

CHRIST GIVES TO US A PROPHETIC MISSION

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 15, 1979

Amos 7:12-15
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

My dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

Tomorrow, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, is a day of great popular devotion. I want to offer our reflection today as a homage to this devotion of our people and I invite everyone to look at Mary as the model of our Christian commitments.

During the Second Vatican Council there were profound discussions about the place that the Council was going to give to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ. Some Council fathers, very devoted to Mary, wanted a separate treatise that would deal with the Virgin. Others, with a more advanced and developed ecclesiological vision said that the Virgin Mary should not be separated from the treatise on the Church and that a chapter should be added to the Constitution on the Church. Those who followed the Council deliberations will remember how this news was reported --- as always, preposterous things, as if some Council fathers were devoted to the Virgin and others lacked this devotion. Despite all of this the opinion that was ultimately adopted was to include the statement about Mary in the treatise on the Church, seeing this as the crowning point of the document. Thus there were not two distinct documents but only one: the Church and Mary.

In the last chapter of the Constitution on the Church, in a chapter that is dedicated to the Virgin, we read this beautiful passage: *Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother* (1). Thus the reflection on Mary became part of the Document on the Church, because the Church --- and we are the Church --- looks at Mary as a prototype (a word that means paradigm or model), the person in whom the Church sees all of her ideals realized. Mary is the model and the work of the Church is oriented toward her --- we want to become like her. The day on which each Catholic, as a member of the Church, proposes to become like Mary, will be the day when we have the Church that we have dreamed about, an ideal Church. Today, on the occasion of the approaching feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, let us focus on the Virgin.

The Biblical reflections that are presented to us in the Liturgy of the Word on this Sunday are placed before us so that we might view our aspirations through the eyes of Mary and thus become like her. It is only in this way that we can become like Christ --- a demand that is placed upon us in today's gospel. She, being the model of the Church, achieves the prerogatives and the duties of the Church in the world.

What is the prerogative that is referred to in today's biblical reading? Today we continue the theme of last Sunday: prophecy. The Council speaks to you the laity --- not to those who are priests or religious but to you who are married, people who are in the world, you who make up the larger

part of the Church, you who have been baptized. Listen to what the Council says: *Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (sensu fidei) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life* (2). This means that as Mary is the prototype of the Church so, too, each lay person, each parent, each man and woman has to equip themselves to be able to fulfill a prophetic function in the world. You have been given the grace of the Word. The simple word of the parent who counsels, the word of a friend or a spouse --- all of these words are effective if they are joined to the anointing that gives them a sense of prophetic responsibility. How effective would all of this be! We would see the Kingdom of God established in the family and in government and business and the economy.

The prophetic responsibility that you have as the People of God and that I have as a member of the hierarchy --- this responsibility is very serious. In the name of Christ and with the authorization of Christ, the great prophet, you and I, from our own proper vocation, have been entrusted with the prophetic mission of the Church. As you the People of God can see, Mary is a layperson --- she is not a priest or a religious, but a wife and a mother of a family. Mary is a lay woman. Here she would be seated, on the benches of our Cathedral, like one of the many women who are listening to me and we would not be able to distinguish her from anyone else. Her heart, filled with the prophetic charism, would take in the words of the great prophet, Jesus Christ, her son, so that she could then fulfill those words as a lay person, fulfill those words with love, faith, charity, courage and integrity, fulfill those words as a prophet in the situation in which she was living.

Instead of clothing ourselves in the scapula which so often is done out of routine, let us offer ourselves to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Let us clothe ourselves with a conviction about our covenant with Mary and not see the scapula as some kind of passport: the one who dies wearing her scapula will be saved. This is a lie! Those who do not do the will of the Father, even though they say, *Lord! Lord!* --- they will not be saved.(3) May Mary teach us about the prophetic mission because then her holy scapula will be a sign of our relationship and our commitment not only with her, but also with the Lord. Mary has said: *I am the handmaid of the Lord. May be it be done to me according to your word* (4).

I entitle my homily: Christ has entrusted us with a prophetic mission. I will develop the following points: First, the conditions of the true prophet; Second, the false prophets; Third, What is our prophetic mission?

The conditions of the true prophet

What are the conditions of authentic prophecy? We only have to look at today's gospel where Jesus presents to us the disciples who were sent as prophets. Through our baptism we are all a continuation of these messengers of God in the world.

In today's gospel we read: *He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits* (5). This is the first point --- an experience of being authorized by Christ. Last Sunday we said that every prophet has a vocation, an anointing and a mission. We see the same thing here as we refer to the prophets of the New Testament. Jesus tells them: *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you* (6). The prophet is one who is chosen by the initiative of God and sent. Only those who have been sent can preach. Only those who have

heard the words of the Lord: *Go and say to this people, can say to others: the Lord commands me to say this!* Authority in this case was authority over unclean spirits (7) but authorization depends on the type of prophetic mission. Yes, the prophets of the Old Testament received a mission so, too, the apostles received a mission from Christ, an authorization that identified them with the One who sent them. They became representatives of Christ: *Those who despise you, despise me and those who pay heed to you pay heed to me.*(8) There is a more intimate authorization between us, the People of God, and Christ than between the prophets of the Old Testament and God. They were messengers but we, as the People of God, are not only messengers, but because Christ has inserted himself into the life of the People of God, he is the one who speaks.

