

## THE DIVINE SAVIOR, LIFE OF THE WORLD

**Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**August 12, 1979**

*1 Kings 19:4-8*  
*Ephesians 4:30-5:2*  
*John 6:41-52*

My dear sisters and brothers

We are mindful of three events as we come together this week to give thanks to God and to move forward into the new week.

First of all, though it is not widely known, the second Sunday of August is Priest's Day. Here we are not involved in some kind of self-praise but rather this is an expression of the priest's need for prayers and understanding from the People of God whom the priest must serve. Therefore at this time I want to take the opportunity to express my solidarity with all the priests of the Diocese. I ask the People of God to show their support to the priests by prayers and by expressions of solidarity. These are difficult times for our priests and yet their mission is indispensable despite the difficulties. These difficulties ought to give greater encouragement to our priests to live their lives according to the gospel.

The second event is connected with the first. This past week we buried Father Alirio Napoleón Macías who, as you know, was assassinated in the parish church of San Esteban Catarina. As Bishop Rivera said in his homily: *he fell like the prophets: between the vestibule and the altar*. As a result of his death the past three days have been days of reflection for the bishops, priests, religious women and seminarians.

But the light that illuminates this reflection is the third event which occurred last Monday, the celebration of our patronal feast of the Divine Savior of the world. Today's readings and all the events of the past week invite us to enlighten the realities of our Church and nation with the light of Christ, Redeemer and Savior of the world.

### **Life of the Church**

The first reality for our reflection is the death of Father Alirio. The bishops reflected on this event yesterday as they gathered together in the Nuncio's office. There they agreed to present an official denunciation of this crime and asked for a thorough investigation that would result in sanctions, according to justice, against the perpetrators of this crime. The Nuncio offered the President of the Republic his support in this investigation.

The priests and women religious --- 110 priests, 130 sisters --- several seminarians and laypersons gathered together yesterday in the church of San José de la Montaña. We have a brief bulletin about this meeting. The objective of this meeting was to take some measures to achieve the unity of the Church so that together, we, bishops, priests and faithful, can defend the priests. We asked for a cessation to the general repression. The results of this meeting were the following:

First, a letter was sent to the Holy Father informing him of the increasing repression against the people and the Church. Concrete petitions were made in this regard. Second, another letter was sent to the Episcopal Conference in which, among other things, they asked the bishops to unite in defending the fundamental rights of citizens and in demanding respect for the lives of the priests. The bishops were invited to make a statement to the government and the people and condemn the violence and ask for a cessation of the repression of the people and the Church. Third, finally, another letter was sent to the governments of America<sup>1</sup> who are interested in defending human rights. They were asked to put pressure on the government of El Salvador to put into practice the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States. Among the recommendations that we find very useful for us is the recognition that there exists here in El Salvador a systematic persecution of the Church. Another recommendation is that the actions of the organization ORDEN be reviewed and, if necessary, that it be suppressed --- they have done much evil in our country! Here we have referred to official statements of the Organization of American States and therefore these recommendations cannot be criticized as being partial to the Church. In yesterday's meeting a statement of the clergy of El Salvador was published in which they protested the death of Father Alirio Napoleón Macías and the increasing repression of the people and the Church. This letter was signed by everyone at the meeting: one hundred eighteen sisters and one hundred eight priests.<sup>2</sup>

It is comforting that in these circumstances the bishops published a statement:

*The bishops of Santa Ana, San Salvador, San Miguel and Santiago de María and the clergy of their respective dioceses vigorously protest before the people of El Salvador the horrendous and sacrilegious assassination perpetrated against Father Alirio Napoleón Macías, the pastor of San Esteban Catarina, Diocese of San Vicente. As we extend our condolences to our sister Diocese, we ask:*

*First, that the civil, military and judicial authorities thoroughly investigate this assassination and other treacherous crimes that have been committed and to be watchful so that the existing laws of the nation are implemented, laws that expressly defend the life of all the people of El Salvador.*

*Second, that his Excellency, the Apostolic Nuncio, immediately intervene with all the urgency that this case merits so that there be a halt to this wave of assassinations of our priests with the hope that this crime does not go unpunished like the previous five assassinations.*

*Third, we ask for effective protection of all the priests and that when individual conflicts arise immediate recourse is made to the competent ecclesiastical authority. [In other words, civil authorities should take measures against the priests but should also be mindful of the fact that there exists a competent authority to review these cases. Civil authorities should bring their denunciations to ecclesial authorities and not take upon themselves the authority to punish our priests and even less should they allow to go unpunished those who commit crimes against the priests.]*

*And finally fourth, we call upon all the sectors of our nation to ask the help of the Divine Savior of the world, the patron of our Republic, and to work together for the cessation of this wave of criminal activity that is bathing our beloved land of El Salvador in blood.<sup>3</sup>*

Since Bishop Aparicio was not present at this meeting because he was the recipient of our condolences, he wrote the following letter when he returned to the country: *With great pain and*

*indignation I have been made aware of the details of the assassination of Father Alirio Napoleón Macías, a priest of my diocese of San Vicente that was perpetrated in cold blood in the very vestibule of the parish church of San Estaban Catarina by three assassins, known by sight to many inhabitants of this area.*

