

## THE DIVINE SAVIOR, WORD OF ETERNAL LIFE

Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time  
August 26, 1979

*Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b*  
*Ephesians 5:21-32*  
*John 6:61-70*

My beloved sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

There are moments when the tempests of history become more intense and create confusion, anguish, discouragement and pessimism. Even pastors who ought to be a sign of calmness and security and provide guidance to people can appear to be disoriented, as though their faith is failing. There is violence and disorder and all forms of vice. There are honest people who believe they are good because they do not act evilly but they have forgotten that being good is not something negative but means that one must do all the good that is possible. Yes, our environment is one of tempest and confusion.

We hear voices that proclaim: *There is no salvation! This is a dead end street!* My sisters and brothers, thanks to God that in the midst of this pessimism and disorientation Christians can rely on a voice that has resounded during the whole month of August: *This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!* (1). Today's gospel tells us that *he has the words of eternal life* (2). It is a calm voice and a voice that gives light. It is like people know that beyond the clouds there is a clear sky where the sun shines, but the clouds must first pass by and then the sun shines brightly. Let us have faith!

It is providential that during this month of the Divine Saviour of our country, the Sunday liturgy sets before us the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel where we discover true knowledge of Christ, who in our country is referred to as the Divine Savior of the world. He is the One who will save us!

The Sundays in August have presented us with a true lesson about Christ. We could summarize this lesson in the following way: Everything begins with an event: the multiplication of the loaves and fish.(3) People are content with the fact that they have been fed and the hunger of their stomach has been satisfied.

We have been involved in a theological reflection in which we have discovered the truth about things and the truth about God, the wonderful teacher of history. Jesus Christ is the fundamental cornerstone of everything that exists. He tells us: *In this bread that you have seen multiplied, you will discover the true bread that has come down from heaven to give life to the world* (4). *I am the bread that came down from heaven to give life to the world* (5).

He has also told us in this reflection --- and here I refer to an issue of our Catholic faith --- that he is present with his flesh that was tormented on the cross in order to save the world (6), that he is united with the Father and that he gives us eternal life (7). He is the flesh that is offered in the Mass and is shared in communion. He is present in the Eucharist that is celebrated in our Church.

After having reflected on this understanding of Christ that only he can give us, the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel concludes with the passage that was just read and we can say that this passage contains the three conclusions of his sermon in Capernaum. Therefore, I have entitled my homily: *The Divine Saviour of the World has the words of eternal life.*

The three ideas that I will develop are the three conclusions of this beautiful discourse, the three conclusion of Jesus as he spoke in Capernaum: First, *the flesh is of no avail* (8); Second, *To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (9); Third, the need to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life.

### **The flesh is of no avail**

In the first place let us analyze the words of Jesus: *the flesh is of no avail* (10). We ought not to think that Jesus is proclaiming here the absolute uselessness of men and women. Rather Christ is speaking about the inability and the impossibility of human flesh to achieve eternal life. It is a consideration that must be examined in light of transcendence which only God possesses and therefore flesh, without a relationship to transcendence, is of no avail.

What is flesh? We have already analyzed this word with precision as we have reflected on the words of Jesus' discourse. We have distinguished between what Christ said: *My flesh for the life of the world* (11) and that his flesh is united with the sacrifice on the cross that saved the world and is also vitally united with the God of eternal life. The flesh of Christ is like the vehicle that gives us salvation and eternal life. We cannot speak of the divine flesh of Christ but we can only speak about what he himself calls flesh: men and women in general, all of human life. Therefore as we talk about flesh we can now say that in the present situation flesh is the flesh of man who is a descendent of Adam and whom Saint Paul calls *earthly man* (12), man who has lost original grace.

We must not forget that according to our Christian faith humanity goes back in time to the era of a paradise that was lost. We were created by God in justice and holiness. Our first parents, however, disobeyed the precepts of God and lost that justice and holiness which had elevated them to the level of God and as a result, as theology states, they remained in a state of *fallen nature*. It is like an eagle that desires to fly but because he has lost his feathers is unable to do so or like a bird whose wings have been cut. This is original sin. Many times we do not reflect on this reality, namely, that because of the original fault of man we have lost our ability to fly to the Infinite, our ability to face the transcendent life of God ... we remain in a state in which we are deprived of grace.

The sin of a child who is born is not a personal sin. New born children are unable to sin because they still have no free will but they are born deprived of something that they should possess. From the beginning God desired that all children who were to be born should be born in justice and grace. But because of the disobedience of our first parents, we are born deprived of grace. It is like the situation of a person who is favored by his boss and is given the opportunity to rejoice in an inheritance that would be bestowed on him and his family. All who would be born into this family should be happy. But because this individual disobeys his boss he is told: *move away from here; we can no longer continue in this fashion.* Now the children who are born into that family have no fault but they are deprived of a privilege. Grace was a privilege that was given to men and women and God took away this privilege because of disobedience and so now children are born deprived of this privilege. This is what Christ calls *flesh*: fallen man, man without grace, without justice, and without divine affiliation.

But flesh deprived of the life of God has the ability to do many things on this earth. Naturally, original sin is not something that is seen in a simple way. Fallen man with original sin would be seen in the same way, would be seen as he is today even if he had not lost grace. Here we could all be in the Cathedral, in the grace of God. We would not be able to distinguish those who were still in the state of original sin and those who were not. In other words, if flesh is of no avail with regard to the divine realities that have been lost, it is still useful for many things here on earth.

