

THE DIVINE SAVIOR OF THE EUCHARIST

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 19, 1979

Proverbs 9:1-6

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6: 51-59

My dear brother concelebrants and beloved sisters and brothers.

Once again we have asked for hospitality from the Dominican Fathers in this church of El Rosario in order to celebrate our Sunday Eucharist. We thank them because our Cathedral continues to be occupied by workers who are on a hunger strike.

Here in El Rosario you are seeing something different: a concelebrated Mass, that is, several priests surround the bishop to celebrate this solemn Mass. As was explained at the beginning of the Mass, a group of priests, in support of other religious communities of women and Christians in general, want to promote a time of intense prayer and fasting. These are spiritual powers that the Church is able to use during serious times in the Christian life. At the end of our celebration, one of the priests will explain all of this. Here I want to clearly distinguish and say that it is one thing to occupy the Cathedral where we are unable to celebrate our liturgy and that is much different from our gathering together in the Church of El Rosario, where we unite with the bishop in order to celebrate the Eucharist. Here in this church we experience strength and nourishment and inspiration so that the language of those who are speaking can be understood by the Church and then the Church is able to speak to the world. The Church is in the midst of the world precisely to continue the mission of Jesus Christ who lived and acted in service of the world and was obedient to the mission that the Father entrusted to him.

I want to thank you for the many expressions of kindness and solidarity that were sent to me on the occasion of my birthday. Believe me when I tell you that that has given a new richness to my spirit: your expressions of solidarity and congratulations and above all your messages of sorrow and illness and suffering. I cannot tell you the richness that I experience when a sick person or a person who is paralyzed or someone who is suffering gives the meaning of prayer to their situation and is united with the bishop. I received a very beautiful letter that stated: *I feel that together with you we are saving the people, saving souls for eternity.* There are many other testimonies like this one. I am also grateful for the Mass that I was able to celebrate with the priests, sisters and many lay people in the church of San José de la Montaña and another that was celebrated in Chalatenango. This was a sign that the communities realize that the Church finds in its bishop a sign of unity, teaching authority, truth and mission that must be proclaimed to the world. I do not see any of this as some kind of personal congratulation but rather a sign of the way we are living together as Church and it gives me great happiness to know that our Archdiocese is maturing in our understanding of Church. Therefore, may the Lord reward you for so many expressions of kindness and of true ecclesial faith.

As we look at today's reading we discover the power of unity and inspiration that our Lord wishes to share with the Church. I remind you that for the past four Sundays we have been reading

the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel. Saint John is the most ecclesial and sacramental evangelist. It is impossible to understand everything that he says about Christ unless his gospel is read from the perspective of the Church community and unless we are living a sacramental life.

This is especially true of the sixth chapter of this gospel where we come to an understanding of the relationship that exists between the Divine Savior and our Church. Therefore, the past four Sundays I have told you that we should consider the Sunday readings as a true providential gift that illuminates the person of our Divine Patron. As a result, the passages from Saint John's gospel during the four Sundays in August have enabled us to give a wonderful homage to the Divine Patron of our nation, to the Divine Savior of the world.

All of this is rooted in Jesus' miracle: the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Saint John is a man of signs and he is not content to simply look at the joy of the five thousand people who were satisfied with bread. Jesus reproached these people and said: *Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life* (1). The sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel is a beautiful explanation of this bread that endures for eternal life. According to Saint John we find in the multiplication of the loaves the gifts of redemption. All the richness that Jesus brought with him when he came to die and rise for us and thus offer a new life --- all of this is symbolized in the loaves. In Jesus we find true liberation, true promotion of the human person. Jesus says *Do not work just for food that perishes; do not struggle just for earthly liberation* (2). All of this is good and necessary but if we do not go beyond this, then, as I have said a thousand times, our liberation is left unfinished. The service that Christ and the Church offer to these efforts on behalf of liberation from the slaveries of this earth is that these efforts are raised up to the liberation that Christ, the true Savior of the world, desires to offer us: liberation from sin.

Anyone who is still a slave of sin cannot speak about liberation. These people are the first ones who need to be freed from hatred and vengeance and unjust violence and all that is abusive of others. Liberation from sin is necessary and so is the promotion of people --- promotion that enables them to seek authentic liberation, to seek their dignity as children of God and their human rights that proclaim the truth about the human person, namely, that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. All of this must be done with the promotion of Christ and thus we are not simply encouraging people to be free but much more. No matter how blessed or free and worthy people might believe they are on this earth, without faith that raises them up to the heights of heaven where they are citizens of God forever and without a transcendent meaning in their lives, human promotion remains distorted. Thus, the fourth gospel with the symbol of bread is offering us true liberation that uproots sin. At the same time we are offered true human promotion that rises to the heights and makes us children of God and citizens of eternity where we dwell with our God.