*This sacrilegious assassination speaks clearly to us about the historical times in which we live with such insecurity, even within our parish churches, with such anxiety and fear which denounces a society that is breaking apart. The disrespect for the right to life of Father Macías and the horrendous attitude of those who gave the order to the assassins to fulfill, as they interpreted it, an evil mission in front of the Blessed Sacrament, thus profaning the church, obliges us once more to condemn the violent action against Father Macías and every other citizen --- actions that are somehow seen as resolving the nation's problems or as removing problems from those persons who want to preserve their power.*

*In light of the case of the assassination of Father Alirio Napoleón Macías and the circumstances of the place in which this occurred and the many witnesses, we urge the judicial and military authorities, in accordance with the laws of our country, to clarify the assassination of Father Macías and to punish those who ordered and those who carried out this crime.*

*As a sign of our repudiation of the violence and specifically, the tragic death of Father Macías, the parish church of San Estaban Catarina, profaned by said assassination, has been closed for worship until the proper acts of reparation are made as ordered by the Code of Canon Law. The Episcopal Conference also withdraws their two delegates from further participation in the National Dialogue.<sup>4</sup>*

Let this be a clear sign of our repudiation of the assassination of Father Macías: the two representatives which the Episcopal Conference sent to the National Dialogue as a sign of good will have been withdrawn because there is no good will on the part of those who extended the invitation\*. This has been the long-standing position of our Archdiocese<sup>5</sup> and I am happy that the whole Conference is in solidarity with this position (and you, with your applause have affirmed this decision). This is a sign that God is guiding our Church.

I also want to express my kind thanks to the United States Ambassador for his expression of solidarity at the time of this bloody event. You have read where he stated: *The news of the assassination of Father Alirio Napoleón Macías, the pastor of San Estaban Catarina, caused me great shock and sadness. Every violent act in itself is deplorable and sad because violence, whether from the right or the left, will never be able to help the cause of peace. This death has not only been a tragic event for the Church but also for the whole country. In a special way this act clashes with our sensibilities and makes us shudder because this priest was killed inside his own church where he had been called to officiate at prayers for a deceased person. This adds to the crime because it shows disrespect for and ridicule of religious acts. All people of good-will repudiate this sacrilege and condemn this brutal assassination.<sup>6</sup>* Thank you Mr. Ambassador for such wise and comforting words to the Church.

The Christian Democratic Party also expressed their solidarity to the Church and their repudiation of these criminal acts<sup>7</sup>. Because of time I will not read their statement. I will also not read the wonderful statement of solidarity from the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador who before the national and international conscience, denounce and ponder the meaning of this incredible action. I only want to refer to the final part of this letter which lays out certain recommendations: *they demand a true and objective investigation of the crime so that, according to*

*the law, the perpetrators and those who ordered this crime will be sanctioned. They ask for the effective cessation of the persecution of the Church, her pastors, and the People of God and the cessation of the general repression that is occurring throughout the country. They exhort the government to order all the levels of its organization to respect the individual and collective rights and guarantees that are protected by the political Constitution, pacts and international treaties that deal with human rights, treaties that our nation has signed.*<sup>8</sup> They conclude by extending their condolences to the priests and the Diocese of San Vicente and to the Church of El Salvador.

As we remember the events of our community during the past week, we direct our attention to those who have occupied the Cathedral. This is the reason why we find ourselves here, asking hospitality once again from our good brothers of the Dominican Community to celebrate the Eucharist in the church of El Rosario. This is a home and the mother of the Savior is here, Our Lady of the Rosary. In her presence we want to remind people that the churches are a place of freedom and truth, but our hospitality should not be abused. Last week Las Ligas Populares 28 de febrero occupied the Cathedral but as gentlemen they respected our patronal feast. When our celebration was concluded the BPR who support the strike of other unions, occupied the Cathedral and have interrupted our worship there.

It is true that the Church is a sign of freedom and in her churches she proclaims justice and is in harmony with the just demands of the people. We ask that her words be respected and that people allow the churches to be used for the purpose for which they were built, namely, to serve the people. They were not built for a worship that has no meaning or that is dead, but built for the kind of worship we are rendering today, a lively worship with a lively denunciation of the realities of our nation. If we want to resolve the situation of our country then it would be good to respect the words of the Church and not interfere with her preaching by other abuses of seeking asylum in the churches. The Church should not be impeded from realizing her specific mission of proclaiming liberty from the perspective of the gospel and her struggle for justice and the development of the human person. The clear language of the Church enables her to provide better service on behalf of the just demands of other groups in El Salvador. I beg you to reflect on this and to respect the churches. As we say here in El Salvador: *the occupation of the churches is a mockery and has no power.*

Those who have occupied the Cathedral are supporting the labor conflicts that are occurring at IMES, Pan Lido and Fabril de Aceites San Miguel. Regarding IMES: this is a North American business and management is located there. They have sent no response that would resolve the situation. They send lawyers who have very limited powers. It would be good if management would present themselves and not remain isolated in the United States. They should come here to see what is occurring in their factory where three hundred sixty persons have been fired and there is no attempt to find a solution to this problem. With regard to Fabril de Aceite and Pan Lido: a collective bargaining contract has not been negotiated. Thus the occupation of the Cathedral cannot be blamed on Church authorities. The Labor Ministry, Pan Lido, IMES, and Fabril de Aceites must find a way to resolve the problem so that our church can once again be used for worship. The Church has always supported that which is just.