I want to explain to you a modern current that should be kept in mind in order to understand the relationship between fallen man and man restored to grace by the redemption of Christ. Fallen or restored to grace in the world --- today there is a current of thought that is called secularization. Note this carefully because I want to explain something to you that everyone should remember. Secularization refers to that current of thought that proposes the autonomy of created things but these created realities have an openness to God. I repeat: secularization is a word that defines the actual state of humanity and that defends the autonomy of created things, but at the same time recognizes the sovereignty of God. It is the opposite of another concept that is often confused with this word, namely, secularism.

Secularism is evil. It also proclaims the autonomy of created things but is closed to God. This theory proclaims: *Here God has nothing to do with us.* See the difference. Secularization says: created realities, the laws of technology, human relationships, that which the human person invents and makes --- all of these can be developed without having to ask God but God is always kept in mind. On another occasion I told you the story of the scientist who was preparing for a trip to the moon and he exclaimed: *Everything that the technical experts have to do is prepared. This trip must provide results but now we must place the success of this trip in God's hands.* These words are an expression of true secularization. Science and technology are autonomous and people do not have to pray to God for everything. The Council states that at a previous time people often prayed to God because they expected many things from God that they were able to do for themselves.(13) This is a sign of progress in the modern era. Today we know that there are many fertilizers and insecticides and many other materials that people have invented and that before would perhaps have been considered miracles. Miracles always exist because the human person reaches a limit beyond which he/she is unable to move. But as long as people move within their limits, in their area of competency, then they are autonomous and this is what we refer to as secularization. Men and women have secularized and made this world. This is secularization, *saeculum*, the world, the century. People have brought to history, to their own competency, things which they have invented and which give them greater dominion over the world. Nevertheless, it remains true that no matter how far the human person expands this progress God will always be higher and wider, taking into his embrace all the different dimensions of the human person. The more people develop themselves, the more they are able to give greater glory to God. God will always be the Lord of the human person, the Lord of technology, the Lord of history. Therefore, when Jesus says: *flesh is of no avail* (14), he is not meddling in the area of secularization but is telling people not to close themselves to the Absolute.

There are good examples of secularization in today's readings. For example, the first reading from the Old Testament is only concerned with the present. The absolute, the eternal, the intimate life of God have not yet been revealed in full. Thus the man of the Old Testament places happiness in the things of the earth: in being freed from Egypt and walking towards a promised land. For us, as Christians, we know all this was a sign – as St Paul says – that an eternal life exists which is the true promised land (15).

Today's second reading deals with married life. My dear sisters and brothers, beloved married couples, your marriage can be viewed from two different perspectives. One perspective is that of secularization: in this case you see the true human values of your marriage but you are open to the sign of the Infinite. Saint Paul has said: *marriage has a divine significance* (an adaptation of Ephesians 5:25). The other perspective is that of secularism: in this case people do not discover the divine mystery and live their marriage as simply a human reality, as a relationship between a man and woman or as a love between a man and woman but do not elevate or open their relationship to its transcendent dimension. My sisters and brothers, we must become signs that we are sons and daughters of God and therefore reflect the infinite love of God in the world, the same love that Jesus has for his Church. (16)

Hopefully, within the autonomy of married life, husbands and wives will discover the transcendent meaning of their marriage. Husbands should be respected as Christ figures who should be willing to accept the responsibility to give their lives to their wives, yes, even willing to die on a cross for them. Husbands should see their wives as signs of the faithful Church of Jesus and while we are living in times of persecution and martyrdom, should also be willing to offer their blood for their wives. When marriage is transformed and transcends secular laws (civil laws concerning inheritance and entitlement to land), then marriage attains its full and wonderful dimension. As long as marriage does not find its divine dimension of love which unites the family, it always runs the risk, like every other human reality, of being lost. People ask: *Why do so many marriages end in divorce? Why is there so much disunity in families?* The answer is found in the fact that people have not become aware of the Absolute and have not reflected on their transcendent mission on earth but simply are living the human dimension of married life. They do not pray or remember to return to God. They do not reflect to the world the image of God that should be reflected by every marriage. *The flesh is of no avail* (17).

In today's gospel we find signs of immanence, that is, earthly realities where people are content with what they see and do not reflect on the transcendent and divine meaning of these realities. Jesus says: *you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life* (18). The bread in the desert was ambivalent. For those who are closed to the Absolute and do not reflect on its transcendent meaning, for them it is enough to eat the bread. They have filled their stomach with bread and they have money in their pockets --- these are earthly things. For those who think like Jesus, they elevate the bread to another level --- while they are eating the *tortilla* they elevate this action to the Lord who gives nourishment that will not perish. Jesus speaks about the manna: *your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died* (19). The manna did not provide them with immortality but the bread that Jesus gives will provide us with immortality (20) because if we accept this bread and eat with faith then we are accepting Jesus Christ.

Secularization must be respected because women and men have an obligation to discover the wonders of God. When wise and learned people discover in their mathematics and in their physical sciences elements that provide them with the power to undertake such adventurous trips as going to the moon, it is clear that these people did not make the energy or the power that led them to this discovery. People did not invent the mathematical calculations that led to this discovery but rather they discovered what God has placed before them to be discovered. This is what we call secularization. God says: *I have placed these things there for you so that you can take possession of the land and govern it* (21). When engineers build roads in the mountains, roads that seem impossible to construct, they are dominating the earth. When skyscrapers are built, again, people are dominating material things. Men and women are the image of God and they are collaborating with their Father, with God, and are making life more beautiful, more organized and more pleasant.