What other conditions does the gospel point out? A community sense: Jesus sends the disciples out two by two and tells them to seek hospitality in the homes of a family in the towns where they go. If the people accept the prophet then peace will come upon them, but if the people reject them then they leave that town and the people will become accomplices since the people were not able to have the faith preached to them. Then Jesus tells them: *shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them* (9). The people who rejected the prophet sent by Christ, who as a community did not want to accept the message to form a society and fraternity that would not be based on dog-eat-dog, a society where people would not be afraid of one another --- these people will be cursed while those who accept the message of Christian fraternity will be blessed. The sign of shaking the dust off their feet is a gesture of repudiation that God has given up on that society.

May God free our nation from having to hear today the words that Jesus spoke as he wept on the mountain of Gethsemane: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold your house will be abandoned, desolate. I tell you there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down* (10). Free us Lord from a similar curse. There is still time for us to accept, not only as individuals but as the community of El Salvador, the message that Christ has sent us through Christian people, the prophetic people. There are so many holy people in our country! They pray often! My sisters and brothers, let us continue to ask the Lord to make effective the words of his prophets! May they be listened to so that the people will not be cursed by the Lord.

A third condition of the true prophet is the beautiful description that Jesus makes when he gives us norms that are so concrete and so simple. Jesus tells the disciples to take a walking stick and nothing else. No bread, no sack, no money in their belt. They can wear sandals but should not carry a second tunic. With eastern, biblical comparisons Jesus is telling them: live the evangelical spirit of poverty. This morning I want to highlight this point and I do this because there is so much selfishness and covetousness and envy of material goods. People fight for these things and yet Jesus says: *put these things aside and present yourselves with a spirit of poverty.* My sisters and brothers, no one is as free as those people who are not subject to the god of money and no one is as enslaved as those who worship the god of money. Jesus wants to break the dominion of this idolatry and tells the disciples: *Do not worry! Trust in Providence and you will be given bread and clothing and all that you need. Go and preach the Kingdom of God not for money because that is bad business* (11).

The prophet Amos who is presented to us in today's first reading experienced such freedom that when a false prophet, more interested in money than the kingdom of God, tells him: *Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying, but never again prophesy in Bethel! Do not disturb us for this is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple!* (12). Amos responds with a calmness that can only come from a true sense of poverty: *I was no prophet,*

nor have I belonged to a company of prophets. I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock and said to me: Go, prophesy to my people Israel. I do not come here seeking money or bread to eat. I come because God has sent me. I have enough with my cows and my figs. I do not have to expose myself to these humiliations that you, because you occupy a high position in the national shrine, direct at me, a poor campesino (13). This is the freedom of truly great people who are poor in the evangelical sense.

When Paul VI spoke about the renewal of the Church, he pointed out two necessary virtues for our time: charity and the spirit of poverty. He analyzed why it was important today for the Church and Christians to live this spirit of charity and stated: *We consider that the inner freedom which results from zeal for evangelical poverty* (14). Notice these beautiful words! *Inner freedom results from zeal for evangelical poverty*. Why is it not enough to be lacking in material goods. There are poor people who are interiorly free but seek things with great passion and hate and have resentments against those who have. This is not the freedom of poverty and therefore it is not enough to be poor and to be lacking material goods. The truly poor person has broken the interior chains. The Pope also states: *inner freedom which results from zeal for evangelical poverty makes us in fact more sensitive to the human aspects of economic questions, and better fitted to understand them* (15). No one understands better the need for money than those who possess a spirit of poverty because they know that money is useful and that it is impossible to dispense with money as a means but not as an objective, as something that serves the human person and not something that the human person serves. Those who possess this spirit of evangelical poverty know better than those who are rich how to use money. They understand the economic meaning of life better than those who have become enslaved to the god of money.

The Pope goes on to say: *This inner freedom which results from zeal for evangelical poverty allows us to pass, where necessary, a calm and often severe judgment on wealth and on the luxuries of life* (16). In other words, wealth is necessary for the progress of people and we are not going to deny that fact. But progress like ours, conditioned by the exploitation of so many people who will never enjoy the fruits of this progress* ... this is not evangelical poverty. What good are beautiful highways and airports, beautiful buildings full of spacious apartments, if they are only put together with the blood of the poor who are not going to enjoy them?* Even though they promote highways and buildings, those who possess true inner freedom know how to give this work a true meaning, the true meaning that the Pope calls a *calm and severe judgment*. *Severe* --- this is a word that is lacking: a severe wealth in the true meaning of the word severity so that those who have know how to place their possessions at the service of the common good. This is how the Lord wants us to live the spirit of poverty: to serve others with all the money that we might have, to serve others with a spirit of discipline and detachment.