We had a charming visit yesterday in San Antonio Los Ranchos. Those simple people say that they understand well the word that is preached in our homilies. How absurd is the misunderstanding of those who do not want to hear --- the misunderstanding of pride and arrogance. As Christ said: *I give praise to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike* (1). There are some people who say that the homilies in the Cathedral are the cause of all the evil in the country

and yet humble people see the same words as comforting and nourishing. The humblest of priests and the Pope himself also speak about human rights, respect for the law of God, peace and love. At the celebration in the village of San Antonio Los Ranchos where people from other communities participated, I had the wonderful experience of seeing that my words find echo among the people there. I want to greet the pastors and the religious sisters of the Assumption who work in that sector and all the catechists who collaborate in the ministry there.

A Good Shepherd Sister died and we want to extend our condolences to that Congregation.

Wednesday is the feast of the Assumption. The passage of Mary in body and soul into heaven is the occasion of many celebrations among our people, especially in the parishes of Mejicanos and Flor Blanca which will celebrate their patronal feast. Various religious Institutes have Mary, assumed into heaven, as their patroness. I want to thank the seminarians who are organizing the celebration for the feast of the Assumption in the Church of San José de la Montaña because they want to unite this feast with a personal feast of mine. The Eucharist will be celebrated there on Wednesday at 7:00pm.

On Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> the community of San Jacinto will celebrate their feast and a Mass will be offered there on Wednesday at 7:00pm.

This is the Christian community that has experienced these events, events that I wanted to mention at the beginning of our celebration so that you can see that the object of my preaching is to be mindful of the realities of the Diocese, the religious, and the priests, to be mindful of our relationship with other Dioceses and to illuminate these realities with the light of faith and with no other lights. We do not have political or sociological or economic objectives when we preach because we do not enter these areas except to illuminate them with our own mission which is based on the gospel. Thus each Sunday we seek to discover what the Lord wants to tell us.

I am happy that the Church in her liturgy has made a pause in her reflection on the gospel of Saint Mark and during four Sundays has presented us the message of the beautiful sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel. This gospel passage presents us John's thoughts about Christ and his presence in the Eucharist. As we analyze this passage we come to a better understanding of the patronal celebration of El Salvador, the Divine Savior of the world. I mentioned to you before that I wanted to thank the communities who participated in our celebration in front of the Cathedral. This was an unforgettable event because of your participation, your hymns and the fervor of your prayers. Through the radio our nation was united in prayer. Why do we place our trust in the Divine Savior? We do this because in the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel Jesus reveals to us the reason for his being. Who is Christ for humanity? On the previous Sundays we have based our homily on the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel and today we arrive at the culmination of that revelation when Jesus speaks to his critics and says: *the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (2). The title of this Sunday's homily is taken from this passage: the Divine Savior, flesh for the life of the world. I will develop the following points: First, flesh in the human person without Christ; Second, flesh in Christ: the life of God in human flesh; Third, the flesh of the human person is freed and developed only by the flesh of Christ who gives life to the world.

Hopefully my message is clear and you are able to see that what I want in my preaching is to place within the reach of everyone, even the simplest, the great message of the gospel which I serve with all my heart and would not want to be distorted. I do not want the message that is received to be the chronicle of the week or a time to criticize the government or accuse people of sin. That is something extra, like the light of the gospel striking those specific events. The principal thing that I

would like you to take away with you from my preaching is the light of the gospel. With that light you yourselves can illuminate the events that I point out as well as the concrete events of your own lives and those of your families, those in your lives, among your friends and on your job. Preaching here is done so that all Christians who ponder the gospel can, in enlightening their own lives, illuminate with the principles of Christ the events that surround them. Today Jesus presents to us the gospel criteria through the word *flesh*.

### **The flesh in the human person without Christ**

What is the importance of this? In the first place I want to pose the question: What is flesh? I pose this question and I know that each of you have various opinions and very certain judgments about this. But I pose this question and want to present to you the meaning of the word *flesh* according to the Bible.

According to the Bible the word *flesh* appears as an expression of life. The Bible says that all flesh will see the salvation of God (3)--- all people and every living thing will see the salvation of God. *Flesh* also refers to the body as distinct from that which is spiritual. The human person is composed of soul and body. The Bible refers to the body as *flesh*, but not with the philosophical distinctions that arose later. In fact the Bible will often refer to both the body and soul as *flesh*. *Flesh* then is the body of the human person animated by life. When reading the Bible we must be careful about separating body and soul using later criteria of Greek philosophy. We must read the Bible with simplicity. The body animated by the spirit refers to the person.