When men and women work as if everything depended on them but pray as though everything depended on God, this is secularization.

On the other hand secularism is a sin. Secularism occurs when people close themselves to the reality of God. This is the foolish position of the atheist who says: *I do not believe in God*. The more intelligent the person, the more foolish these words. If a person has been gifted with intelligence, then the true wisdom of that person should lead him/her to the God whom humble people embrace in faith and encounter by much simpler paths: *I believe in God*. Those who are wise discover in the laws of their technology and art and science the hand that leads them to God. If such people come to the scientific conclusion that leads them to the denial of the existence of God, then they are like those students who solve the problem of their professor in an incorrect way. So the professor says to them: *repeat the problem because your solution is incorrect*. God ought to say to all those who are atheists: *You, who believe you are wise, a university graduate, a professional, a person of science and yet you laugh at the old woman who prays because you do not believe and the old woman does and she prays. My dear atheist, you have solved the problem incorrectly and are more ignorant than the old woman. Go back and review your religious problem and you will discover that God exists --- the God of mathematics, the God of astronomy, the God of laws, the God of medicine, the God engineering, the God of all that the human person can invent. You have to discover God if you resolve things correctly and if your secularization is true. But you have sinned by becoming a secularist. Secularists enclose themselves in this world and in their autonomy and say: "Here God has nothing to do."*

In today's readings we find examples of secularism: the idolatries of Egypt and Canaan. What does the first reading say? It is beautiful to see Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land. Moses had died before he was able to accomplish this and he entrusted Joshua with this task. As the people entered this territory they saw that the Canaanites adored false gods. So the people who had come from Egypt, from the other side of the Euphrates and who had also, at one time, adored false gods, were reminded by Joshua: *Remember that it was the true God who brought you out of Egypt, who led you through the desert and who has given you this land. Here there are many false gods and I do not know if you want to return to the worship of the gods of Egypt or the gods of the Canaanites or the true God. I and my family are going to adore the only Lord, the God who has done such marvelous deeds, the God who freed us from Egypt. What do you say?* (22). The people responded: *Far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods* (23).

Here we see a denunciation of the existence of secularism. All of those who adore idols are atheists in the eyes of the true God. They have decided in favor of secularism and are closed to the transcendence of the true God. Idolatry is not only a reality that we see reflected in the lives of people of centuries past but is also a reality in our own time. Joshua could return today and speak to the people of El Salvador: *There are many idols in this land: the idol of money, the idol of politics, the idol of popular organizations, the idol of the flesh, vice and alcohol and drugs. So many idols! If you want to be true Christians then tell me if you are going to adore the true God.* There is only one God and we must cease adoring false idols. Because the Church, like Joshua, proclaims the existence of one true God, the idolaters hate the Church and do not want their worship of false gods to be disturbed. The Church, however, would not fulfill her obligation if she were to enter into solidarity with idolaters and not point to people who want to follow the gospel that there is only one Lord and he alone is to be served. We adore this God because he is the Lord who is saving our nation.

As we return to the second reading and look at married life again we see that the reality of marriage also runs the risk of becoming an absolute and therefore can easily become a sign of

carnal flesh rather than a sign of the divine reality. I believe that the crisis of many marriages is rooted in this reality. Many people have enclosed themselves in the sexual value of marriage. This explains the campaigns in favor of contraception and abortion. This explains how people can focus on the aspect of pleasure without realizing that the sexual and carnal dimension of marriage is not an absolute. Jesus says: *The flesh is of no avail* (24). Rather the flesh should lead us to an understanding of the divine dimension of marriage. People who have established pleasure as their only god, who have forgotten about the fruitfulness, honesty, purity and sanctity of marriage, are idolaters and have blemished one of God's laws. Such a marriage is secularist and closed to the Absolute. No matter how much they might pray, if they do not pray with a mind that is open to God and a willingness to obey God's laws, those laws that involve the intimacy of marriage, then they cannot say that they adore the one true Lord. This is an example of creating absolutes here on earth, an example of a form of secularism that is the cause of so much evil among us.

The gospel also speaks to us about cases of secularism and of closing oneself to the divine. We see this when Jesus is rejected. Today's gospel is very sad. After the beautiful revelations of Jesus he might have expected the people to acclaim him and follow him. Yet we see that Jesus runs the risk of being alone. In fact, whenever the truth is preached there is always the risk of being alone. The gospel says: *many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him* (25). His disciples left him. When only the twelve remained, Jesus asks them: *Do you also want to leave* (26). This is a time of crisis. This crisis occurs precisely because people separated themselves from Jesus and because Jesus did not preach what the people wanted to hear. They said: *We hoped he would be a political Messiah!* (27) *We wanted a Messiah who would always give us bread that would fill our stomachs!* (28) They were following Jesus because of some material or physical benefit but suddenly all of this disappeared: *this saying is too harsh: who can accept it?* (29); *they murmured and criticized Jesus.*

Always the bread of preaching the authentic gospel is criticized. Yet despite the rejection and the doubts and the betrayal of Judas who preferred thirty pieces of silver rather than friendship with the Lord, despite all of this, Jesus does not retract his words. Jesus is resolved to be alone. No, not alone, alone with the Father who is primary; alone with God. This is the only thing that is important. Therefore, from the perspective of one who preaches the truth, those who follow this teaching are not just with the one who preaches but are with God. As a result, Jesus asks: *do you also want to leave?* (John 6:67). Peter's response guides us: *Master, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life* (John 6:68). The idols that other people worship will be left behind at the time of death. Indeed, the idols will betray them. There is nothing worse than a fallen politician, a rich person who has become poor, or idols that have abandoned their worshippers. How sad to speak about the ex-President in Nicaragua who is unable to find a country that will receive him! How sad is the fall of an idolater, the fall of a god that cannot save! What is the value of all that money and power at the time of death? *You alone have the words of eternal life* (John 6:68).

