and slipping away from its spiritual dimension: it no longer preaches what is spiritual, it only preaches politics. It is not so. The Church is pointing out sin and society must listen to that accusation and be converted and in that way become what God wants.

Puebla continues: *Many others claim that they are Catholics "in their own way," though they do not adhere to the basic teachings of the Church* (36). For this reason our present preaching is finding an echo among those who want the Church to be present in the midst of the world. We cannot speak in any other way. We must denounce injustice and defend human rights when they are abused.

Finally Puebla proclaims some words that must be kept in mind: *Many value their own ideology more than their faith and their membership in the Church* (37). Here we refer to those people who are struggling for the just demands of people and separate themselves from the Church. These people no longer preach Christianity but other ideologies that are very far from Christianity. Look at how the prophetic Church is in a very difficult position and it is understandable that people will criticize us and place us on the margins of society. Jesus himself was placed on the margins of society --- people despised him and insulted him. The Apostles and the prophets have suffered the same fate as all of those who want to be faithful to the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Life of the Church

My sisters and brothers, it is here that I would like us to take time for an examination of conscience on the events that have occurred in our Church and world. Let us ask ourselves if we are the true prophetic Church that God wants us to be.

A very prophetic event occurred last Monday when two members of the Mercederians of the Most Blessed Sacrament made their profession. In a beautiful ceremony two young women consecrated themselves to be an example before the world of what it means to follow Christ in the religious life.

In a similar way I saw the death of the elderly Sister Luz del Perpetuo Socorro in Buen Pastor as another prophetic sign. She died at a very advanced age and she had the privilege of sharing the Easter feast with a community that sees death as a stimulus to continue to live the gospel faithfully.

In El Liceo Salvadoreño we celebrated a Mass for the eternal rest of Brother Blanco, a Marist who was machine-gunned in the war in Nicaragua.

Last Monday evening here in the Cathedral we saw a beautiful prophetic gesture during the prayer vigil that had been promoted by the Conference of Men and Women Religious. A similar sign of our prophetic Church was the meeting of religious dedicated to seeking ways to awaken more in our people the prophetic awareness of the people of God.

In the communities there is a change in the pastor of San José de la Montaña. Father Cristóbal Cortes is the new pastor and will collaborate with Msgr. Urioste, Father Salvador Colorado, Father Rafael Urrtia and Father Raúl Angulo. We do not want San José de la Montaña to be simply a parish of worship. We want this parish to be a center of vocational promotion on an Archdiocesan level. The new leaders of this parish have committed themselves to this objective and we hope that this will be a place of true encounter between the People of God and the great problem of our Diocese: the seminary.

In Ciudad Arce we have the retreat of Mother Josefina and I call all the Catholics of this parish to unite themselves once again under the prophetic guidance of their priest and learn to cultivate his Christian spirit of prophecy.

In the parish of La Merced I visited the Tinetti market. I admire the generosity and religious sense of our people in their devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Fr Torruella told me it was the ladies in the market who paid for the publication of a death notice for Fr Palacios. I would like to thank them for this gesture of solidarity with the Church.

Yesterday, in the market of Santa Tecla I celebrated a Mass in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spent some wonderful hours with the people there. I also announced there that on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel we will continue the tradition of administering the sacrament of Confirmation in the church of La Concepción at 11:00am but this sacrament will only be administered to those who are at least eight years old.

In the parish of La Palma we witnessed another prophetic gesture. The pastor gave me a beautiful letter in which he invited people to express their solidarity on the occasion of the death of Father Palacios and to charitably assist in the burial of three unknown people who were assassinated and whose bodies were found in that area. Father Guaratto wrote: *... as we ring the bells let us be mindful of the fact that this is an invitation to pray for those who have died, to pray without any discrimination or criticism because death like life is sacred and those who have died are now to be judged by God.* Very beautiful Christian and Franciscan thoughts!

The parish of Perulapan has protested the fact that their cemetery is becoming a dumping ground for those who have been assassinated. The pastor states: *the cemetery should be respected as sacred ground where people who are worthy are buried.* I believe many communities could say the same thing because as a result of the phenomenon of vengeance many decapitated, nude, mutilated, and tortured bodies are appearing. Look at what is happening to human life: machine-gunned and then thrown away!