Another advantage of poverty: *We can come promptly and generously to the aid of those in need* (17). No one understands the poor like those who possess a spirit of evangelical poverty. They know the meaning of a mother's and a child's hunger because even though they might not live in the same physical conditions, the spirituality of their poverty enables them to understand and share. They share with those who do not have and are generous and concerned about them. They do not give from a position of superiority to one who is inferior --- this is not the time for paternalism but a time for fraternity and experiencing the other as a brother and sister. They are concerned about the poor, the *campesinos*, and those who do not have.

And finally the Pope states: *this spirit of poverty enables us to do our utmost to ensure that wealth, far from being a source of conflict, selfishness and pride amongst men, shall be used justly and equitably for the good of all, and distributed with greater foresight* (18). If people do not

possess this spirit that Jesus has recommended, then our society will never change. Therefore, this message today that is contained in the sending forth of the disciples should not be seen as a remembrance of some past event. Ah! Then there would be no highways to construct! There would be no buildings to erect! There would be no cities to build! Yes, progress has always been an ideal of the human person but this ideal is changed into selfishness and a source of rivalry when it is not animated by a sense of virtue. The spirit of poverty is a Christian virtue and we all need to change and clothe ourselves in this virtue.

I have brought with me the document of Puebla so that you can see that the Church is severe with herself: *The Church must become more and more independent of power in this world. Only thus can it enjoy a broad area of freedom that will enable it to carry out its apostolic work without interference. That work includes the practice of cultic worship, education in the faith, and the fostering of those many and varied activities that lead the faithful to implement the moral imperatives deriving from the faith in their private, family, and social life. Thus, free of compromising and vested only with its witness and teaching, the Church will be more credible and better heard. This will enable it to evangelize the very exercise of power for the common good* (19). I rejoice, my sisters and brothers, that our Church is persecuted precisely because of her preferential option for the poor, for attempting to incarnate herself in the concerns of the poor and for proclaiming to all people, government officials, the rich and the powerful: If you do not become poor and if you do not become concerned about the poverty of our people as though they were members of your own family, then you cannot save society.*

There is another paragraph from the document of Puebla that interests me and that will help you see the sincerity of the authentic Church today. Speaking about the preferential option for the poor, Puebla states: *The gospel demand for poverty, understood as solidarity with the poor and as a rejection of the situation in which most people on this continent live, frees the poor person from being individualistic in life, and from being attracted and seduced by the false ideals of a consumer society* (20). How much the poor are interested in understanding the evangelical spirit of poverty! If there is a sickness among the poor and the middle class and those in the lower classes of society, it is a most terrible illness: to be a victim of the consumer society --- to want a television, to have a television set that has better reception than the neighbor upstairs, to rejoice in luxury without having that which is necessary to subsist. The spirit of poverty is the best way to resist these temptations that annihilate the family and the happiness of the human person. The Church opts for the poor in order to teach them the true spirit of detachment.

But even further the Church wants to be poor, living an evangelical spirit of poverty. Puebla says: *the witness of a poor Church can evangelize the rich whose hearts are attached to wealth, thus converting and freeing them from this bondage and their own egotism* (21). How wise is the Lord Jesus Christ in telling the apostles: *go and evangelize like a poor pilgrim*. The Church of today has to be converted to this command of Christ. This is not the time for great show and large, useless buildings and pomp in the Church. Perhaps at another time all of this had a function and now we must give all of this a function of evangelization and service. Now more than ever before the Church wants to present herself as poor among the poor and poor among the rich in order to evangelize both poor and rich.*

In our filial love for the Virgin to whom we have dedicated this reflection, I want to speak about her in the same way that Puebla does, citing the words of the Pope's homily that was delivered in the shrine of the Virgin of Zapopan. He recalled to mind the fact that *in her Magnificat, Mary proclaims that God's salvation has to do with justice for the poor. From her, too, "stems authentic commitment to other human beings, our brothers and sisters, especially to the poorest and the*

neediest, and to the necessary transformation of society” (22). These are the exact words of Puebla and the Pope and therefore you can see that devotion to the Virgin is not a form of alienation. Tomorrow, on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, when the multitudes come before her image and dress themselves in her scapular, we should not forget that Mary is above all else a prophetic messenger of Christ. In her canticle she remembered the poor and the hungry and said that God would ask an accounting from the proud of heart and the haughty and the rich of the world.(23) God will send them away empty handed if they do not become converted to the poverty of God.

Yes, we love our mother because she is the model, the paradigm of those who follow the gospel. She is the model of the poor of Yahweh. Mary, a poor woman --- Cardinal Pironio calls her: *The woman who visits America and wears no shoes. With a poor child she makes us rich and with a destitute child she makes us free.* We have a great devotion to Mary, but, my sisters and brothers, our devotion should be liberating, a devotion that allows us to learn from Mary the meaning of the freedom that she speaks about, a devotion that allows us to experience ourselves in front of God, not to implant our way of thinking or our false prudence, but to learn how to turn to Christ when because of injustice we are nailed to a cross, to learn how to turn to Christ when everyone else flees and Mary remains alone beneath the cross. She is the courageous woman of Yahweh who defends the rights of God and of the human person even when this involves humiliation and danger.