### **Events of the week**

My sisters and brothers, I believe that it is good to pause here so that we can examine ourselves to see if we are living in a sinful situation, a situation of secularism. I believe that there is much sin and that the Church, like Joshua, has to speak to the people of El Salvador: *Do not be idolaters; convert and believe in the true God!* You yourselves can analyze the news that we are all aware of.

So much importance is being given to the approach of *free* elections and yet at the same time the political parties are saying that they do not believe that this is going to happen. There is not an

environment of truth. We have read the statement of the UDN (Democratic Nationalistic Union) and the conditions that they believe are necessary in order to trust in free elections. They state:

First, *A cessation of the repression against the Catholic Church, the political parties, labor unions and other popular organizations, without any discrimination.*

Second, *Granting freedom to all political prisoners and those who have disappeared and clarifying the situation of those who may have already been assassinated.* In the towns where I travel there is terrible anguish which can only be experienced when one listens, for example, to an elderly woman in her house who speaks about the support that she received from her spouse or a son and then says that this beloved family member has been taken away and never seen again.

Third, *The punishment of those guilty of violating the Constitution and culpable of crimes against the people of El Salvador.*

Fourth, *The dissolution of the assassination groups: UGB, Falange, Mano Blanca, ORDEN. These groups are instruments of the state's repression and their objective is to harass and destroy the popular organizations.\**

Fifth, *A return of all those who have been exiled since 1972.*

Sixth, *Freedom that allows workers and political parties to effectively organize in the city as well as the rural areas. Without any discrimination all existing organizations of laborers, farmers, and campesinos ought to be legally recognized and supported.*

*Recognize the right of workers to strike by eliminating the legal and administrative obstacles that in effect make it impossible to go on strike.*

*Freedom of expression, freedom to gather and meet and freedom to demonstrate in any part of the country. Therefore there should be a cessation to the police and military activity that is utilized to annul the exercise of these rights and freedoms.<sup>1</sup>*

After listing these eight points their statement goes on to say: *The fulfillment of these demands will be the beginning of the creation of favorable premises and conditions so that the grave political problems that have been imposed on the country can be resolved with effective citizen participation etc.<sup>2</sup>* You can see that we have at the present time a secularism of repression that everyone experiences.

My sisters and brothers, I want to say something here that has not been published in the newspapers but that is a scandal for our country. On July 25<sup>th</sup> the Legislative Assembly enacted a law that increased the defense budget by 52 million colones<sup>3</sup>. Where did this money come from? This is even more scandalous: 4 million colones were taken from the Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Social and Economic Development, 1.5 million colones from the Ministry of Justice, 7.6 million colones from the Ministry of Education (in other words, weapons are given a priority over our schools), 9 million colones from the Ministry of the Economy, 4.1 million from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and 18 million colones from the Ministry of Public Works. A total of 52 million colones pilfered from works that the people need. 52 million colones given to the army so that they can obtain more weapons. This is unjust and is an action of a government that is creating an absolute, the action of a government that wants to base its power on the brute force of weapons and not on culture.\*

As a commentary on this scandal of giving millions to the army so that they can have more power I want to repeat the words that I spoke during a commentary on Radio YSAX: *52 million destined for the democratization of the country and the well-being of all people?*<sup>4</sup>

In the area of labor relations, several labor union organizations have published a very courageous statement in which they speak about the need to revise the Labor Code. On July 31<sup>st</sup> a group of union leaders were invited to participate in a meeting with the Minister of Labor and they asked the Minister for some time to be able to present a plan for the reform of the Labor Code since they had not had time to study this together in any depth and had not been able to consult with their members. The different organizations asked for a ninety days delay but have not yet received a response from the Minister of Labor.<sup>5</sup> I believe that in these situations things cannot be dictated from on high but rather the voice of the workers and the labor unions must be heard so that a law can be enacted that corresponds to the reality of our people. Hopefully these voices will be heard because the series of strikes is beginning to undermine the life of our nation.

Thanks to God that on Thursday, after three and a half months of negotiations and a strike of two months, the situation at La Fabril was resolved. Both sides compromised and a final agreement was reached that satisfied, in part, the demands of the workers. We hope that a response will be received from the directors of IMES. At the present time they are meeting in the United States. Negotiations are underway to resolve the conflict with APES, Foremost and other factories. We hope that in all of these situations the understanding and the good will of labor and management will lead to prompt solutions.

The repression and violence continues to cause terror in our people. The body of Professor Mauricio Antonio Méndez was found, another teacher was assassinated, the victim of strangulation and internal injuries.