La Escuela Sagrado Corazón is being slandered and accused of raising their tuition in the middle of the year. The Director General of Education, Mr. Moreno, explained that there is no proof for this accusation and that in fact the school is studying the differences in tuition that are paid by the students². The school, like every other school, is studying the economic situation of each student. This study is not done to raise tuition but to justify the tuition that each student is currently paying. We must be very careful in this matter especially when dealing with a school that has been singled out as being subversive and communist. I have complete faith in the La Escuela Sagrado

Corazón and I know that they are in communion with the Church and impart a true Christian education.

I also want to vouch for the fact that, when the Catholic schools organized a two-day strike, their objectives were published: to repudiate and strongly condemn the savage assassinations of teaching personnel and to reject the systematic violation of human rights and bodily integrity. Catholic schools are in solidarity with families weeping the death of so many teachers unjustly killed. It also wishes to be a sign of solidarity for those teachers threatened with death³. No one should distort an act of generosity and solidarity, an eloquent witness on the part of the Catholic schools. If only all of us together accompanied the Church in understanding that its schools were not on the margin but in the centre of the pastoral work of the archdiocese. ,

I rejoice with the Franciscan Community on the naming of their new Superior General, Father John Vaughn. On this occasion we remember the fact that there are 23,000 Franciscans in the world and that Father Vaughn is the 116th successor of Saint Francis Assisi.

Our Secretariat of Information has published a bulletin documenting the persecution of the Church. The survey that they took has shown that there have been seventy-six cases of abuse among the priests, men and women religious and communities⁴. Since the Church does not only identify herself with the priests and sisters but is also identified with the people, we have tried to study and count the number of abuses that have occurred during the past six months, abuses against those members of the Church by persons who should have defended them. Since January four hundred and six persons have been assassinated⁵ and at least three hundred and seven persons have been arrested for political reasons --- many of these people have never been heard from again because they have disappeared⁶.

Events of the week

We now look outward from the Church community to the world and the most notable event was the presidential address of July 1st. I did not want to say anything because I have made the recommendation that our beloved listeners should learn to read or listen critically. Not everything that is printed or said is the truth. What I want to do, because it is my right as pastor, is to point out a great danger when the President said: *I reiterate categorically that we are against violence from whomever it comes and regardless of the social position or the political hierarchy of those who create its victims. Above all else these victims are human persons and violence will never solve our problems.*⁷

This phrase is very beautiful and I would accept it but this leads us to the reality where in practice there are two logical faults. First, if violence is repudiated from whatever source then where are the sanctions against the Security Forces who have committed so much violence?* ... If violence is repudiated from whatever source and the Organization of American States has pointed out that ORDEN is responsible for so much violence among the people and for the persecution of the Church, then where is the justice against this violence that ORDEN has provoked?* ... We have a very clear case of this violence in the assassination of Father Octavio in El Despertar in San Antonio de Abad. A clear error. Where is the sanction against the criminal who did this? Here I want to become the voice of so many voices in mourning that have come to the Chancery and to our pastors. Families and witnesses have seen security agents kill and arrest people who later appeared dead in other places. Why are these cases not investigated? These are horrible crimes committed against our people!* These families, with legal documentation, have gone before the Supreme Court of Justice but have been ignored. This is the first criticism I make of General Romero when

he says that he repudiates violence from whomever it comes. We await the fulfillment of his words.*

Second, it seems to me that in pointing out this violence from whomever it comes, one must go even further. One must also point out the source of all this violence, namely, social injustice and the violation of freedom. In his discourse the President said that he is aware of the social problems of the country; its causes are complex and profound and it is urgent and impossible to delay finding a path that will lead us to promote an authentic justice in a climate of peace.⁸ He also recognized that democracy is justified in function of the values that it defends such as freedom and the dignity of the human person. Democracy permits dialogue and the right to dissent. On the other hand, in totalitarian dictatorships the person is obliged to accept the decisions of the State without discussion⁹. There we have two sources of injustice and much violence because the state has become an absolute that does not allow people to think differently and has established a social injustice which many times we have denounced with official documents of the Church. It is scandalous that we live in a society where the rich become richer at the expense of the poor who become poorer.(38) *

These are the points that as pastor and that Sacred Scripture demand a response: *Tell them, thus says the Lord: know that at least there is a God who is not in accord with the abuses and that there is a Church that defends the people and that is on the side of those who suffer because of injustice.*