The false prophets

Now let us focus on the first reading that describes the sad role of the false prophet. There was a pseudo-prophet named Amaziah. Let us remember that Bethel, the place where this priest exercises his ministry, was a rival shrine to that of Jerusalem. Israel and Judah were divided. The temple of Judah was in Jerusalem and Israel's temple was located in Bethel. The Kingdom of the North, Israel, had flourished and with this progress came many vices and luxuries that were an offense to those who were poor. Worship in the temple had become nothing more than the appearance of worship. God sent Amos to Israel and to prophesize to the people. I invite you to read the brief pages of the book of Amos. You will see the freedom with which he faced King Jeroboan II and told him that there could be no peace until there was justice and that the present situation of injustice and excessive luxury had to be changed. That was enough because God would come on that terrible day and punish the people. Yes, this language that places demands on people upsets them and disturbs them. It would be like a *campesino* entering an elegant dance and threatening people --- he would be immediately thrown out. The same happened to Amos. But it is sad that the people made a game out of injustice and oppression and excessive luxury. In their worship they did not honor God but wanted to maintain good relationships with the people and so the priests also played games in the shrine at Bethel.*

What was the sad role of Amaziah? Today we saw his role described in the first reading. First, he opposes the voice of the true prophet: *Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying. There you can do what you want but not here!* (24). As though God did not reign over the whole world and could not send his messengers to every part of the world. We see that the words of Pope Paul VI that we referred to before are disturbing and upsetting in certain situations: *the severe judgment of wealth.*(25) We no longer want to hear words that approve injustice and abuse. What is the purpose of a National Forum¹ if the only people invited to participate all think alike? What is the purpose of not listening to the voice of the Lord?

What else is a false prophet? The false prophet says to Amos: *Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread!* (26). Thus we see how the false prophet confuses the

prophetic mission with economic interests. How terrible when the priestly or prophetic mission becomes subordinated to social or economic interests. My brothers and sisters, how many times --- and here I am speaking to you the laity who are the prophetic people of God --- how many times has a person achieved a high political position and now that person is no longer the same as before? * How many times have we had to lament betrayals! Even in the modesty of certain letters that still preserve a hint of friendship some people tell me: *you understand, I cannot think like you. I will lose my job and will no longer have the advantage that has been given to me.* We have a series of subordinations like that of the prophet Amaziah who thought that his duty was to earn money, to engage in a business and so thought that Amos had gone there for the same purpose. Instead he encounters a free and independent man who said: *I do not work for bread or money, but I come because the Lord of Israel has sent me!* (27)

We can also see how the prophetic mission becomes subordinated to political interests: *Never again prophesy in Bethel for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple! Here one must speak as the king desires!* (28). In this instance Amos appears like Peter: *We must obey God before obeying man* (29). We cannot work to maintain good relations with the powers that be. In the name of God we must denounce so many injustices. There are so many ways of becoming accomplices of criminals! The Church cannot become an accomplice with any of this but must proclaim her word even though this word will be rejected by those who, like Amaziah, respect the voice of the king more than they respect the message of their God.

What is our prophetic message to the world, as God's people ?

Remember I am trying to speak as a member of the people, of a diocese. Although it is true that I am the bishop of the diocese, still I am not the only one with a prophetic mission. It is my whole people, all of my priests, all my religious, the Catholic schools, and all who form the Catholic community.* In the name of all of you, beloved lay people who listen to me and reflect with me, I speak about the meaning of our prophetic mission --- what we must preach with our witnessing and with our words to the people of El Salvador who so much need this Christian light. You and I are responsible for seeing that Christ's message reaches everyone.

First, a negative aspect. We heard in today's gospel how Jesus sent the disciples to drive out demons. The gospel says: *So they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them* (30). What does this mean? This is the negative aspect of our message: sin. There is a war to the death against sin. Sin has its roots in the devil and also produces certain effects. The effects of sin are illness, misery, illiteracy, malnutrition, social injustice. All of these realities spring up in our midst and are the fruits of the trunk, that is the fruit of sin which is rooted in hell and the devil.

Therefore the struggle of the prophetic people is a struggle against sin and the devil and all their consequences. It is a struggle against the different forms of slavery on this earth. Thus, to speak about confession so that we are free from personal sin and yet not become engaged in the struggle against injustice --- this would not be the authentic People of God. Together with our effort to avoid personal sin we must also join together to uproot social sin and to struggle against the power of hell and the devil. The prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist and the mission of the Apostles are not definitive but simply a preparation. They are focused on the negative aspects and thus the gospel says that the disciples *went off ... and drove out many demons and cured those who were ill.* In other words, the disciples taught the message of Jesus Christ through human promotion.