In La Escuela Urbana-Mixta in El Campamento, Acajutla, the following occurred. On July 26<sup>th</sup> Professor Pedro Colorado was assassinated. Several masked civilians arrived and intimidated the students. Then near the end of August these same people were asking insistently for the Director of the school. The Director is a woman religious, Sister Adela Guardado López and she spoke with the Director of basic education and the supervisor of District 0-41. They counseled her to leave the country. On the very same day the school was searched, the seal of the school was stolen and the office of the Director was broken into. What surprises us is that this is a school of Fe y Alegria, a Catholic institution and no one has raised their voice about any of this.

In the community of Aguilares some very ugly things have occurred. I asked for a report from the parish there and was horrified when they told me that in May they began to count the number of deaths, arrests and disappearance that have occurred at the hands of the Security Forces. Since July 20 there have been a series of searches. A combined operation of the National Guard, Treasury Police and army soldiers took control of Valle Nuevo, Tres Ceibas, Buena Vista, Loma de Ramos, Mirandilla and El Zapote. In Tres Ciebas they demolished and burned the building that housed the old school and also burned the house of Luz Rivera, the widow of Calles. Pedro Dolores Rivera was attacked, beaten and his feet were burned. Mariano Canales and Osmaro Contreras were beaten. The Security Forces intended to burn the house of Bernardina Carrero, obliged her to take all her possessions out of the house and spared her life because she was pregnant.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm four trucks with the National Guard and soldiers as well as a machine to open roads and members of the Red Cross, including medical personnel, were brought to Las



Ceibas. They announced that they were coming in a peaceful way, gave civics classes and distributed medicine. At the same time, however, every type of meeting was prohibited and no one was allowed on the streets after 6:00pm. They announced that they would remain there for twenty-two days. On Friday, August 17<sup>th</sup>, bombs were detonated on the high grounds surrounding the village and the mountains were being watched because it is here that the poor *campesinos* sleep because they do not feel safe to go to their homes. It is interesting that the Security Forces present themselves as benefactors of the people who bring medicine and offer cultural works and yet at the same time they kill and assassinate and beat the people.\* I ask if it would not be better to leave the millions of colones in the different Ministries of the government so that they can do good works rather than take this money away from them. Are not these “peaceful” occupations a camouflage that enables the Security Forces to continue to harass our suffering people?\*

Six bodies of men and one woman were found on the Troncal highway. They were found there on Friday and one of them is the body of the *campesino* Francisco Fuentes Landaverde whose family had presented a petition of habeas corpus to the courts. He had been arrested on August 15<sup>th</sup> in El Coyolito by the reserve forces (National Guard and Army) in the Northern Zone. We fear that the other bodies are those of Eugenio Francisco Guardado<sup>6</sup> and Esperanza Manjívar de Guardado whom we have spoken about on other occasions.

Finally the family of the engineer, Mr. Valle, and the seven other persons who were assassinated with him near El Parque Infantil, have asked for an investigation of this crime.

We denounce the arrest of the following persons and the abuse of their right of habeas corpus: Mardoquero Arnoldo Castillo Olla from Apanece, José Efraín Ganuza and his father, both from Acajutula and Félix Ganuza. These people are still missing despite the fact that their families have presented petitions of habeas corpus to the courts. Their families have insistently asked the Security Forces for information concerning their loved ones but have received the same hypocritical response: *We do not have them here! We have not arrested them!* There are witnesses who say the opposite. Do not lie to the people when they are seeking consolation for their great pain.

On the other hand, the left has committed cruel outrages. The death of the governor of Armenia, Modesto Jacobo Villata, has been attributed to the ERP. Groups of the extreme left have assassinated members of ORDEN, destroyed vehicles and costly machinery that had brought many benefits to the people of those villages. They open ditches, impede the free movement of people, and occupy the churches without repairing the damage that they do there. We cannot say that any of this is good.

In a word, it appears that we are in the midst of a clandestine civil war which does not resolve the great evil that we are experiencing. It is time to reflect on the fact that our country is in great need of peace but this peace must be based on justice.

It is just to support the court proceedings that are being carried out with regard to the assassination of Father Macías. Las Ligas Populares 28 del febrero have written the Pope and the Nuncio and are demanding justice in this case. We should remember the final words of Father Macías: *Look out, they are members of the Security Forces!* And the voice of the people stated: *Yes, we know them!* We hope that we will not see the Security Forces set free since we know that they are guilty and also know that they would just as quickly torture and make it appear that innocent *campesinos* are guilty. It was strange that the President of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Supreme Court of Justice has extended condolences to me. In the first place I want to tell them that I am not the bishop of Father Macías but rather Bishop Aparicio in San

Vicente is his bishop. I suppose that they have also sent a telegram to him. In response I would say to them: *You have in your power laws and justice so rather than send a telegram I would ask you to use these powers and resolve this crime.\**

The death of Father Marciás has encouraged people this week to support the voices of justice, the voices of our people who suffer, the voices that cry out for peace in our country, the voices who desire unity in the Church. As Church, we are mindful of our sins and we have cried and deplored these sins during our time of prayer and penance --- a time that has been celebrated in all of the dioceses. The holiness of so many good people attracts the blessings of God that our people are in such need of.

*The flesh is of no avail* (33). How right that the Lord should speak these words. When the flesh forgets that which is spiritual and rational, forgets the realities of peace and justice, when secularism encloses people in the idolatry of having more money or power, in the idolatry of repressing people, then in such situations the world becomes a hell because people are not open to heaven which is the Kingdom of God. Then the Church must proclaim the Kingdom that our people so need. *The flesh is of no avail* (John 6:63). For this reason there are so many situations of sin. The decaying, tortured and scalped bodies that we find along so many roads and in the valleys and mountains of our country are a sign that El Salvador has forgotten about these words of Jesus. They are also a sign that the flesh is of no avail because the flesh is destroyed when the spirit is not present. Let us give meaning to our bodies and to our lives by seeking that which I am going to speak about next in our reflections.