Today the passage that has been read culminates with the wonderful revelation of the Eucharist. My sisters and brothers, I would like our presence here each Sunday to be enlightened by the word that has just been proclaimed. We do not come to Mass out of curiosity or for political reason --- for merely human reasons. If we do so, then we will soon be disillusioned because the Mass does not respond to these considerations. When we come to Mass let us be motivated by the words of Jesus: *Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life* (3). As we conclude our reflection on the words of the Lord, I want us, you and me, to feel that we are more Christian, more grateful to Christ who has given us our Sunday celebration, given us the Eucharist which nourishes us on our journey. I am saddened by the fact that there are so many people who have no regard for the Mass because they do not understand the Eucharist or the gift of God.

Jesus begins today's gospel with the great revelation: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven ... and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (4). My sisters and brothers, let us realize that when we come to Mass we have the opportunity to experience the personal presence of Jesus even though we do not see his face like we see the faces of the people that surround us right now. Jesus is the primary actor in this celebration and is personally present here. Thus I base my homily on the Word of God and entitle it: the Divine Savior is personally present in our Eucharist. I would like us to engrave this title in the depths of our being and to truly live these words. The Divine Savior is not a statue that we take out of the Church and carry in our procession on August 5th. Many people laugh at our faith in these images. We know that this image is made of wood and therefore is something material and a reflection of ourselves. But if we go deeper into this reality of Christ who lives among us and understand that our faith is not based on some wooden or plaster image but on a person who is present here, then we begin to see that there is a value to our religion because we are able to encounter the Divine Savior in person. I will develop the following points in my homily: First, our Church, the sacramental sign of humanity's salvation; Second, the Eucharist, sign of the personal presence of Christ; Third, women and men before this sign of contradiction (either they accept it or reject it and as a result will either journey with Christ or without Christ).

Our Church, the sacramental sign of humanity's salvation

In today's first reading the Church is foreshadowed in the image of the wisdom of God. Wisdom has built a house, set up seven columns and prepared a feast. (3) The image of a banquet, a building, joy and a magnificent celebration is the language of the prophets. Jesus was mindful of these images and so Saint John presents us with the image of the joy of people who are able to eat and are satisfied.

How many times do we hear the words of the first reading (the building of a house, the preparation of a banquet, sending out servants to invite people to the banquet) proclaimed in the parables of Jesus concerning the Kingdom? The Kingdom of God is a feast (4) and the one who has prepared the feast calls people from the crossroads of history: *Come, I have made this wine and prepared the table that I want to share with the invited guests* (5). How wonderful to know that each Sunday that we come together we are the invited guests at a banquet!

The Vatican Council calls the Church *the universal sacrament of salvation* (6) because she possesses all the means that the Divine Savior has desired to offer to people so that they can be saved. People must listen to the words of Saint Peter: *There is only one name that is able to save women and men, the name of Jesus. Only in him do we find liberation and only in him do we find salvation* (7). I want to introduce Jesus with all his richness present in the Church that is invited to share in the banquet. The Divine Savior is present in the Church with all the means of salvation. No one can say that only those persons who are members of the Catholic Church can be saved. We must be aware of the fact that outside the Church there are many paths to salvation. It is certain, however, that the Church, authentically established by Christ and handed over to the Apostles, is the place where Christ has entrusted the means to salvation. Many people do not take advantage of these means. Many people who are members of this Church, the banquet of the Lord, prefer to worship the idols of the world. The Council refers to these people as those *who remain in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a "bodily" manner and not "in heart."*(8). The reverse is also true, those who have not known the Catholic Church but desire to be saved according to their religion *are in the bosom of the Church, but as it were, "in heart" and not in a bodily manner.* It is better to be in the heart of the Church but even better to be in the heart and in the body of the

Church. Good Catholics who know that God has given all the wonderful means of salvation have to take advantage of them and live this treasure that God has placed in our hands.

In our catechisms we learned that the Church has seven sacraments. The sacramental Church is herself the universal sacrament of salvation. But we might ask: why is this so? The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation because in the Church Christ acts through means of the sacraments which are administered by human persons, that is a bishop or a priest. The bishops and priests are simply humble instruments of God who is the one who baptizes, forgives, and nourishes. We should keep this in mind because many times we view the administration of the sacraments in a very personal way: this priest celebrates the sacraments well while this other priest does not. The sacraments do not depend on the holiness or the wickedness of the priest!