The Bible calls *flesh* the person. The *flesh* of so and so --- so and so is the person. This person, this life has two aspects because he/she was created by God in a state of original holiness, a child of God, rejoicing in God's grace, in friendship with God. The *flesh* of Adam is the *flesh* of man, the *flesh* of humankind without sin. But when the sin of disobedience was committed, *flesh* was changed into sin and inclined toward evil. Thus the Bible considers *flesh* as the human person with evil inclinations, the carnal person, the selfish person, the hypocritical person, liar and ambitious. All of this evil which we bear within ourselves we refer to as the carnal person. Thus *flesh* takes on a pejorative meaning, a meaning of evil, of inclination toward evil, of concupiscence.

In light of evil man, man inclined toward evil, we also have this other aspect of the human person, the spiritual, *flesh* according to the spirit. This is what Saint Paul calls *flesh* in Christ, the second Adam, who came to redeem the *flesh* of sin, who paid for the sins of the *flesh* and also cured the evil inclinations of the human person. Therefore, redeemed man is *flesh* but now inserted into Christ so that even though people might now experience temptations and inclinations toward evil they also experienced the power of God which saves them. *Flesh*, then, has two meanings: *flesh*: the inclination toward evil and redeemed *flesh* with a tendency toward that which is good.

Keeping in mind these concepts, today's readings present us the *flesh* of a man without Christ, that is, the *flesh* that we inherited from Adam and Eve, the *flesh* that is born of man and woman. That which is born of *flesh* is *flesh*. A new born boy or girl has been born of *flesh* --- *flesh* with its concupiscence of which Jesus says: *the flesh is of no avail* (4). The *flesh* is sin or the inclination toward sin. This is what I refer to when in today's readings I look at the man of *flesh* without Christ. Jezebel was the wife of king Ahab --- an evil woman who, when she saw that Elijah struggled on behalf of the rights of God and against the false prophets, sent him a message like that which is sent by members of the White Warriors Union: *May the gods do thus and so to me if by this time tomorrow I have not done with your life what was done to each of them* (5). Elijah was afraid. Who would not be afraid before such a threat? Elijah fled because the White Warriors

Union had threatened him, Jezebel, the perverse wife of king Ahab.\* I find that Jezebel as well as Elijah are flesh without Christ. Jezebel, with her criminal and vindictive tendencies, is flesh without Christ. Elijah forgets for a moment God's protection and runs away: fearful flesh, cowardly, one who hides and flees --- this is also flesh without Christ, the cowardly person.

Saint Paul says that *we should not oppose the Spirit*. (6) Those who oppose the Spirit are flesh without Christ. All opposition to the Church is flesh without Christ. Every crime that destroys life is abusive and is flesh, the criminal actions of men without Christ.

In the second reading Saint Paul says that we should not allow ourselves to be driven by bitterness, fury, anger and insults.(7) All of this is flesh without Christ. Let us examine our own poor flesh to see if we are driven by bitterness, fury, anger or insult. If so, we are giving honor to the flesh of sin, flesh without Christ.

In this first point I am very interested in these words that Jesus speaks about flesh without him. When Jesus speaks about eternal life and says that he is the bread that has come down from heaven, the Jews criticize him. When Saint John uses this word, *the Jews*, generally he refers to the enemies of Jesus, the authorities who rebelled against Jesus during the time of the Jews. While it is certain that all authority comes from God, yet people want to make an idol of authority and believe in their own power more than God. They judged Jesus and criticized him because he said: *I am the bread that came down from heaven* (John 6:41). So they responded: *Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, "I have come down from heaven?"* (8).

My sisters and brothers, this passage is very interesting and also helps us to understand the criticism against the Church. Criticism against God can only proceed from people who have lost their faith. When the people of Israel walked with Moses through the desert everything went well as long as they believed. When they began to doubt God, when they began to murmur and criticize, God punished them so that they might once again believe. Jesus also experienced this temptation: *how can he have come from heaven when we know that he was born of Joseph and Mary? How can he give us the wisdom of eternal life when he has lived here among us?* See, the carnal man!

Flesh, the flesh of Jesus, the son of Mary Immaculate and the Eternal Father, God and man, but when we look at him with only the eyes of flesh and without Christ we see only the man, the man like us and we criticize him because we sit at the accuser's table. The same will happen to his Church, his bishops and priests they will easily be called Marxists, subversives, criminals --- you are to blame for everything evil that is happening. This is the voice of persons without Christ, because Christ himself, when the divine perspective is lost, appears like an ordinary man, a criminal who must be sentenced to death. Christ even dies when one has lost faith! Christ therefore dismisses this opinion in view of its banality and pays no attention to it, ratifying his own claim: *I am the bread come down from heaven. If you don't wish to believe, it is because you have lost the faith. You have made yourselves flesh without Christ, because I am offering you the bread of eternal life and you don't want it.* This is flesh without transcendency.