### **To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life**

When Jesus challenges the Apostolic College: *do you also want to leave?* (34), Peter responds with the courage of a Christian who is convinced of his faith in Christ: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (35). This is a proclamation of the transcendence of Christ. My beloved sisters and brothers, we stand before the reality of transcendence and this is only achieved through dialogue with God and intimacy with the Lord. Saint Augustine says: *You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*<sup>7</sup>

Today in the gospel the Divine Savior of the world proclaims to us the meaning of his presence in the midst of history. When people murmur and criticize him, he says: *Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?* (36). This is the first proclamation of Christ's transcendence. He has come from above but people did not understand this because he was present with them. They were incapable of understanding this until he returned to his divine origin. Christians who have faith know and believe that Christ lives in eternity; they know and believe that all the inspirations that he gives to his Church are bread that nourishes the world, bread that has come down from heaven: the transcendence of Christ.

Jesus continues to speak and thus we have the second proclamation of his divinity: *It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail* (37). Christ is the spirit who gives life: *my words are spirit and life*. What does Saint John mean when he uses this profound mystical language? Christ is the Anointed One of the Holy Spirit and Christ is led by the Holy Spirit. All flesh is divinized and so when he is nailed to the cross, it is the source of holiness and grace that is nailed to the cross because he is anointed by the Spirit. He is life because he has brought us the life of God. *Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.* (38)

*No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father. (39)* My dear sisters and brothers, to believe in Christ is a great grace. I do not want anyone who is listening to me or reflecting with me to doubt Christ, to not believe in Christ. This would give me great sadness because this was not revealed to those persons by the Father. Why has this not been revealed? God is not at fault ... we must look at the disposition of the human heart. If people want to continue to adore their idols then this explains why God is unable to come to these persons. Therefore, the Church says: *Be converted! Put aside your vanities! Put aside your false gods and you will encounter the transcendence that will make you happy!* No one can come to the Father if their hearts are not disposed, if they do not allow their hearts to be filled by Christ.

The words of Peter are the most beautiful proclamation of Christian transcendence: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (40).* In light of this revelation of Christ's transcendence that is revealed to us by the Absolute God, how beautiful it is to explain Jesus' challenge to the people: *You know the true God and you also know the false gods. Decide, which one are you going to adore?(41)*

Here we have a call of intimacy with the Church. If today the Church is fulfilling the function of Jesus in the nation, pointing out the only true God and warning people about the false gods, then my dear women and men religious, Catholic institutions, ecclesial communities, parish and base communities, all of us who are Church, please distinguish our voice from others because ours is a voice of transcendence. Those who, like the Jews, want to utilize us and make us political kings of the earth (42) will discover the firm response of Jesus: (43) he flees to the mountain to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is above all political activity. Even though the Church enlightens the realities of the earth, accompanies women and men who belong to different organizations, enters the palaces of politicians, yet she must never be confused with partisan politics but should be seen as the light that illuminates and supports that which is good and denounces and informs what is evil.\*

For my part, the voice of the Church has attempted to be clear. Perhaps she has not achieved this clarity because there is much ill-will, much ignorance and much idolatry. Idolaters do not want to see their idols removed from their pedestals. Nevertheless, this voice wants to cry out once again and this is what I want to proclaim: Jesus tells us not to look for more possessions but to look for salvation. I have to laugh when people say that I am looking for power. What ability do I have to be president or a minister? Christ has called me to be a priest and from the perspective of the Church and my priesthood he has called me to serve.\*

Yesterday, in San Juan Opico, channel 13 of Mexico asked me: *If you or the Church were offered the leadership of a revolution, would you accept it?* I replied: *It would be an absurdity. The Church is not on earth for that reason. The Church is not here to captain an army or to carry on a revolution, but to be the mother of unity. It remains autonomous between two parties that struggle in order to be able to say to each other what is just and what is unjust, and when there are sins of warfare to be able to oppose what must not be done even in situations of conflict. The Church wants to be always the voice of Christ, the bread that comes down from heaven for the life, for the light, for the salvation of the world.(44)*

Beloved ministers in the Church, I beg you, let us manifest in the most transparent form the thought of Christ, this transcendence of the Church that Paul VI spoke of: *If the Church proclaimed a different liberation, not that of Christ --- one that is not liberation from sin, one that will not lead God's children to heaven, to eternal life; if the Church mixed itself up with liberations that were only political, social or economic --- then it would lose its original force and would have no right to speak of liberation in God's name (45).\**

## The need to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life

With this I end with my third thought: the need to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life. If the flesh is of no avail and only Christ has the words of eternal life then it would be foolish to separate ourselves from eternal life which is a gift that is so graciously given to us. To enclose ourselves in the goods of this earth and not to take advantage of the gift that Jesus offers us to sanctify the things of this world (a gift that led him to renounce all the things of this world) --- to accept all of these things is a form of unpardonable secularism.