Therefore we are also in accord with the denunciation that the teachers have presented to the Supreme Court of Justice, Dr Rogelio Chávez, who has just been reelected to this position. I want to repeat here on behalf of the teachers that the voice that comes before the Supreme Court of Justice is the voice of our people. The teachers represent a group of people that ought to be held in high esteem and I am profoundly hurt by what is happening to them. I say the same about our beloved priests who were not mentioned in the President's discourse, and also speak on behalf the humblest *campesino* who has a right to live and therefore the voice of the teachers that comes before the Supreme Court is the voice of the people. On this occasion we appeal to your conscience as a public official and ask you to become aware of the situation that attacks the most elemental disposition of justice. In summary: *as teachers we do not want any more assassinations, attacks, threats and persecution and you ought to state this and do something about this. The teachers demand an immediate halt to the assassinations of teachers and their families and those responsible for these criminal actions should be punished. It is within your competency to intervene in this matter.*¹⁰ Very courageous and very true!* If the Assembly has reelected Dr. Chávez to continue as president of the Supreme Court for two more years and spoken so eloquently about his judicial ability¹¹ then we hope that their words are not spoken in vain but rather that these words might become a reality in the next two years, a reality which up until now the people have not seen. Let there be greater justice and let the Supreme Court allow its weight to be felt in our history, especially during these dark hours of bloodshed and mourning by the Salvadorian nation.

I also want to unite myself to the observations that the teachers made. The teachers demand a halt to the slanderous campaign that has been mounted by the government against them. They wrote to the Supreme Court of Justice and said: *... it is within your competency to intervene in order to put a halt to this campaign of propaganda that we spoke about before*¹². We have continuously listened to this campaign on radio and television. It is as though the teachers were putting forth subversive doctrine. The same campaign has also been waged against the Catholic schools as though they were teaching Marxist doctrine to the students. I join my voice in protest

with the teachers and ask that the justice of our country punish those responsible for and those who support these campaigns that slander the teachers and our schools and that also divide our teachers.*

The medical interns have directed a courageous letter to the Vice-President of the country, Dr. Julio Ernesto Astacio, and asked that the promises that had been made to them be fulfilled. In their letter they state: *Various anomalies are occurring in the different centers of assistance and reprisals are being taken. We do not believe that you are the cause of this and ask you to use every means to intervene before the President of the Republic, the supreme authority, to resolve these painful situations. Such actions will give validity to your words*¹³. Actions always speak louder than words!

Workers should be mindful of the new pay scales which have been published in all the newspapers. Beginning July 10th all public employees will earn an additional 75.00 colones. Beginning next week, July 15th, male agricultural workers, 16 years of age and older will earn 5.20¹⁴ instead of 4.25 and female agricultural workers, 16 years of age and older will earn 4.60 instead of 3.75. All disabled workers, regardless of sex, will earn 4.60 instead of 3.75. Business workers in San Salvador will earn 9.00 instead of 7.20. In the other municipalities the rate will be 8.00 rather than 6.20.¹⁵ I make this known to you because for many *campesinos* the only means of communication is this voice of the Catholic Radio.* I raise only one criticism: the raise in salaries is just and good but I do not understand why, in a civilized country, there is discrimination against women. Why is there not equal pay for equal work? This is a question for the Department of Work.

I ask us once again to extend our hands and assist Nicaragua. All of you are aware of the terrible situation there. It is calculated that at least 800,000 people have been injured and are suffering from hunger. One of the religious communities of women received a call from another Sister who said that her community and the people who were sheltered there had not eaten for three days. *Cáritas* is grateful for the way in which you have responded to our call and continues to ask that you continue to donate whatever you can either through *Cáritas* or the Red Cross. Help as soon as possible! Help our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua!

Because this voice is a relief for those families whose loved ones have been arbitrarily arrested and now have cruelly disappeared, I denounce the actions that have been committed against Faustino Ayala, Ernesto Menjívar Castro (*campesinos* from Chalatenango); those who have actually disappeared: Elena Gómez Flores, Santiago Gutiérrez Payés, Juan Francisco Ruiz Rosales from the village of Nancistepeque in Santa Ana. We do not know the whereabouts of: Salvador Rubio Hernández from Olocuilta, Gonzalo Segundo Merino, Daniel González from Tejutepeque, Cristóbal Zelaya Murillo, a worker from San Salvador. Also the case of María Amada Galán de Rivera who was arrested in her own house in the village of San José Los Sitios in Chalatenango who leaves behind two children, ages six and four.