In my fourth Pastoral Letter which will soon be published, I denounce three absolutes in our environment<sup>9</sup>. When I speak about absolutes I refer to the attitude of people who consider absolute their own opinion and everything else is of no consequence. When this absolute is not Christ or God, then, like the Jews, we erect other absolutes. It is true that today in El Salvador there is a great deal of what we might call *polarization* and we could also refer to this as the establishment of absolutes. Above all else, I denounce the absolute of wealth. This is a great evil in El Salvador because wealth and private property are seen as untouchable absolutes. Ah, the person who touches

this high tension wire is burned!\*

People forget about flesh without Christ and wealth is neither Jesus nor God. The creation of wealth and private property as absolutes is a great error. The Pope stated: *Private property must be respected but it must not be forgotten that there is a social mortgage on all private property*<sup>10</sup>. What does the Pope mean? He speaks about the tradition of the Church and therefore private property is not an absolute but is conditioned by the political Constitution of El Salvador which recognizes this fact when it states: *private property has a social function*<sup>11</sup>. What a person possesses is not only for his own use but is a gift from God and must be administered to serve the common good. It is not just that a few people should have everything and then make this such an absolute that no one else can touch these things. They must remember the majority of people who live on the margins of society and die of hunger.\*

Another absolute of people who have lost faith in Christ is the absolute of power. We have only to look at the philosophy of national security in which everything is allowed on behalf of the god of power. In my pastoral letter I state: *the legitimate security that the state ought to seek for its members is cruelly perverted for in the name of national security the insecurity of the individual becomes institutionalized*<sup>12</sup>. The establishment of power as an absolute is evil because power is neither God nor Christ and so if everything is subordinated to power, then every opinion and everyone who criticizes those in power in order to better our situation will be repressed. This repression is what we are experiencing in our country since power as an absolute.

There is a third absolute that is in line with our reflection: politics as an absolute. This occurs when a person believes that his political opinion or party or organization is the only political solution to our problems. Thus we have an absolute because such people do not enter into dialogue with others because they believe that they have the solution. They do not approach other people but make other people come to them. This then becomes a type of fanaticism and a form of sectarianism which is ridiculous. At this point in our history it is also a crime to make our political organizations an absolute.\*

As a result the servants of the right have erected their own absolute which today in El Salvador is wealth and private property and political power while the ultra-right with their phantom or real organizations threaten people with death, riddle people with bullets and threaten and abduct. All of this is done in the name of a false god. This is also the horrible idolatry of gods who claim human lives --- servants of the god Moloc. The armed organizations of the ultra-left are servants of the same god. These are all crimes of idolatry, sinful and making absolute that which is not absolute. Both sides are sinning in their polarization against the commandments of the law of God. Only God must be obeyed.\*

### **Events of the week**

It is here that I want to speak about another aspect of the past week. The first aspects concerned our community. Now I want us as a Christian community to focus on the reality that surrounds us and to enlighten that reality with the gospel. Thus let us look at our social, political and economic reality. My sisters and brothers, we have an obligation to do this. As we do this, however, we are not meddling in politics but bringing the light of faith to these realities and fulfilling our mission because God has placed us in the world to organize the world according to the plan of God. The People of God, we, the Church, if we truly come to the Church to illuminate our minds and our hearts with the Word of God, then we have the capacity to criticize that which is evil and that which is good in the world that surrounds us.



How could the Church not be critical during this week? We witnessed the arrest of Kelvin Achila, a worker in the factory of IMES. He was taken prisoner by twelve Treasury Police officers and is presently detained in the prison of the National Police. José Adolfo Cartagena, Simón Brizuela and Fidel Arias, *campesinos* from the village of Las Minas in Chalatenango were arrested on August 5<sup>th</sup> by a contingent of the National Guard and soldiers who invaded all of the surrounding villages and led these men to an unknown destination. I am very interested in this case because in Las Minas the police were asking about Father Fabían Amaya: *what time will he arrive?* I want to denounce this immediately because if something should happen to him I want you to be aware of this detail.

Rafael Humberto Alarcón, 18 years old, was also arrested in his own house by agents dressed in civilian clothing and by one person who wore a hood. María de León Guevara, a *campesina* from El Paisnal was also arrested by the National Guard. Oscar Vicente Araujo Mata was arrested on August 10<sup>th</sup> by the National Guard. Fidel Angel Ortiz was arrested on July 16<sup>th</sup> and despite the fact that his family asked that Fidel be brought before the courts, this was not granted. His family has visited all the different prisons in our country.

I also want to denounce the assassination of the secretary of the Justice of the Peace in San Esteban. This is also a crime and according to reports (some literature was found beside his body) it appears to be an act of the FPL. I want to say now, before some slanderous statements proclaim the contrary, that this assassination is not related to the death of Father Alirio even though this criminal act occurred in the same town. On the other hand, it is related to the arrests and threats that began in San Esteban Catarina and hopefully the crime committed against Father does not lead to greater aggravation with more tortures and threats and abuses of the human rights of the people of that humble town.

We must also denounce so many threats and arrests and the psychoses that these threats are creating in our environment. Besides the threats, today there are also counter-threats: some people suppose that the threats were made by said individual and they seek vengeance without being sure whether or not the individual involved really made the threat. Bishop Rivera and some other Christians from San Sebastián have experienced this. There are also other cases in which the persons threatened suspect that the individual who has threatened them is an enemy and they seek vengeance from that enemy and again have no certainty that the supposed enemy really made the threat. This kind of situation lends itself to many abuses and takes on a form of personal retribution for wrongs that are done. In the name of our Lord, the Prince of Peace, I beg you not to allow yourselves to become involved in these types of rumours that can end with the taking of innocent lives.