How beautiful is the Biblical scene that is presented to us in today's readings! Joshua in front of the people, entering the Promised Land, asking the people to maintain themselves faithful to their God because there are many dangers and it is easy to fall. This moment of crisis in the life of Jesus appears to be very emotional. First the crowds followed him but then they began to leave him and finally, he was alone. In this state of loneliness which becomes more and more profound, he asks his disciples: *do you also want to leave* (46). Peter responds in a most beautiful way: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

In the second reading we find an expression of the sign of the covenant, a sign of solidarity between flesh and the divine. Saint Paul says: *Marriage is a great sacrament but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church* (47). A man and a woman, from distinct families, perhaps even from distinct towns or from far off nations, come to know one another and love one another and then seal their relationship together forever with the marriage covenant. Here we are not only talking about the love of this particular man and this particular woman but they represent two families, two people and even though they are quite distinct they also represent what Saint Paul speaks about: *the two shall become one flesh* (48). This is the sign that Jesus wanted to establish on earth so that people, when they see married couples, would think about the covenant of the flesh with the Spirit. Thus when a man is in love with a woman and loves her and is willing to give his life in order to be with her and when a woman loves a man and hands herself totally over to him, this is a sign of union. The more people love one another the more they give themselves to one another and they become a more powerful sign of the infinite love of God who sought us out.

Today, we read a most beautiful phrase in the letter of Paul: *Christ loved the Church.* (49) The person who does not love the Church is not a Christian. Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with his own blood so that he might make her holy, without blemish, holy for all eternity. What would a husband do in order to maintain his bride always beautiful and young? Christ achieves this ... a Church always beautiful and young. We are making the Church more beautiful with our virtuous lives. We make the Church more pleasing by the way we live our lives as Christians.

Therefore, we never tire of becoming and making Church. When the members of our community die they are incorporated into eternal youth in heaven. Yes, they become a new Church because they have been taken from the Church of the Archdiocese in order to become part of the Church in heaven. What a beautiful pastoral ministry! Bishops, priests and all pastoral ministers are doing nothing more than beautifying the beautiful spouse of Christ, the Church, in which we are also participants. This is the covenant that Christ asks for. Christ does not tire of loving. He is always faithful even when we betray him, but we must make every effort to be holy and faithful.

The gospel offers us three wonderful means to live in solidarity with Christ: grace, faith, and the life of the Church. Grace: through which the Father allows us to know the Son and makes us

children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ. Faith: no one has this gift unless it is given to them by the Father. To believe in Christ is a work of God. We should thank God if we have this gift and if we do not possess this gift then let us ask him for it. We cannot achieve this by ourselves because he alone is the One who bestows this gift upon people. To live in the Church is to create community. Allow me, my brothers and sisters, to go on a little longer because I want to speak about the Church that we have created in our Archdiocese, a Church that is in communion with the Pope and with the universal Church.

### **Life of the Church**

At this moment in the history of our Church we have lived an historical week. We have been in unison with the Pope as he speaks about his concern for China.<sup>8</sup> The Pope wants to establish diplomatic relations with the government and with the Church. Very tragic events occurred in China in 1949. The hierarchy became independent of the Holy See and from that time they have established an autonomous Church. During these days a new bishop was named for Beijing and when the bishop became aware that the Pope wanted to establish relations of communion with the separated Church in China, the new bishop elected by the people of China opposed the Pope and does not want to enter into full communion with the Holy See. He wants the Holy See to establish relations with the government but wants the Church to remain independent of Rome. My sisters and brothers, this schism is very sad. We must pray frequently for the situations where schisms exist and we must never think of ourselves as being autonomous. That would be suicide! Jesus says: *a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine* (50). A branch that is separated from the trunk withers and dies.

I want to take this opportunity to speak to those who want to put me at odds with the Holy See. I want them to know that the Archbishop of San Salvador glories in the fact that he is in communion with the Holy Father. He respects and loves the successor of Peter.\* I know that I would not be rendering you, the People of God, a good service if I were to separate myself from the unity of the Church. This is far from my thinking! I prefer to die a thousand times than be a schismatic bishop.

In communion with the hierarchy of Costa Rica I want to tell you how beautiful it is to see the five bishops united in face of the strike that is taking place in Puerto Limón. They have proposed some steps so that the community is able to live once again in peace. I believe that these steps are very valid. Let us learn from the bishops of Costa Rica\* because they are teachers of the Church. They outline the following steps: First, a cessation to the violence; Second, those who have much must understand the situation of those who have little; Third, those who have made demands must have an objective vision of the difficult economic situation of the country at this time as well as an understanding of the economic situation of the world; Fourth, a firm resolve to save the democratic life, the freedom, dignity and fundamental values of the institutions of Costa Rica; Fifth, to listen and to be listened to with openness and understanding so that the dialogue is fruitful.<sup>9</sup> The voice of Costa Rica, the voice of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, can be very valid for the situation which we are presently living. Notice their words: *those who have much must understand the situation of those who have little*. The bishops also ask for realism from those who have gone on strike, realism in their demands and then ask management not to become closed minded and adopt a position that everything is impossible. They must be aware of the fact that the great profits that they have reaped (not today, but definitely in the past) constitute a form of property that the Pope has said: *there is a social mortgage on all private property*<sup>10</sup> (John Paul II, Opening Address at Puebla, III, 4). In light of the common good all private property has a social mortgage. If during times of crisis it is necessary to lose money, and take money from one's own pocket, then this must be done because

the human person is much more important than the profits of the factory or the industry. In the eyes of the Church the human person is most sacred.