The Italian writer Manzoni¹ said: *When I kneel before the priest to ask forgiveness for my sins, it is of no importance to know if he has greater need of forgiveness than I. He can be a great sinner, but at the moment when he says to me: "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", I am absolved. I am not absolved by the priest. No, he does not forgive me but rather it is God who forgives me through the instrumentality of the priest. A converted Protestant wrote: I was truly deceived! I thought that the sacraments were obstacles between Christ and myself. Because I wanted to save myself through my faith in Christ, I rejected the sacraments in order to enter into a direct relationship with Christ. But now that I have reflected on this fact I see that there is no such screen between Christ and me but rather the sacraments are the very actions of Christ. When I confess my sins to the priest, I am not confessing to the priest but to Christ who is in the priest and through whom I hear the words: I forgive you. It is not the hand of the priest who baptizes and takes away original sin, but rather by virtue of Christ's redemption this priest has been sent: Go and baptize in the name of God, not your own name.*

Here I would like to take the opportunity to review the seven sacraments but I believe that you know them: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, and the two great social sacraments, Matrimony and Orders. These are seven channels through which the Divine Savior, by means of his sacramental Church, is saving humanity and society and sanctifying the love of man and woman and the mission of the priests who by vocation merited this difficult role of continuing the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of redeeming women and men.

Thanks to the sacraments, we enjoy the fruits of the redemption; even more, we must recognize what Pope Paul VI said, that to show I belong to the Church, I must show it through the sacraments. (10) Nobody can say: "I am a Catholic, but I don't need to go to confession". Nobody can say: "I am a Catholic, but I don't take my children to be baptized". These signs – and the sacraments are signs -- are the signals that you belong to Christ. So you cannot say you belong to the Church if you despise these signs of your belonging. The Church continues and guards all the means of salvation that Christ entrusted to her.

The Eucharist, sign of the personal presence of Christ

The second consideration is what we find in the reading of St John for today: the eucharist is the sign of the personal presence of Christ. Notice that in the other sacraments Christ is not personally present. In Baptism we have the redeeming presence of Christ who through the priest and the Church removes original sin from the child and incorporates the child as a child of God, but Christ is not personally present in baptism. The same can be said about Confirmation where the bishop imposes hands and anoints an individual with the chrism oil. Christ is not personally present but

through the instrumentality of the bishop, the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the individual. The same occurs in Penance where Christ is not personally present but through means of the priest is granting forgiveness. In the Anointing of the Sick we have a virtual presence of Christ, that is, the power of Christ is present but not Christ himself. In the sacrament of Matrimony and Orders, the two people who are wed are ministers of the presence of Christ who is represented in the blessing of their love and in Orders Christ is not personally present. But there is one sacrament where Christ is personally present and it is this point that we are reflecting on this morning: *the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (11).

My sisters and brothers, above all else, the words of this morning's gospel, the words that we have just cited, affirm the personal presence of Jesus: *the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world*. Last Sunday I explained the meaning of the word *flesh*, that is, the person, man or woman. Jesus is therefore saying: *the bread that I am announcing is my person; I myself am the bread of eternal life*. When the Jews begin to doubt this: *how can this man give us his flesh to eat?* (12) Jesus knows that they have understood his words because they speak about him as flesh and blood. Jesus does not retract his words but affirms what has been stated: *You have understood correctly, my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.*(13) *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life* (14).

When Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus, he is corrected. Jesus tells him: *I say to you no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above* (15). Nicodemus understood his words in a literal sense: *how can a grown person become a child again and reenter his mother's womb in order to be born again?* (16). Jesus responds: *No, it is not as you think! To be born again means to be baptized, to renew yourself as a man* (17). The Samaritan woman hears Jesus tell her: *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water I will give, will never thirst* (18). The Samaritan woman understands him literally and says: *Sir, give me this water so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water* (19). Jesus corrects her: *I am not speaking about the water in this well, but the water of grace, the water of eternal life, the gift of God that brings about eternal life* (20),

In other words, when the gospel presents Jesus affirming a reality and when he is misunderstood, he corrects the misunderstanding. When Jesus' words are understood, even though these words remain a mystery to the human person who does not understand them yet Jesus reaffirms his words and makes them more precise. In the case of the bread that is his flesh and his flesh that is food, the people understood his words and he affirms their understanding: *Yes, I will give you my flesh and my blood and you must eat and drink of this in order to have eternal life* (21). The Council of Trent chose three words to affirm the presence of Christ against the enemies of the Eucharist. Those who ask: *How is the person of Christ going to be present in this piece of bread and in the wine?* Inspired by the words of this gospel, the Council replies: *Jesus is truly present, really present and substantially present*². These three words refer to a personal presence that responds to the objections of those who say: *he can be present but only as a sign --- take and eat, this represents my body*. No, it is not that way! This truly is the body of Jesus; this is really and substantially the body of Jesus. This is what we must understand. We should, however, be careful here because we are not speaking about eating Jesus in some cannibalistic way. Jesus clarifies all of this: *this is my body, but one must understand the meaning of Jesus' flesh and the way in which he clarifies all of this in his discourse in Capharnum*.