According to the gospel of Saint Mark (the gospel that we are reflecting on this year), Christ reserves for himself the initiation of the positive proclamation: *the kingdom of God has come upon you* (31). This is the positive aspect and so now we move beyond simply rooting out sin and its consequence: selfishness on earth. Ours would be a very negative religion if this were all we did. But how beautiful to be able to fill the emptiness that is caused by sin and hell and slavery --- to fill this emptiness with the kingdom of God! According to Saint Paul, the Kingdom of God is not distinct from Christ. Christ is the Kingdom of God. He incarnates the Kingdom of God. To preach the Kingdom of God in the world is to preach that Christ is coming. As the Pope said in his first homily when he was consecrated Pope: *Open the doors to Christ, you who are politicians and economists, you who work in the university and are responsible for our culture. Only Christ has the words of eternal life²*. We are in such a sad situation here in El Salvador because we want to build a civilization without Christ.

It is necessary to open our thoughts and love and mind to the words of the second reading where Saint Paul offers us a synthesis of Christian kerygma. *Kerygma* is a word that means: proclamation, announcement. According to the prophets of the Old Testament, the kerygma was a definitive phase that would be brought to reality by the Redeemer. The Redeemer who came proclaimed: *The Kingdom of God is at hand! Open the doors! Repent!* (32).

What is the kerygma that Jesus preached and that he entrusted to the Church? We as Church are entrusted to bring the kerygma to society, to our homes and our friends, to every situation. What must we preach? Besides the repudiation of sin, Saint Paul presents us with another aspect of our preaching: *to bring together all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth* (33). Saint Paul says that the mystery hidden in the eternal depths of God has been revealed to him. The mystery that he refers to is the following: *to bring together all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth*. Before the heavens or the earth or history or women and men existed, God thought of Christ as the key to heaven and earth and history. Therefore all things must be brought together in Christ. When I was looking for the origin of this word I discovered that the Greeks when they added numbers spoke about bringing together. Several numbers were added together to arrive at a total. What we refer to as a total the Greeks referred to as bringing together. Christ comes to be the *total*. Christ comes to be the summary of everything that exists. Christ is the key that is needed in order to understand the human person and history. Christ is the last stone that is placed in the building --- like those stones that crown the Gothic arches and provide stability to the whole building. This is Christ: the one who brings together the whole universe.

Saint Paul presents Christ under different aspects: *through his blood we have received redemption*.(34) There is no redemption without the blood of Christ. Even though people today might struggle for the just demands of people in the face of an unjust society and an unjust, dishonest political system, before a corrupt world,* yet people will only find true freedom and true redemption in the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Only in his blood! Therefore when we come to Mass on Sunday we render homage to the blood that is the only hope of our redemption. Liberation is a word that causes much conflict in our time. But the Bible uses this word. For ancient Israel, liberation meant leaving the slavery of Egypt and traveling to the Promised Land. For us as Christians, liberation means that with his blood Christ paid the debt that resulted from our sins and now we experience ourselves as freed from sin.

Besides freeing us from sin Christ has made us sons and daughters of God (35). This relationship with Christ is another aspect of our kerygma, our proclamation of the Kingdom of God. All people are called to be children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, coheirs of the Kingdom. This is the call that makes us enthusiastic because it opens new perspectives for us. This fear that

we have of one another here in El Salvador is not going to be a permanent situation. True freedom will come when all of us experience ourselves as children of God, when we experience ourselves united in the family relationship that Christ has established with us and when we sincerely pray together: *Our Father, who art in heaven!*

There is still more! Christ made us his children but then did not separate himself from us as one who signs a document, acting in the name of another person or like the parent who adopts a child signing a document but remains distinct from the child. There is something great in what Saint Paul calls incorporation into Christ. Christians are not only children of God but also living members of Christ --- members whose head is Christ. (36) All of us are a living organism. Let us incorporate ourselves into Christ so that we might experience the beautiful unity of the People of God.

Lastly, the Kerygma, the proclamation of the Kingdom, assures us that all Christians, from the day of their baptism, have been sealed with the sign of the Holy Spirit.(37) The seal is like the coins that are exchanged during a wedding ceremony, like an anticipation of the payment that is demanded by the debt that has been incurred. It is as though God has become our debtor. He has placed the seal of his Spirit upon us so that after our death we might be able to receive the consummation, the inheritance, the demands of this seal that we bear in life, the beautiful inheritance of the children of God in the land of fulfillment.

This is the proclamation that we were entrusted with on the day of our Baptism. Redemption in Christ is also a fertile seed, a leaven for the liberating groups of the earth. Therefore, the Church continues to be sympathetic to all the liberating efforts of men and women. So that these groups do not lose their effectiveness and strength and become hateful, the Church also cries out against their sins and abuses. She says: *these demands that you seek are good but the strategy that you are following is not good.*

We meet Mary here, through the faith and hope she placed in this beginning of God's kingdom which is her own Son.... The Risen Christ has put in history's womb the beginning of a new world. To come to Mass on Sunday is to immerse oneself in that beginning which again becomes present and is celebrated on the altar at Mass. As we go forth from Mass we know that we have proclaimed the death that saved the world, we know that we have proclaimed the resurrection of Christ, who lives as hope so that all the universe of heaven and earth may join together so that all things in heaven and on earth may come together in Christ.