How could the Church not denounce all of these things? On August 9<sup>th</sup>, Don Jaime Conde from Spain was abducted. No one has claimed to be the author of this abduction. But whoever they may be, if they are listening to me, be aware that this trampling on the freedom of an individual is also a crime.

The government of the United States is concerned about the situation in El Salvador and in recent days some very interesting things have been published in the newspapers. For example, you remember that *El Mundo* stated that it has been pointed out in the United States that the situation in El Salvador is dangerous<sup>13</sup>. Since the United States has seen a similarity between the situation in Nicaragua and our present situation, they sent the under-Secretary of State, Viron P. Vaky to El Salvador. Since this fact has already been published we can say that it was understood that Mr. Vaky came to the conclusion that the situation in El Salvador is an exact copy of what occurred in

Nicaragua. The polarization between the ultra-right government of President Carlos Romero and the opposition is becoming so intense that a moderate solution acceptable to both sides is becoming more and more improbable. This explains the statement that was published in the newspapers in the United States: *Mr. Viron P. Vaky returned from his visit to El Salvador with the impression that the regime of Romero suffers from a persecution complex and is not willing to make any concession that would facilitate the process of liberation.*

Where do we stand then? While free elections and other things are announced here in El Salvador\*, there in the United States, high ranking observers like the Secretary of State say that our government is not willing to make any concession that would facilitate the process of liberation. This is sad, but if it is true, then the escape valve to this explosive situation is being closed. This can not remain this way\*. We are hopeful concerning the announcement in the newspapers: *The President promises important news next week.*<sup>14</sup> May we be truly given this important news that enables us to believe that he will use his authority to give moral force so that our problems can be resolved. Vatican II has stated: *there must be an authority to direct the energies of all citizens toward the common good, not in a mechanical or despotic fashion, but by acting above all as a moral force which appeals to each one's freedom and sense of responsibility.* May this be the moral force of our government and not the force of rifles or machine-guns or searches or repression.\*

My dear sisters and brothers, we as a community are illuminating these realities --- realities and not fantasies, realities presented by impartial critics, realities presented by political observers. We do not enter into these matters to make political judgments about them. From the perspective of the gospel, however, we state: *this cannot be done and this is not the path.* I say to you as Christians: *the sure path is that of prayer and participation --- but legitimate participation which God desires.* As you can see we are sitting on gun-powder which can explode if it has not already exploded. In my opinion, what is occurring here in our midst is almost a civil war, a clandestine civil war in which the extreme right and the extreme left are claiming victims. Is this not a war?

God willing this will not escalate any further and we will find in time a solution to our situation through moral strength which appeals to freedom. I do not believe that it is necessary\* to pay the same price that Nicaragua paid for their liberation --- which is still in a state of *time will tell.* Here we are able to seek a solution that is very Salvadorian. I believe in the ability of the people of El Salvador and I also believe that if we await our freedom from the perspective of moral strength then we will desire authority and not hate it. The people of El Salvador are capable of finding a solution that is proper to them and there is no need to imitate the people of Nicaragua\*.

This is flesh without Christ. See where all this polarization leads! So many absolutes when the only Absolute is forgotten!

### **Flesh in Christ: the life of God in human flesh**

Those who did not know Jesus confused him with the son of Joseph, with the carpenter of Nazareth. These were people of flesh without Christ because they were not mindful of the Incarnation. Notice that the beautiful mystery of our religion, the Incarnation proclaims to us the sublime meaning of flesh. There was a most pure Virgin and blessed be God that we are recalling this fact in a temple dedicated to the Virgin, our Lady of the Rosary. We salute her each time we say, *hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.* (11) At the time when there was an exemplary person among humanity, a person so pure and holy as Mary, God asked consent to incarnate himself, to make himself a fetus in the womb of Mary. He was born in Bethlehem and grew and was nourished by his mother's breasts. As a true man he could say: *I have a mother.* The God-

man --- this is the absolute because he brings the life of God. The angel said to Mary: *the holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God* (12). No other woman has heard these words because no other woman has been able to unite the two crowns of a woman: virginity and maternity. Mary unities these two dimensions because she offers her pure virginal womb to the life of God who becomes incarnated in her and becomes God-flesh. *The Word became flesh* (13).

This is what I want to say in my second point. No, not I, but Christ, because today in the gospel Jesus speaks to us about the principle of life that becomes incarnate. Jesus says: *No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God* (14) and here he refers to himself. When he compares himself to manna, the food that the Jewish people knew, he says: *Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die.* (15) What is this bread? *I am the living bread that came down from heaven: whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (16). This is a great revelation: flesh, God has become incarnated.

The flesh of Jesus is not like our flesh. We are killed and our body decays and our spirit returns disincarnated to God. Christ, flesh and spirit, soul and body, everything is under one single divine person: the Word. *The Word became flesh* (17) and everything that is done by the Word enfleshed, is done by God and has an infinite value. Therefore when this enfleshed God is crucified and endures the pains of agony, an offering is made to God and thus redemption is infinite. When Jesus cries because he is persecuted, because people do not want to understand his words, the tears and the complaints are the tears and complaints of God. Without faith no one can understand the mystery of Christ which we attempt to proclaim every Sunday.