First, the flesh that was offered on the cross is the bread that gives life to the world. (22) It is an expression of Christ offering his life for the world. Jesus said: *It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail* (23). The flesh that Jesus offers is his life for the world, the life that

reconciled men and women with God. We are reminded about this when in a few minutes we will proclaim: *Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!* This is the personal flesh of Jesus in the Eucharist, Jesus who died in pain, his body pierced and his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. (24) This is the body and blood that is present during our Mass, the personal presence of Christ at the culminating moment of redemption.

Another wonderful aspect of all of this is that the life of Jesus is united with the life of the Father. *Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me* (25). In other words there is a flow of life --- Jesus is the God-man who gives his flesh so that we might share in the life of God. Those who are nourished by this body and blood under the species of bread and wine are not simply nourished by human flesh but by the flesh of the Son of Man who brings together the human and divine, who becomes food and nourishment for all people.

Let us be mindful of these two dimensions: Christ offers his flesh on the cross and Christ is in divine intimacy with the Father. This is the flesh that is given and that must be eaten. This is the flesh of the Eucharist and the personal presence of Christ. He is not simply present in power but his flesh is personally present as Jesus has just described this: he is united to the sacrifice of the cross that saves the world and is also united with the eternal life of the Father. In this way Jesus assures us of things that have been unheard of: *those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life and those who do not do this will not have life* (26).

The presence of Christ is indicated by its effect. What beautiful effects are presented to us today in Jesus' discourse! You will live forever. (27) Your ancestors ate manna, a mysterious bread, but manna satisfied the hunger of their stomachs day by day and those who ate manna died. But those who eat this bread that Jesus offers will not die but will have eternal life. The effect of the Eucharist is that we become immortal, we participate in the very life of God who does not perish and we participate in the life of the Risen Christ. The Bible says: *We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more* (28). My sisters and brothers, this means that the sacrament of the Eucharist is an eschatological sacrament. We have explained this many times: the definitive goal of history, the goal of our journey, the ocean into which everything empties --- this is eschatology --- that which is final, the end. In Jesus' presence in the Eucharist he brings us a message of eschatology and not only a message because in his very flesh which is received in communion we receive the eschatological reality. Those who come to Mass on Sunday and those who kneel before the Blessed Sacrament are grasping the eschatological reality --- they are savoring the life of God before entering eternity.

:Another effect that appears in today's Biblical passage: *Dwell in me and I in you*. Another thing that is unheard of: *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him* (29). Reflect on this all of you who are going to take communion --- what a divine moment! Christ dwells in you and you in him! In other words there is a co-penetration that enables us to say like Saint Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (30). This is difficult to understand when one does not have faith, but my sisters and brothers, with the gift of faith what occurs is what I witnessed yesterday in two religious communities of women. I visited the Franciscan Sisters in Usulután. They were my first teachers and they said: *Look at how our house has been fixed up, a poor house but very habitable. But look at the chapel, the most beautiful place in the house*. Where there had once been a beauty salon the Sisters had erected a beautiful Blessed Sacrament chapel because for their community there is nothing more beautiful than the tabernacle where Christ dwells with the Sisters and the Sisters dwell with him. Also last night I celebrated with the Good Shepherd Sisters the nine day anniversary of the death of Mother

María Mercedes and for them also the tabernacle is primary. Ah! when we understand the real meaning of the host it is as though we want to guard it in heaven! It is sad to think about the abandoned churches, tabernacles filled with dust, no flowers or just withered flowers and weeds. Where the Eucharist is not esteemed we have an indication of little faith.

The story is told that when some tourists and men of science visited the island of Molokai where Father Damian lived with the lepers: he asked God to make him a leper so that he could remain with them because his superiors wanted to send him away but he said: *No, leave me here!* So he asked God for the grace to be a leper. One day as he raised up the consecrated host he saw on his hand the signs of leprosy and from that time on when he spoke with the lepers he said: *we, lepers.* He identified himself with them in such a way that the lepers felt that he was their brother and they supported and helped him. They asked him: *how many more pains must you endure?* He said: *Pain? Not one minute more of pain. I am here because of Jesus, because of the love of Jesus.* The bread of eternal life gave Father Damian strength, gives strength to every missionary, to all Sisters, to all priests, gives life to the ecclesial base communities, and becomes the center of parish life. *Those who eat my flesh are nourished with eternal life. I dwell with them and they are with me* (31).

