

THE CHURCH BEFORE GRIEF & VIOLENCE

¹**Funeral of the Chancellor, Mauricio Borgonovo**

May 11, 1977

My dear sisters and brothers.

In this most solemn gathering, our faith discovers that the protagonist, the central figure in this coming together, is Christ, our Lord.

I invite you then to lift up your eyes toward this Jesus because only he can speak the Word of God that is so necessary at this moment. Through great faith in the Church, we come to understand that the Church does not speak words of this world but words of heaven. Through great faith in the Church, we come to understand that the Church extends Christ's message to humankind and the Church understands his language, the language of an eternal Christ who enters into an eternal dialogue with humankind. Yet humankind finds these realities absurd and thus finds no easy explanation for their situation. They are like Martha who spoke to Jesus, almost reproaching him: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died* (a). Jesus calms her with the serenity of one who holds in his hands that which is eternal: the heart and life itself. He says to her: *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will never die* (b)

How great is the word that God wants to speak at this moment. This word is great because great is the pain that resulted from the death of our beloved Chancellor, Mauricio Borgonovo, who now rests in peace.

Great is the word that God wants to speak because the body that is here means a great crime has been committed and great violence has been done. This word has to be great because no human person, no power, no sister or brother can now speak words of harmony and love --- words that the people of El Salvador need at this time.

A word comfort in face of pain

This word has to be great because of the pain. We understand our beloved Sarita² (and with her we feel for the whole family) because we have been very close to her family. It is a great satisfaction for the Church to have shared the pain and the terrible, bloody agony. It would be difficult to find anyone who has died in agony but died in a way that everyone expected. What pain!

We understand this anguish and only Christ can speak an adequate word of comfort. Thanks to God, this Christ lives in the Church. Even though her intentions are distorted, the Church is Christ and continues to console, and to bring comfort to painful situations. The Church who has no other word but that of Christ, can speak this word because she is immortal. Yes the Church is composed of frail human beings, but she bears within herself the Spirit of Christ. How much hope is awakened by this eternal Word! A hope from above that invites the beloved family of Borgonovo Pohl and all who feel this pain in the depths of their being, to elevate their hearts toward that supreme goal where Mauricio lives, where he

lives with the risen Christ. When Jesus rose, he left his hiding place --- we do not know where Jesus was, but we believe that there were thousands of souls with him and many souls were in anguish. The consolation of this risen Christ was derived from a torrent of light and from the comfort of his family who listened to his words of eternal life.

This hope is not alienation, as the communist doctrine states. Our religion preaches hope and not the alienation of men and women. The Church is not communist but is filled with hope in God and in eternal life. The Church proclaims to humankind the significance of this hope and says that it is worthwhile to engage in the struggle, to be honorable and to die, even though one is the victim of these cruel and criminal actions. In death one has the satisfaction of having served with honor one's family, country and all of humanity.

God is most generous and so Mauricio's reward will be great and the consolation of his family must also be great.

The rejection of violence

I also believe that only Christ can speak a harsh word, a great word in face of this crime. The Church, who continues the teaching of Christ, rejects violence. She has stated this thousands of times and none of her ministers preaches violence. The Church preaches the words of Jesus: *All who take the sword will perish by the sword* (c). The Church continues to proclaim the voice heard in the Bible: *Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil* (d). God, our Lord, cries out against injustice and crime and violence and, thanks to God, the Church has been very decisive in regard to the situation of our beloved Chancellor.

The Church has been with those who suffer and has always rejected violence. In front of the body of our beloved Chancellor I repeat: violence is neither Christian nor human... nothing that is achieved through violence can long endure. It is said that the human person is more important than everything else. Therefore, *the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath* (e). It is necessary then, to view the law in this context, for when these considerations are forgotten one commits crimes such as this horrendous assassination of another human being. The commandment: *you shall not kill* (f) is always shouted out by God --- it is a cry from God to the human heart.

Those who carry out this violence in such an extreme way cannot continue to live with serenity.

A call to harmony

Finally my sisters and brothers, at this time I want these following words to be my most powerful words: we are called to live in harmony. At this moment only Christ can proclaim: *love one another* (g). Only Christ, living in his Church, can say: the power of the Christian is found in love, not in hatred or vengeance or resentment. My sisters and brothers, we must distance ourselves from the wave that many await, this wave of crime and vengeance. We must say, no! Responding to violence with more violence will never establish peace in the world. Saint Paul says: *do not repay anyone evil for evil* (h) but extinguish evil with good, with a wave of goodness and love and an environment of understanding.

Beloved Mauricio, after such a terrible death, your heaven is this: ask our Lord, who is love (i), to pour forth his love upon the people of your country, upon all the people of El Salvador so that we might know how to forgive and thus leave vengeance to the only one who can rightfully avenge, God our Lord. Ask God to pour forth his love upon us so that we might dedicate ourselves to the building up of this country that is being split apart. Finally ask God to pour forth his love upon the Church that bears within herself a message of love, so that this Church might know how to give the world the strength that it needs.

Dear sisters and brothers, let us pray for our beloved Borgonovo Pohl. Prayer is necessary for every soul that enters eternal life because we do not know the mystery of their faults or the need they have for God's mercy. But we are sure that God sees this gathering of people in prayer and suffering and hopefully of hearts open to goodness.

Let us pray not only for the eternal rest of our dear brother, but also for our country, and may Mauricio, from his place in the Kingdom, watch over us; may he join us in this prayer. How beautiful the world would be if we loved one another! If there were no violence like that which took the life of our brother! If we understood the significance of human relations! Let us pray a prayer that unites us together more firmly as sisters and brothers, a prayer that gives rest to our brother, a prayer that does not disturb his rest. Hating one another will certainly disturb his rest; but if we love one another we hasten the coming of the Kingdom. We do not know the mysteries of the beyond, but there is certainly a relationship between life here after and life here and now: the degree in which we here in the world become an antechamber of heaven, united in love and understanding and hope and faith, then heaven itself opens even wider to the realities of happiness and recompense. There is a mutual relationship.

My sisters and brothers, after witnessing this crime, may our land be converted into an antechamber of God's forgiveness.

Let us celebrate our Eucharist. May this Divine Word find echo in your hearts, not because it is pronounced by a human person who is simply an instrument of the eternal Word of God, but precisely because it is a Divine Word. Then, united to the Creator who becomes present in the Eucharist, in the Body and Blood which is given up for us, may our prayer unite us more closely as sisters and brothers, may Mauricio have eternal rest and may his family be given Christian consolation.

¹ The corpse of Dr Mauricio Alfredo Borgonovo was discovered early in the morning of 11 May after 20 days of being kidnapped. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 11 May 1977.

² Sara Pohl de Borgonovo, mother of Dr Mauricio Borgonovo.