This God who was incarnated in Christ is the one whom people, without God and without Christ, were looking for. Remember once again the first reading. Elijah is discouraged, deceived, persecuted, and threatened but finds strength when a sign in the desert allows him to experience the fact that God is near. He discovers a mysterious bread: *get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!* (18). He recovers his strength and undertakes a forty day journey toward Mount Sinai where we are presented with a beautiful theophany story. Elijah is going to see God.(19) Elijah experiences the winds of a hurricane, but God was not in the hurricane. Elijah then experiences a great fire, but the Bible says that God was not in the fire. Elijah also experiences a powerful earthquake, but again the Bible tells us that God was not in the earthquake. Finally there was a soft gentle breeze, like the breeze that we experience at dawn or the setting of the sun --- and God was there. It appears that the Lord wanted to teach Elijah a lesson: neither violence nor the power of the elements is going to bring about a solution. God inspires Elijah with the gentleness of his mind, with the gentle breeze of peace.(20) Elijah is then given signs: sure victory over Jezebel, his enemy and the king will change because of the prophet's words and other signs of victory. The situation will be resolved not with hurricanes or earthquakes or fire but with the gentle breeze of the mind of God.

Here we have the God of the gentle breeze who is incarnated in our Lord, Jesus Christ. My sisters and brothers, above all else I want us to see Christ, our Lord, in the way that Saint Paul refers to him in the second reading: *the Holy Spirit of God with which you were sealed for the day of redemption* (21). Those who believe in Christ are sealed by the Spirit of God. Saint Paul continues to speak about Jesus: *be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. So be imitators of God, as beloved children and live in love.* When Saint Paul says: *live in love as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma* (22) he is showing us that the only violence that the gospel

admits is violence to oneself. When Jesus allows himself to be killed, that is violence --- he is allowing himself to be killed. Violence to oneself is more effective than violence to others. It is very easy to kill, especially when one has weapons, but how difficult it is to allow oneself to be killed for the love of the people.

### **The flesh of the human person is freed and developed by the flesh of Christ**

And finally, my third point. When Jesus, in today's gospel, assures us of the means that make us members of the flesh of Christ, he is offering us the greatest treasure of our faith. Here I want my words to be eloquent and effective so that each one of us, you and I, might understand that our life, our flesh, has no meaning, in fact it becomes absurd when we create absolutes here on earth. When we struggle here for liberation, yes there is value in all of this but in no way can it be compared to the absolute that God has given us. Yes, we are truly great women and men, even the most insignificant person in our community, but we must incorporate ourselves into the life of Christ. For this reason in the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel Jesus desires to present himself to us in the symbol of bread --- bread that is eaten and becomes part of our very lives. Thus when we eat the bread of the Eucharist we become like Christ and are assimilated into Christ. May each one of us, as Christians, be able to say like Saint Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (23).

When Pope Paul VI spoke about the movements that struggle on behalf of the just demands of people he said that the Church also offers people Christian liberators who are willing to cooperate in this effort. Who are these liberators whom the Pope spoke about? He said: *She is providing these Christian "liberators" with the inspiration of faith, the motivation of fraternal love, a social teaching which the true Christian cannot ignore and which he must make the foundation of his wisdom and of his experience in order to translate it concretely into forms of action, participation and commitment* (24). When there are Christians in El Salvador who are truly enlightened by the faith and love of Christ, wholly penetrated with the social doctrine of the Church, then we will have in the midst of political organization the presence of the Church that is brought there by you, laymen and laywomen who must enter the political, sociological, and economical arenas. You are the laypeople who must be holy people in the world, holy politicians, holy businessmen, and holy professionals. You will be such people to the degree that you allow your professional and political action to be illuminated by Christ who is the life of God incarnated in man. In today's gospel Jesus offers us three means to achieve liberation and development: faith, grace, and the sacraments.

So that you can see that my preaching is wholly ecclesial I say to you that it is only faith that enables us to call ourselves Christians. Jesus has told us: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them* (25). Faith is the grace of God. Faith is not the product of human reflection. Nothing human can produce something that is divine and faith is a divine gift that can only be given by God. When we reflect on the question of the meaning of Christ and are able to respond in words like Peter, then we should give thanks to God because Jesus said to Peter: *blessed are you ... for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father* (26). This is the flesh of women and men that is illuminated with the light of heaven. My beloved sisters and brothers, let us not lose faith! Let us forever seek ways to follow Jesus!

What a beautiful expression: *come to me!* (27) Jesus says: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them* (28). How pleased I am in the humble villages where the children and people push one another because they want to see us as we enter the town. As we enter a certain town, people from that place come to meet us. These people come with confidence because they know that this person is bringing them the message of God. This is the faith that Jesus

desires: *go to him*. Let us look for him with the confidence of those who anxiously look for someone to protect them. To believe in Christ is to have trust in him and to place our lives in his hands. Thus Jesus comes to us because he was sent by the Father. Now we are invited to go to the One who was sent by the Father. Faith is a gift of God and El Salvador has much faith, a faith that was taught to us by our grandparents and parents. Please, do not lose this faith!