My sisters and brothers, people who have not lived the experience of the Eucharist will not understand this. This also explains why the Christian communities are slandered and misunderstood. Some people cannot conceive of women and men willing to die unless it is for some subversive or revolutionary motive. But there is a power greater than any revolution: the love that individuals and communities have discovered in the treasure that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ --- his lively and life-giving presence in the Eucharist.

I have already told you that I would hope that in light of these realities we would be more present in our Sunday celebration. With what joy would we come together because we do so not to encounter one of the bishops or one of the priests but we come together to encounter Christ who gives us eternal life. Let us take communion and adore him and experience the reality of Jesus in us and us in Jesus. Let us receive strength for the week that is in front of us, strength to live more holy lives as a family, strength to work better, strength to be kinder and more loving because the love of Jesus Christ has nourished us. Because we eat the body and blood of Jesus we will be willing to make sacrifices and work together in a better way and fulfill our obligations. See how the Eucharist truly is the bread that gives life to the world!

Women and men before this sign of contradiction

And finally my third point: as women and men stand before the sign of the Eucharist they are able to say the following about the consecrated host: it is a sign of contradiction. Some people are wonderfully in love with it and others despise it to the point of hatred while still others see it as unimportant because they do not have faith.

In today's three readings, people are categorized precisely by their position in front of God's wisdom that is incarnated in Jesus Christ. We could say that the first reading refers to those who are not experts, those lacking in judgment and those who reject the work of Wisdom. (32) On the other hand, those who are prudent and nourished by the knowledge of God even though they might

be less intelligent according to the world, these people possess the Wisdom of God that is given in the holy Eucharist where Christ is present.

In the second reading Saint Paul presents us with persons who are categorized as drunkards, confused, senseless, and involved in dissolute behavior. He tells us that we should not act as these persons but should be wise and fulfill the desires of God. We should allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit and make our lives a joyful liturgy: *singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything* (33). How beautiful our lives when they are enlightened with faith! How beautiful our lives when we know that our body, whether ill or healthy, is united to the consecrated host that is received in communion! Then our own bodies become hosts. All our actions, all the obligations that we must fulfill, all the sacrifices that we make --- all of these are changed into the crucified Christ, the flesh that saves the world. We are offering our sacrifice, our small host, our little bit of water in the chalice filled with wine that is changed into the body and blood of Christ. There the drop of water is not distinguished from the wine because all that is perceived is the blood of Christ that is poured out for the salvation of the world. Then, yes, the lives of men and women become liturgy. When we act in union with the Lord then we are all priests, regardless of our office.

Christ, our Lord, also makes similar distinctions among people. (34) There are people who doubt him and others understand his words so literally that they think him to be some kind of cannibal. Jesus did not want to be understood in this way and he uses such a delicate language that is not understood in the rude environment of the world where flesh is only understood as pleasure, flesh that can be exploited, flesh of those who are haughty and proud, flesh that becomes an idol in this world. This is not the flesh that Jesus gives. Rather Jesus offers us flesh that has been divinized in the sacrifice on the cross, flesh that is united to God in the mystery of the Incarnation. Yes, this is the flesh that is divine and this is the flesh that the Lord offers us and yes, this is understood by those who have faith, but is not understood by those who lack faith or who have lost their faith. In the light of this reflection let us ponder: what kind of people are we?

Life of the Church

In the first place, I want to present to you a series of events that have occurred within our Church and hopefully all of us in the Church have a great love for the Eucharist.

Therefore, in the first place I want to speak about our beloved priests. My sisters and brothers, have you thought about the fact that the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Orders are like twins. In order to maintain this treasure of the bread of life that gives life to the world, Jesus instituted the priesthood on the same night and bestowed this sacrament on his followers. Jesus, the Eternal Priest, celebrated the first Mass and shared communion with his Apostles but then told his followers: *Do this in my memory*. (35) Thus the priesthood came into existence and the priests were entrusted with maintaining the Eucharist. This is our principal mission, but we must give the Eucharist its fullest meaning. This means that we do not simply distribute the hosts but must understand what it means to redeem people, to save people so that when they come to communion they feel as though they have truly been developed. It is for this reason that we insist that the sacraments must be celebrated with a greater awareness and that no one should come to communion unless they feel truly responsible before the bread that gives life to the world.