I also denounce a very painful case which I have been involved with and here I refer to Carlos Antonio Mendoza Valencia, a fifth year medical student who disappeared on the morning of June 28th. It is presumed that he was arrested and even though his family has searched for him in the all the offices of the Security Forces, they have been unable to locate him. His wife is two months pregnant and his mother is very afflicted. His sister asks for mercy from those who are responsible for his detention.

I also bring to your attention the very serious case of Professor Iván Burgos, who works with Fe y Alegría and was arrested during a soccer game. In the offices of the National Guard where he was

taken there is a paper that he freely signed. We want to state here that on many occasions hundreds of political prisoners have made statements only after long and painful interrogations --- statements that supposedly were signed freely. Is this another one of those cases? May God deliver us from this and hopefully Professor Iván Burgos quickly returns to his family.

There are labor conflicts in Pan Lido, IMES, IMISA, Tipografía Central, Fabril de Aceites, OCUSA. We ask God and the protagonists of these events to do all that is possible to resolve these situations rationally.

Speaking about the abductions, thanks to God, after so many Sundays of crying out for the freedom of two English bankers they are now in their homeland with their families.¹⁶ Also Miguel Armando Miguel, whom we have been concerned about, has been freed.¹⁷ As a result of this last case I want to speak about the young woman, Yolanda Guadalupe Arbaiza who was seriously injured during the abduction of Mr. Miguel. Her family has had many expenses and they have come to the Chancery asking us to act as mediators with the ERP. They ask this organization to help them pay the cost of her treatment. They need 33,500 colones to transport their child to the United States in order to undergo an urgent surgery. I hope that the ERP will give echo to this call. The family has asked the Red Cross to serve as an intermediary with the ERP if they wish to fulfill their just obligation. An evil has been done here and it is necessary to provide compensation for this evil.

My sisters and brothers, the Word of God today questions us about the difficult task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and denouncing sin that is opposed to the Kingdom. So much work, such a difficult work, such a risky work in our present situation! But thanks to God who wants this poor voice to be able to raise itself and speak in the name of the whole prophetic people: *Yes, to the Kingdom of God! No, to the kingdom of sin and the kingdom of the devil!**

¹ Pius IX, Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 December 1854.

² See *Diario de Hoy*, 5 July 1979.

³ See *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 5 July 1979.

⁴ See "Persecución contra sacerdotes, religiosos y religiosas", *Orientación*, 15 July 1979.

⁵ See "Represión contra el pueblo", *Orientación*, 22 July 1979.

⁶ See "Desaparecidos por motivos políticos", *Orientación*, 5 August 1979.

⁷ Message of President Carlos Humberto Romero on completing two years of government, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 4 July 1979.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1979.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 July 1979.

¹⁰ Letter of ANDES 21 June to the President of the Supreme Court of Justice (3 July 1979), *La Crónica del Pueblo*, 5 July 1979.

¹¹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 July 1979.

¹² Letter of ANDES, *op.cit.*

¹³ "Médicos internos continuamos en paro. Carta abierta", (4 July 1979), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 July 1979.

¹⁴ These and the following figures are expressed in colones.

¹⁵ See *Diario de Hoy*, 4 & 7 July, 1979.

¹⁶ Ian Massie and Michael Chatterton were freed on 2 July 1979. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 4 July 1979.

¹⁷ He was freed on 30 June 1979. See *Diario de Hoy*, 1 July 1979.

Marginal References (1) 2Tim 2,9; (2) Ex 2,2-3; (3) Is 6,8; (4) DV 2; (5) Jn 15,15; (6) Mk 6,2; (7) Ac 9,13; (8) Ac 9,15; (9) 1Cor 15,9-10; (10) Ex 2,2; (11) Ex 2,4b; (12) Ex2, 5a.6; (13) Ex 2,5b; (14) Ex 3,10; (15) Ex 3,11; (16) Jon 1,2-3; (17) Ex 3,12; (18) Lk 3,15; (19) Ac 14,11-18; (20) 2Cor 12,7; (21) 2Cor 12,8; (22) 2Cor 12,9^a; (23) 2Cor 12,9b-10; (24) 2Cor 12,10; (25) LG 12; (26) LG 25; (27) Mt 7,3; (28) Mk 6,2-3; (29) Jn 19,25; (30) Ex 2,3-5; (31) Lk 16,27-31; (32) Ex 33,7-9; (33) Is 56,10; (34) P 73; (35) P 79; (36) P 79; (37) P 79; (38) P 30.