Secondly, grace. What is grace? Grace is the conversion of men and women who have put aside sin in order to live in friendship with God. It is similar to faith but more life giving. Grace is to clothe ourselves in the life of God. To be in God's grace is to share in the life of God. Therefore when we die our destiny is determined by this element of grace. If we die in the grace of God, then our destiny is heaven where we will live in the company of God forever and share completely in the life of God that we also rejoiced in here on earth. If we are not in the grace of God, if we are in sin and victims of our passions, if we are flesh without Christ, then no matter how intelligent or beautiful we might be, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God because we are filled with sin. Let us be careful to live in the grace of God.

And thirdly, the sacraments. Commentators say that the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel was written because he did not want to narrate the Last Supper in such strict realistic language: *he took bread in his hands --- words that I will pronounce during the Mass --- and said: this is my body and this is my blood* (29). Saint John does not present us with this account but with another more profound account that explains the meaning of the Eucharist. We could say that Saint John gave a sacramental preparation course and the other gospels administered the sacrament. This is exactly what the Church is doing today. Children are not baptized until their parents understand the meaning of the sacrament that is going to be conferred on the child. Confirmation is only celebrated after the young women and men have been prepared for the reception of this sacrament. So too no one receives communion without first understanding the meaning of this action and the priest does not celebrate Mass until he knows what he is doing when he takes the bread and wine in his hands to change them into the body and blood of the Lord: *this is my body ... this is my blood*.

When we reflect on the sixth chapter of Saint John, we understand why we take communion. Yes we know that the taste of the host is the taste of wheat but our faith changes this into eternal life. Then we come to understand the words that we have commented on today: *the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (30). The flesh of Jesus but nothing like the flesh of those people without Christ. Here we refer to the flesh of Christ that became incarnated with great power and love, with all the merits of the cross and the holiness of God --- this is what we receive when we take communion. Communion: the bread that is the flesh of God who came to sanctify and spiritualize and make our flesh without Christ like the flesh of Christ.

Therefore in conclusion we ought to say: Lord, do not allow us to become people without Christ, people who do not know the beauty of your Incarnation. We want to be women and men incorporated into the life of Christ. I would hope that all the communities that have shared in this reflection, without going outside the reality of the nation or the Church, will try to do good. I hope that people will try to do good from the perspective of the Church where Christ administers the sacraments to give us his flesh which is life for the whole world. Then in light of all of this we can be light and life for the world. As a People of God we are called to act in this way so that in all that we do we become true missionaries of peace and love in the midst of our people. So be it.\*

<sup>1</sup> See Carta a los presidentes de los Gobiernos de America (11 August 1979), *Orientación*, 19 August 1979.

<sup>2</sup> See Comunicado del clero y religiosas de todo el país (11 August 1979), *Orientación*, 19 August 1979.

---

<sup>3</sup> Communication of the Bishops of Santa Ana, San Salvador, San Miguel and Santiago de María (10 August 1979), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 August 1979 and *Orientación*, 12 August 1979. The text in brackets in Mons. Romero's commentary added to the letter.

<sup>4</sup> Message of Mons. Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio, Bishop of San Vicente and President of the Bishops' Conference of El Salvador (10 August 1979), *Orientación*, 19 August 1979.

<sup>5</sup> President Carlos Humberto Romero summoned a national dialogue on 7 May 1979. Mons. Romero questioned this and took no part in it. But the Bishops' Conference of El Salvador decided to send two representatives.

<sup>6</sup> Declaration of Frank Devine, Ambassador of the United States of America to El Salvador, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 8 August 1979.

<sup>7</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 August 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Communication of the Commission for Human Rights of El Salvador (7 August 1979), *El Mundo*, 9 August 1979.

<sup>9</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 42-49.

<sup>10</sup> Discourse of John Paul II at the opening of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See Constitución Política de la República de El Salvador (1962), art. 137.

<sup>12</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 48.

<sup>13</sup> See *El Mundo*, 3 August 1979.

<sup>14</sup> See *El Mundo*, 10 August 1979.

*Marginal References* (1) Lk 10,21; (2) Jn 6,51b; (3) Lk 3,6; (4) Jn 6,63; (5) 1K 19,2-3; (6) Ep 4,30; (7) Ep 4,31; (8) Jn 6,41-42; (9) GS 74; (10) GS 74; (11) Lk 1,28; (12) Lk 1,35; (13) Jn 1,14; (14) Jn 6,46; (15) Jn 6,49-51a; (16) Jn 6,51b; (17) Jn 1,14; (18) 1K 19,7; (19) 1K 19,11-13; (20) 1K 19,15-16; (21) Ep 4,30; (22) Ep 5,2; (23) Gal 2,20; (24) EN 38; (25) Jn 6,44; (26) Mt 16,17; (27) Mt 11,28; (28) Jn 6,44; (29) Lk 22,19-20; (30) Jn 6,51b.