During these days our priests have been involved in profound reflection because they understand that their mission leads them to an incarnation on this earth --- and here I do not only speak about the priests of the Archdiocese but the priests of the whole country. It is for this reason

that I asked you to understand their gestures as priestly gestures. Do not confuse their gestures with simply political gestures or revolutionary gestures. I know that news will be published stating that rebellious priests have taken control of the church of El Rosario. But it is nothing like that. What has occurred here in the church of El Rosario during these days is that the priests have called people to engage in prayer and fasting. It is an initiative that they have taken as members of the Church and they are going to explain this in a little while. I try to understand the concerns of the priests and I ask you, dear People of God, to be united with your priests and help them so that their words and actions might truly be what we all want: gospel words, words of a gospel that is not dead but a living gospel.

I speak about this unity of the Archdiocesan Church because I have seen it in different communities. I had the pleasure of visiting Mejicanos during the patronal feast which was celebrated on August 15th. I also visited San Jacinto on August 16th where they celebrated their patronal feast and also Chalatenango where I was able to celebrate a Mass with the communities.

There is no doubt that the kindness of the communities of Chalatenango was in stark contrast to the outrage that I received at the barricades when I entered Chalatenango. I had to leave my car, they almost made me place my hands on top of the car, they searched me and the car (even the motor of the car). They opened everything that I was carrying, including some correspondence and I believe this was unconstitutional because personal correspondence can not be examined in this way. There were a whole series of actions that led me to understand, above all else, the meaning of cowardice. Yes, it is cowardice that makes someone find enjoyment in being able to demonstrate that one is able to dominate another. On my part, I felt that I could only give one answer, the answer that I have always given, the answer of the Church, the answer of the truth: *search whatever you want but you will find nothing!*

But this was not enough. During the Mass in Chalatenango we were constantly watched. Even the Departmental Commander arrived with his tape recorder and other officials. As I concluded the homily, I asked the people: *do you believe that I have said something subversive?* All the people responded: *No, Bishop, you have not said anything subversive.* There was an extended applause and I told the people: *I hope that those who are watching this act will be mindful of the thinking of the people and not say something different.*

I accepted a kind invitation to visit the community of Usulután and Santa Elena in the Diocese of Santiago de María.

Here we should also rejoice with the community of the Good Shepherd Sisters. Today they are celebrating the feast of their founder, Saint John Eudes. I also want to speak about this community because one of the sisters, Sister María Mercedes Peñate, died. She was an exemplary Christian who lived in silence and holiness. Today we gather up the testimonies of her writing, her actions, her life and we see that she was truly one of those hidden saints who blessed the whole community of our Archdiocese. I greet the Good Shepherd Sisters and I hope that you will produce many more saintly women like the Sister who has just been handed over to her eternal reward in heaven. I have the same desire for all the religious women and for all of our communities.

I rejoice with the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Theresa because four of the Sisters celebrated twenty-five years of religious life during the past week. May the Lord preserve you for many more years beyond these past twenty-five years and enable you to continue to be enthusiastic in serving our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I extend the same greeting to the Franciscan Sisters who are flourishing in the Diocese of Santiago de María, in Usulután and in Berlín.

I want to mention something very important here. You will remember that an open letter from the Conference of the Diocesan Clergy of Bolivia was published with great fanfare and many details³. We were interested in knowing the truth about this matter and we wrote to Bolivia and received the following response:

Dear Archbishop,

We have received a newspaper clipping about an open letter that that was addressed to you by Father Luis Rojas, a diocesan priest in the Archdiocese of Santa Cruz. We want to express to you our displeasure and our disagreement with the content and the tone of said letter that was written in a biased manner and is far from the truth.

We also believe it necessary to inform you that the Conference of Diocesan Clergy is an organization of Bolivian diocesan priests that does not have the support of the bishops of Bolivia. Also not all the Bolivian diocesan priests belong to this organization, in fact, very few of them are part of this organization. Therefore, in our opinion said letter should be considered as something personal from Father Luis Rojas or at the very least the representation of the opinion of a very small group of priests. Lastly, we want to extend to you and the Church of El Salvador our expression of admiration, esteem and unity for your courageous and self-sacrificing pastoral ministry in defense of and promotion of human gospel values in our sister nation. This is the response to the slander that was so widely published and distributed here. It is better to look for the truth outside rather than here where so often all we find are lies.

Notes concerning the universal Church. The Pope has announced the theme of the next Day of Peace. It is very inspiring to see that the Pope continues the previous custom of celebrating the first day of each year as a Day of Peace and has pointed out a theme for each year. The theme for 1980 is: *Truth, the Power of Peace*. The Pope explains: *At the source of this choice is the realization that the outlook of too many people today is opposed to peace because this outlook is against truth. All too often falsehood is met in field after field of personal and collective life, giving rise to suspicion on the part of others. Suspicion takes the place of trust between one individual and another, and between one people and the rest ... In the final analysis, peace is based on the truth about man. If it is to be true and lasting, it must be truly human. By building peace on the truth about man, we help the human being to emerge from his present forms of alienation, inviting him to become once again the subject and not the object of what he himself creates and to give priority to ethics over technology, to people over things, to spirit over matter... and to the primacy of "being" over "having"*⁴. Let us be concerned about clothing ourselves with this spirit of true peace and not with false peace.