In this community in which we are building the Archdiocese there is news of a priestly character. Our beloved Vicar-General, Msgr. Ricardo Urioste, has returned to the United States. This is the reason he has been absent but his visit to the United States is for the good of our Archdiocese and a service for our Church. On Wednesday,\* God willing, he will be interviewed and we will ask him to give us his impressions of his trip. You can listen to this interview on Radio YSAX.

Father Cristóbal Cortés who has functioned as Vicar-General during the absence of Msgr. Urioste will continue in that role. The Diocese has much work and according to the laws of Canon Law we are allowed to have two or more Vicars-General. Thus both Msgr. Urioste and Father Cortés are Vicars-General and have my complete confidence and the confidence of the priests and the people.\*

We pray for the health of Father Raúl Alberto Flores, the chaplain at La Vega. He is recuperating little by little but he is still not healthy.

I also ask you to pray for our brother, Bishop Rafael Valladares who was the auxiliary bishop of San Salvador. We will celebrate the anniversary of his death on August 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Sisters are also in mourning. Sister Rosita Díaz from Bethania in Santa Tecla died. We send you our condolences and we have already gone there to express these condolences to you personally.

Life in our communities is also flourishing. In San Antonio Abad we celebrated the conclusion of their patronal feast on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the feast of the Assumption.

On August 24<sup>th</sup> in Arcatao there was a beautiful patronal feast celebration in honor of Saint Bartholomew.

Once again I want to call your attention to the military blockades at the entrances to those towns that were celebrating their traditional patronal feasts. Respect the joy of the people! Even the fireworks were confiscated! And we know that if there are no fireworks there is no celebration. Someone has said that when I talk about being searched, I am looking for praise from the people. My sisters and brothers, when I travel to these towns I do not go there as some arrogant or boastful person. I go because it is my pastoral duty and the people ask me to do this.\* I believe that it is right for the Archbishop to protest when civil authorities make me get out of my car (which was never done before), then search me as a vile suspect, make me empty my pockets and search all my possessions. I protest because I have a right to go and visit my flock wherever they might be and I also have a right to have these meetings undisturbed because the people have prepared these sessions with great kindness.\*

Yesterday in the community of San Juan Opico there was a beautiful Confirmation ceremony that had been prepared by the priests of the vicariate. I praise this wonderful gesture of priestly unity.

This afternoon we will celebrate the second anniversary of the assassination of Don Felipe de Jesús Chacón who, like Saint Bartholomew, was skinned for proclaiming the gospel.

In La Palma there was a meeting of a cooperative nature and we give thanks to God for this.

Cáritas has complained that official organizations have put obstacles in the path of their work in Aguilares, El Salitre, Los Martínez, Arcatao, El Portillo and El Paraíso.

Enough news for today, my sisters and brothers, but I want to tell you that this is a lively community. Thanks to God I feel proud of my Archdiocese and I know that wherever I go, there is a gospel spirit and people follow the paths of Jesus. I am not going to deny that in our Church we see the same thing as Jesus: some people leave us and others criticize us. How difficult is this word! Others reject the Church and do not believe but there is always a group that says: *to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (51). So be it.\*

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<sup>1</sup> Communication of the National Executive Committee of the Partido Unión Democrática Nacionalista: “El UDN contrario a la participación en las elecciones de 1980”, *El Diario de Hoy*, 22 August 1979.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See *Diario Oficial*, 9 August 1979.

<sup>4</sup> See *El Salvador: entre el terror y la esperanza*, UCA Editores, San Salvador, 1982, pp. 429-430.

<sup>5</sup> Comunicado de prensa de las organizaciones sindicales, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 18 August, 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Two people are involved: Eugenio Guardado and Francisco Guardado. See “Solidaridad”, *Orientación*, 26 August 1979.

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions*, I,1: PL 32, 661.

<sup>8</sup> See Allocution of John Paul II (19 August 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 26 August 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Message of the Episcopal Conference of Costa Rica, *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 August 1979.

<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.

*Marginal References* (1) Mt 17,5; (2) Jn 6,68; (3) Jn 6,1-13; (4) Jn 6,33; (5) Jn 6,51; (6) Jn 6,51b; (7) Jn 6,54; (8) Jn 6,63; (9) Jn 6,68; (10) Jn 6,63; (11) Jn 6,51b; (12) 1Cor 15,47; (13) GS 33; (14) Jn 6,63; (15) 1Cor 10,11; (16) Ep 5,25; (17) Jn 6,63; (18) Jn 6,26-27; (19) Jn 6,58a; (20) Jn 6,58b; (21) Gn 1,28; (22) Jos 24,15; (23) Jos 24,16; (24) Jn 6,63; (25) Jn 6,66; (26) Jn 6,67; (27) Jn 6,15; (28) Jn 6,26; (29) Jn 6,60; (30) Jn 6,67; (31) Jn 6,68; (32) Jn 6,68b; (33) Jn 6,63; (34) Jn 6,67; (35) Jn 6,68; (36) Jn 6,61-62; (37) Jn 6,63; (38) Jn 6,51a; (39) Jn 6,44; (40) Jn 6,68; (41) Jos 24,15; (42) Jn 6,15a; (43) Jn 6,15b; (44) Jn 6,33; (45) EN 32; (46) Jn 6,67-68; (47) Ep 5,32; (48) Ep 5,31; (49) Ep 5,25; (50) Jn 15,5-6; (51) Jn 6,68.