You know about the union and the intimate relationship that exists between men and women and the universe. Go back to chapter of Genesis where God gives to humanity the land and the stars and the planets: *fill the earth and subdue it* (40). Men and women, with their great inventions, are fulfilling the command of God. The human race of the twentieth century has climbed to the moon, has uncovered the secret of the atom, and what else might be discovered? The Lord's command is fulfilled: *Subdue the earth* (Genesis 1:28). But absolute human dominion over the earth will be that which is proclaimed today: bringing all things of heaven and earth together in Christ. Then humanity will put under God's reign the world which is no longer a slave of sin. Then humanity will place the universe at the feet of God. This is the bringing together that was God's design before the world existed. And when history comes to its end, this will be God's fulfillment: Christ, the sum of all things.

All that history has been, all that we do ourselves, good or bad, will be measured by God's design; and there will remain only those who have labored to put things under Christ's rule. All

that is rebellion against God's plan in Christ is false. It will not last; it will be for history's waste heap.

Life of the Church

It is now, my sisters and brothers, that I want to undertake with you a review of the past week. Our Church uses as a starting point the Church in which Christ is incorporated. What an honor to know that you and I, the community of the Archdiocese, are the flesh of Christ in the history of the present moment. Christ lives today and is revealed in us. Christ wants to act through us and wants to speak through us. This is the great prophetic responsibility that the People of God has. Hopefully no one will flee from this responsibility.

On this day before the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the people of the Archdiocese experience a profound relationship as a result of their incorporation into Christ which also makes us pleasing to the Virgin. The more we are incorporated into Christ because of grace then all the more are we children of Mary who is the mother of Jesus. Let us celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel together with the Carmelite Fathers in the village of Roma where today we will also administer First Communion at 4:00pm. Tomorrow at 6:00pm we will also celebrate a Mass in this parish. We will celebrate with the Carmelites in San José at 11:00am this morning. Some novices will make their profession and begin their life as Carmelite Sisters. We also celebrate this feast with the Spanish Carmelite Missionaries who are working in the Policlínica and in two other communities of the Archdiocese. May God reward them for the good that they are doing. We say the same to the Carmelite Missionaries of Saint Theresa who are ministering in Colegio de la Gruta and also in Hospital de la Divina Providencia. How much good the Virgin is doing through them. We greet the members of the Iglesia del Carmen in Santa Tecla and in Cuscatlán where the people will also be celebrating their feast. I remind you that in the Iglesia de la Merced we have a Carmelite jewel. The image of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is venerated there and has been crowned by a Pontifical Decree. That is to say that the Pope is in agreement with our devotion and has expressed this through the gesture of crowning the image of the Virgin in the Iglesia de la Merced where tomorrow we will celebrate Mass at 7:00pm with the Confraternity that bears the same name.

We also see the life of God alive in the hearts of other communities. In El Paraíso the Bethlehemite Sisters gifted me with a very wonderful reception. Around the convent and the Church I was able to see the flowering of the Church as a multitude of faithful, especially young people who are the hope of that area, gathered together. There is much hope in the Vicariate of Mejicanos where people are meeting and organizing themselves to work together as a team. The Spirit of God was present in Comasagua yesterday when we celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation with Father Gonzalo Orellana.

Our Archdiocese will put our vocational ministry under the protection of Saint Joseph this afternoon at 6:00pm in the church of San José de la Montaña where we will install the new pastor, Father Cortes, and his collaborators. So at 6:00pm we will consecrate the vocational mission of the Diocese.

There were two gatherings that expressed the life of our Archdiocese as it is enlightened by God. One of these meetings was with the families of the priests who were assassinated. I was deeply moved to be among the parents and brothers and sisters of my companions in the mission. They spoke to me about the origins, the infancy, and family impressions of the five priests that were assassinated and who offered their lives as a holocaust for the Church. The other gathering was composed of the major and minor seminarians of the Archdiocese and was filled with life. They

gathered at one of our beautiful beaches where they spoke sincerely about the problems of young people and searched for a greater unity among themselves.

Our Archdiocese invites everyone next Friday at noon to celebrate the thirty day anniversary of the death of Father Rafael Palacios. I invite all the priests, communities and faithful to participate in this celebration on Friday at noon. I want to echo and support an initiative of the Vicariates of Mejicanos, Aguilares and La Libertad who are promoting an extended period of prayer beginning on Friday at 6:00am until the following Saturday at 1:00pm. This will take place here in the Cathedral. The Vicariates that I have mentioned will provide more details about this program. I also want to echo their invitation and ask you to respond to this wonderful initiative. This time of prayer and reflection will be focused around the question: why have we come to such an extreme point in our society that priests are murdered?

As his friend I want to mention here the death of Don Avelino Alvarez. He will be buried this afternoon and he was an arduous collaborator of *Orientación*. May God reward him for his work with our means of communication! We also send our condolences to his family. I also want to let Virgilio Aguilar and his wife, Doña Agustina, know that the Mass for their son has been celebrated.