There is some very interesting information concerning the universal Church. The Bishops in Argentina have defended the right to organize as a natural right of workers that cannot be denied to them nor withheld from them. Also in the same country Bishop Jorge Novak celebrated Mass in the Cathedral of Quilmes with the family members of detained political prisoners and those who have disappeared.

Another echo from our Central American Church. The Superior General of the Jesuits, Father Pedro Arrupe was visiting Nicaragua and Honduras for two reasons. First, he wanted to see the situation in Nicaragua and second, Honduras had been a mission of the Jesuit community from the

Saint Louis Missouri Province in the United States but now will become a part of the Central American Province.

Concerning Nicaragua, Father Arrupe expressed some very interesting things that would be good criteria to use when very biased news is published here. First he spoke about the need for the Church to collaborate positively in the work of reconstruction, preserving the evangelical freedom to point out possible deviations, but helping with enthusiasm in a task that presents a challenge to society. It seems to be a position that is in accord with the freedom of the gospel and also very practical in the given situation. Nicaragua does not need any more criticism that might destroy their hope. Rather we need to help the people and yet maintain a freedom because the Church cannot commit herself to any system per se. We must, however, encourage and help every system. What is most serious is that Father Arrupe saw a great need to come to the aid of people who are hungry and said that all countries should be concerned about sending to the people of Nicaragua the bread that they need. He also said there is a great lack of food in Nicaragua.

Events of the week

As Church that has experienced the events mentioned above we now focus on the reality of our country. We do this not because of some political desire or out of curiosity or to be critical. We do this because it is an evangelical obligation and because Jesus himself has said that he wants to be bread that gives life to the world. (36) Therefore if in El Salvador the bread of life that the Church distributes, the word of the Lord, our Christian religion ... if these do not touch on the political, social and economic realities of our people, then we would simply be speaking about bread that is stored away. However, bread stored away does not nourish people, but only that food that is eaten and assimilated. Thus we need that bread which is assimilated into the realities of the nation.

How could we not enlighten with the words of the bread of life the words that the President proclaimed this week when he spoke about necessary, indispensable and urgent changes? He said we should not cling to outdated forms of social living. He reiterated that the people want peace and said that authority should not be exercised in a way that dominates others⁵. We also heard him give instructions to allow those who are in exile to return to the country and promised a thorough investigation of the death of Father Macías. He then invited the Red Cross to verify the fact that there are no political prisoners⁶. My sisters and brothers, these are things that would give us great encouragement if we did not see realities that are quite contrary to these words. Therefore, we say: if it is true that we need urgent changes in the country, then why is a person or an organization called subversive when they propose these kinds of changes? Our Church desires those changes that are demanded by the gospel.

If we want a form of authority that is not exercised in a way that demonstrates dominion over others, then we ask: why do our people continue to experience repression? We have a long list of the abuses that occurred this week: Amado Guardado Mejía, Eugenio Guardado, Francisco Guardado, Esperanza Menjívar de Guardado, Francisco Fuentes Landaverde. All of these people were arrested and their constitutional right to be brought before the courts has not been adhered to. Either bring them to trial or set them free. Military searches have also been carried out in Valle Nuevo, Buena Vista, Las Tres Ceibas in Aguilares where there have been further abuses that have created greater instability in this area. It seems to me that all these abuses are expressed in letters that frequently arrive at the Chancery. For example the following letter of a mother who says: *I am a wife and a mother in great anguish because on May 29th the police arrested my husband, Mercedes, and my son, José María, as well as my brother, Pedro Juan. They were arrested as they were planting rice near the house. We have looked for them in many places but have been unable*

to find them. You can image the anxiety that I have and so I ask you, please, in your Sunday homily ask the authorities to give us some information about these family members who have disappeared. I ask you this favor with all my heart. This is one of the voices that is not heard and that must be listened to. We would not be proclaiming a true gospel if we were indifferent to so many anxieties and worries, especially when others try to soothe these anxieties with promises and news that does not speak the truth but hides the reality that we are so afraid of.