There is news about our Church community that is more universal in nature. The Pope and the Prime Minister of West Germany analyzed the situation of Latin America and Eastern Europe. Latin America is being closely watched by the Pope and by those who know that the hope of the Church is here, on our continent. The Pope named a new Archbishop for San José, Costa Rica. On August 2nd, the new Archbishop, Román Arrieta Villalobos, will take possession of the Diocese. He had been the bishop of the Diocese of Tilarán in the same country.

I want to express my gratitude for the gestures of solidarity that I received from the bishops of South America who were meeting in Ecuador. I was told that they had hoped that I would have been present at the meeting but I was unable to go there because of the situation here in Central America. I received a beautiful letter in which the bishops expressed their solidarity with the people of El Salvador and Nicaragua and pray for our situation. May God reward them!

The bishops of Nicaragua called attention to those who are seeking just demands of the people and warn them not to commit abuses that could be labeled as war crimes. The bishops in Venezuela have taken up a collection to help the church in Nicaragua. Incidentally, I want to express my gratitude for everything that is being done here to help the people in Nicaragua. I continue to call for your assistance because Nicaragua is in much need of our charity and our Christian love.

Events of the week

This morning as I looked at our present situation I was saddened when I received a telephone call and told that the offices where *La Crónica del Pueblo* is published were burned. I expressed my pain and feelings to the Director of the newspaper and I do the same here publicly. I express my solidarity with his suffering and also with the determination of his spirit. He told me: *They will not be able to make me fold because my decision is to continue to serve the people ... With my modest means I want to continue to serve the truth and justice.* He said that the inheritance that he could provide for his children was his desire to be faithful to his convictions and not sell out to the highest bidder. I congratulate and hope that he, with the help of the people, is able to recuperate from this loss. May his newspaper become once again another voice that speaks out on behalf of freedom!

It is a shame that we have to speak through these means of communication about the reason and the method of those who are unreasonable: brute force. How much better would it be to engage in an authentic dialogue where dissenting voices were listened to! Not everyone thinks the same way. To listen to others and to listen to criticism is an enriching experience. We are not going to achieve a unification in criteria by burning newspapers or planting bombs in radio stations. I also lament the sad news that arrived from Santa Ana from Radio HH that is owned by Manuel Montes. His radio station was destroyed and as a result the effort of so much time has been undermined.

Other alarming news was communicated to me this morning: the assassination of a worker, Ana Silvia Oliveria, a member of the Industrial Electrical Union in Sonsonate. Her companions have asked me to invite you to participate in the viewing and burial which will take place in la Avenida Cuscatlán #630.

We express our solidarity to the families who have continued to suffer repression that becomes crueler with the passing of each day. Arrests and assassinations have continued and there are no signs that the government is taking any serious measure against the violence, regardless of where it comes from. Violence continues to torment our *campesinos* and we hope that cruelty will be quickly halted because we continue to be surprised by the fact that not only are people arrested but also that there is an increase in cruelty and sadism.

You have read in the newspaper about the discovery of three bodies in Chalchuapa. The newspaper reported: *they were buried without being able to be identified.*³ But I received news from their families and these bodies have been identified. They are Miguel Angel Osorio Velásquez, José Fermín Albayero Ortega and Roberto Hernández. Their families identified them after traveling for several days searching for the place where their bodies had been thrown. And this is what they found how horrible! Miguel Angel Osorio Velásquez lived in Colonia Montevideo in Sonsonate and was twenty-two years old. At the end of this month he would have married. Early Monday morning, after having eaten his breakfast, he left for work. He was a carpenter. He never returned from work. Later on the same day eight agents from the National Guard searched the house that he was preparing to make his home. His family believes that he was captured before this search was conducted because the police were able to open the house with their own key. His body and two other bodies were found by his mother. His face was disfigured, one of his hands was missing and there were numerous signs of torture on his body. He was buried in Sonsonate. José Fermín Albayero Ortega was from Izalco, thirty-one years old and leaves behind four children. Monday morning he left for work and never returned. His wife recognized that one of the three bodies that were found on La Calle Las Cruces was that of José Fermín. His body had been terribly mutilated. His eyes were taken out, his tongue and ears were missing and his body had been burned with acid. His feet showed evident signs of torture. He had no bullet wounds. Roberto Hernández was twenty-seven years old and leaves behind two children. There were evident signs of torture on his body and his body had been horribly mutilated.

The list of those who have been arrested continues and I mention their names here because it is possible that this voice that mentions their names will make their captors think. If you have them in your power then bring them before the Supreme Court of Justice. If you do not do this then we know they are lost and have disappeared. Besides being an affront to the human person your action is also an affront to the Supreme Court of Justice and the very Constitution of the country. Here I mention: Crescencio Antillón, Herculano Antillón (two brothers --- the first brother was used as bait to capture the other whom they wanted to arrest), Roberto Antonio Olmedo Nóchez, Angel Rigoberto Hernández, Manuel de Jesus Valle Abrego, Juan José Abrego, José Alvaro Zelaya Rivera, Luis Alberto López Alvarado. I am especially concerned about the case of Juan Francisco

Ruiz, a relative of a priest and the case of Professor Carlos Iván Burgos, because he is a member of the faculty of Fe y Alegría. The *campesinos* Faustino Ayala and Ernesto Menjívar were also arrested. I also mention here the case that I referred to last Sunday, Carlos Antonio Mendoza, because his family has received reliable news that he is being held in the police station.