With regard to the investigation that the Red Cross made about those areas that have been evacuated we are able to say that their report was given to the Organization of American States and the English Parliament. They asked for accountability for the abuses committed in these communities and also asked for information about those persons who are being held as prisoners. Since at this time the Red Cross is unable to account for these people we can ask: what has happened to them? Where are they? It is certain that there has been an abuse here and the Church cannot be silent in this situation.

In the area of labor relations, there are many things that cause us great affliction. For example, the Minister of Labor is fearful of the suppression of several sources of work and so we think about the many people who are presently working and are now in danger of losing their jobs. We therefore call upon all those persons who are concerned about the labor situation, management, workers and the Ministry of Labor, to enter into a serious dialogue that will seek to find the true causes of this situation. Let neither side abuse their rights or their authority and may all join together to discover that which is best for the people so that we might become a nation where we are able to find bread, work, peace and tranquility.

There are many things that sadden us this week as we look at the situation of repression that exists in our country. For example, the assassination of Professor Sánchez in San Miguel. Everyone has heard about the assassination of Mr. Valentín, a businessman --- the FPL has claimed responsibility for this action. On the other hand the death of an engineer and seven other workers who were executed near El Parque Infantil has also been attributed to the FPL⁷ but there is no certainty as to who carried out these assassinations. Our impression is that this was done by forces of the extreme right. All of this gives us the impression that we are involved in a clandestine civil war in which many lives are being lost. It is necessary to look for solutions so that the responsible persons can be brought to trial and judged. In this way we can avoid people seeking vengeance and taking the law into their own hands.

We could lament many other violent acts and yet at this time I ask you to join together with the people who are praying and fasting in this Church, may we all, with our prayers and human resources, look for solutions to our problems. There is still time to resolve this and not have to pay the price with so much bloodshed.

We unite ourselves with the suffering of 10,000 persons who, as you know, died in India as the result of floods.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is the history of our country during the past week. There are many other things that you could add here but nonetheless all of this provides us with a framework in which we celebrate our Eucharist today: the bread that has come down from heaven, the flesh in which Christ gives us his divine life, his redemption and his love. From this perspective let us reflect and contemplate all the things that can be done when we have faith in the Lord and when we truly want to be instruments of the love of the Lord. It is at these times that we must continue to be nourished with the eternal life of the Eucharist. So be it.*

As I promised you, we are going to ask one of the priests taking part in this service to explain its meaning for us to understand.⁸

¹ Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873).

² Council of Trent, Session XIII (11 October 1551), *Decree on the Eucharist*, ch.1: Denzinger, 874.

³ Among other things the letter said: “We do not question your personal opposition to the regime. Nor do we question your continual preoccupation for the observance of the ‘human rights’ which are supposedly being violated... What goes against our conscience as a Catholic priest is that, on this pretext, the Church of Jesus Christ is instrumentalized in favour of communism... It is already publicly recognised that you have already converted you pulpit in the cathedral to Marxist demagogy. This, Monsignor, is to pass from the flag of Christ to the flag of Anti-Christ without any extenuating explanation.” Conference of the Diocesan Clergy, Open Letter to Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 20 June 1979.

⁴ “Truth, the strength of peace”, *Osservatore Romano*, 19 August 1979.

⁵ Discourse of General Humberto Romero to officials of the Armed Forces of El Salvador on 11 August 1979. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 13 August 1979.

⁶ Message of General Carlos Humberto Romero at a press conference on 16 August 1979. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 17 August 1979. A synthesis of the President’s message was also published in the edition of 22 August 1979 of the same paper.

⁷ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 17 August 1979.

⁸ After the homily, a priest explained the meaning of the day for feasting and prayer celebrated in the church of El Rosario from 19 to 22 August 1979.

Marginal References (1) Jn 6,27; (2) Jn 6,27a; (3) Jn 6,27; (4) Jn 6,51; (5) Pr 9,1-2a; (6) Mt 22,1-10; (7) Mt 22,4; (8) LG 48; (9) Ac 4,12; (10) LG 14; (11) LG 48; (12) EN 23; (13) Jn 6,51b; (14) Jn 6,52; (15) Jun 6,55; (16) Jn 6,54; (17) Jn 3,3; (18) Jn 3,4; (19) Jn 3,5; (20) Jn 4,13-14a; (21) Jn 4,15; (22) Jn 4,14b; (23) Jn 6,54; (24) Jn 6,51b; (25) Jn 6,63; (26) Mt 26,28; (27) Jn 6,57; (28) Jn 6,54; (29) Jn 6,49-51a; (30) Rm 6,9; (31) Jn 6,56; (32) Gal w2,20; (33) Jn 6,51a-56; (34) Pr 9,1-6; (35) Ep 5,15-20; (36) Jn 6,41-43; (37) Lk 22,19; (38) Jn 6,51b.