Even though I should conclude I want to speak about the different labor conflicts. I want to appeal to the common sense and reason of labor and management. The intransigence of one of the two parties makes working and living together impossible. Try to understand one another and even though the workers might be in solidarity with workers from another factory, think of each factory as autonomous and do not be so demanding but be more understanding. Yes, you have a right to honor the sense of solidarity but you dishonor this solidarity with your intransigence. Resolve these conflicts quickly for your families and for the peace of the country.

Here I want to mention two denunciations in Santa Tecla. First, beside the house of the Dominican Sisters, a house of human promotion, very unpleasant things have occurred. Mauricio Hernández Martínez, thirty-six years old, together with his wife, works during the day on a farm and at night they seek lodging in one of the corridors. Some unidentified persons who thought that Mauricio had denounced them for threatening the Sisters with robbery, hit him over the head with a large rock while he was sleeping. He was brought to the hospital unconscious and died there three days later. Second, the Dominican Sisters who live in this house and the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul in Santa Tecla dedicate themselves to ministering to the infirm, the elderly and children. The vexing white hand of the White Warriors Union has appeared on their houses⁴ as if the Sisters are doing things that disturb the true progress of our society. Apart from all foolish partisan politics I invite these people to look at the work that the Sisters and the Christian communities are doing. For this reason I believe that the Vicariates that are promoting these days of prayer and reflection want to call people to be more rational in our present situation. Let us not allow ourselves to be carried about as though we were trying to thrash the air because of some foolish and tragic vengeance. Keep in the mind the useful lives of so many sisters and brothers.

The ERP informed us that Carlos Rafael Nieto who was abducted on June 14th is in good health and they are waiting for the fulfillment of their conditions in order to release him. On our part we call upon the ERP to help restore the health of the young woman who was wounded in one of their operations. It is only right that she should be compensated.

We receive comments about the present situation of the country and I was pleased by the commentary that was sent to me in a letter: *How sad to see the state in which we have arrived! How can we teach our children the value of life when no value is given to life here? If we as parents are enraged by this bloodshed then how can we be silent?*

My dear sisters and brothers, we have not gone outside the framework of our homily. People of God! all of you who are so kind as to reflect with me --- the Lord is placing before us a tremendous challenge. His doctrine is one of love and peace and his message is one of salvation and eternal life. But we are placed in a world where people appear to be wolves and wild beasts. This is our mission: to go to all those criminal hands, to all those terrible forces of hatred and silence, to all those forces of concealment and evil, to go and change these people into children of God, people who are incorporated into Christ. Who are these people? Many know who they are and people suspect who they are, but the Lord knows all of this better than we do! Listen to the prayer of the people today who have gathered here, who in light of the Word have reflected on so many disastrous actions, and who in light of the Word cry out for the action of God in the midst of a people who have forgotten God.

May each Christian and each member of this Church May all of us, like Mary, know how to wipe away the tears and console those who are weeping and sorrowful and may we, like Mary who was courageous in her prophetic profession, also know how to unmask the evil in our midst and cry out against injustice because according to Mary's hymn the redemption of women and men is linked to the justice that they do here on earth. In this matter we pay tribute to the truth of God. So be it.*

¹ The Foro Nacional was convoked by the President Carlos Humberto Romero on 17 May 1979. See "Documentos sobre el Foro Nacional", *ECA* 368, (1979), pp. 458-468.

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

³ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 July 1979.

⁴ A threat from the 'White Warrior's Union', one of the extreme-right paramilitary groups, better known as 'death squadrons'.

Marginal References (1) LG 53; (2) LG 35; (3) Mt 7,21; (4) Lk 1,38; (5) Mk 6,7; (6) Jn 15,16; (7) Mk 6,7; (8) Lk 10,16; (9) Mk 6,11; (10) Mk 23,37; (11) Lk 12,29; (12) Am 7,12; (13) Am 7,14-15; (14) Es 28; (15) ES 28; (16) ES 57; (17) ES 28; (18) ES 28; (19) P 144; (20) P 1156; (21) P 1156; (22) P 1144; (23) Lk 1,52-53; (24) Am 7,12; (25) ES 28; (26) Am 7,12; (27) Am 7,15; (28) Am 7,13; (29) Ac 5,29; (30) Mk 6,12-13; (31) Lk 11,20; (32) Mk 1,15; (33) Ep 1,10; (34) Ep 1,7; (35) Ep 1,5; (36) Ep 1,5; (36) Ep 1,10; (37) Ep 1,13; (38) Gn 1,28.