

## IN CHRIST THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF TRULY GREAT PEOPLE ARE REVEALED

**Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
September 23, 1979**

*Wisdom 2:12, 17-20*

*James 3:16-18. 4:13*

*Mark 9:29-36*

My dear sisters and brothers.

Thanks be to God the fourth Pastoral Letter is being distributed<sup>1</sup>. I recommend that everyone reflect on this letter because it is an attempt to enlighten the present situation of our country with the words of the Archdiocese. At the same time it is an official presentation of the document of Puebla to the Archdiocesan community so that, according to the desire of the Pope<sup>2</sup>, the wise pastoral guidelines of this document might come to life in our ministry. Our Archdiocese always desires to be docile to the will of the Pope and always wants to be enlightened by the teaching of the universal and continental Church. This gives us much strength and so I want everyone who feels committed to the Archdiocese, as well as those who criticize us, to study the authentic teaching of the Archdiocese.

Taking into consideration the thinking of the present Pope and Puebla (1), this Pastoral Letter highlights the doctrine concerning the human person. In a desire to be docile to this will and teaching we state: *Human beings, by virtue of their dignity as the image of God, merit a commitment from us in favor of their liberation and their total fulfillment in Christ Jesus. Only in Christ is their more intimate reality fully known. Hence we, being pastors, speak to human beings and proclaim to them the joyful news that humanity has been assumed and exalted by the very Son of God. For he chose to share with human beings the joys, labors, and sufferings of this life and the heritage of eternal life.*

We come to Mass every Sunday to know Christ and his great mystery. As we attempt to understand the mystery of Christ we also discover the mystery about ourselves. No one has such a precise concept of the human person as that which is reflected in Christ. The Vatican Council states: *The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light* (2). The reading from Saint Mark's gospel, that Sunday after Sunday designates our study of Christ during the year, has presented us with the first aspect: during the first part of the year that concluded last Sunday we reflected on the mystery of the Son of God, the mystery of the Messiah and concluded with the wonderful profession of Peter: *You are the Messiah* (3). Saint Mark begins the second part of his gospel by explaining to us that the Messiah is also the Son of Man. In fact, the second part of Saint Mark's gospel could be titled: the gospel of the Son of Man. Jesus gives expression to the person of the Messiah, but not some false triumphant Messiah who easily conquers all and has worldwide domination, a domination that occurs almost spontaneously and miraculously. No, Jesus is the Messiah who must conquer with the cross, pain and suffering. Jesus must incarnate in his divine greatness the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh, the servant that appears in the Book of Isaiah: (4) spat upon, beaten, crowned with thorns, humiliated in ways that no other person experienced. This image appears strange to those who hoped for a triumphant

Messiah: *how can there be a suffering Messiah?* The joining together of the triumphant and suffering dimension is the task that Jesus undertakes in the passages that are presented to us for our reflection today and the Sundays that will follow.

Thus the doctrine concerning the human person and our reflection on Jesus are parallel. I believe that today more than ever in El Salvador we need to know Christ. Today we need Christians and from among these Christians will come humanity's true liberators. Otherwise we will be given violent and aggressive political movements of the extreme right or the extreme left, but we will not be given true human beings. From among Christians, from among you, my beloved sisters and brothers, from your communities that ponder God's Word as we are doing today in order to know Christ's mystery --- from you will come the true liberators that the nation needs. Let us be today's Christians. Let us not be frightened by the boldness of today's Church. With Christ's light let us illuminate even the most hideous caverns of the human person: torture, jail, plunder, want, chronic illness. The oppressed must be saved not with a revolutionary salvation or in merely human fashion, but must be saved with the holy revolution of the Son of Man who dies on the cross to cleanse God's image which is soiled in today's humanity --- a humanity so enslaved, so selfish and so sinful.

In the light of today's readings, I title my homily: *In Christ the three dimensions of truly great people are revealed.* Only great people will fulfill the following three dimensions: First, justice that is proven through persecution; Second, service animated by love; Third, a transcendence that identifies the weakest and the humblest with God.

This is true liberation! The liberation that is proclaimed in today's readings, especially in the gospel where Jesus reveals the three dimensions of truly great people. My sisters and brothers, I believe that the saints have been the most ambitious people. They wanted to be truly great and they are the only truly great persons. Earthly heroes cannot attain the heights of a saint. This is my ambition for you and for me: to be great, ambitiously great, because we are God's image and we cannot be content with mediocre greatness. I want everyone to aspire to greatness but greatness according to the dimensions that Jesus offers us today. Without these there is no true greatness.

### **Justice that is proven through persecution**

First of all, a justice that is proved in persecution. What a beautiful parallel is offered to us in today's liturgy! The first reading from the book of Wisdom speaks to us about the persecution of the just by the impious. Here we listen to words that were spoken in the gospel when Jesus' enemies crucified, killed, ridiculed and laughed at him: *he said he was the Son of God. See if God comes and saves him! We will believe him if he comes down from the cross.* (5) This was the ridicule of the impious against the just One, just as we heard in the first reading from the book of Wisdom. (6) Today's gospel recounts the second announcement of Jesus' passion. His passion is announced three times in Saint Mark's gospel. We heard the first announcement last Sunday which occurred in the beautiful area of Caesarea Philippi on the lower slopes of Mount Hermon by the side of Lake Gennesaret. Today Jesus descends the mountain and is walking along the shores of the lake, traveling to what he called *his city*, Caphernaum. Perhaps today's events occurred in the house of Peter.

When they arrived, Jesus once again explained to the disciples that the Son of Man had to suffer and be handed over to people who would kill him, but three days later he will rise! (7) Again a beautiful synthesis of the kerygma! This is Jesus and we will proclaim this mystery after the words

of institution when we sing: Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! Jesus has to be humiliated and put to death but he will rise on the third day. This is the path of true salvation.

The disciples did not understand this announcement concerning the Son of Man and suffering. The gospel says: *they did not understand the saying and they were afraid to question him* (8). They were afraid to ask Jesus any questions because within their hearts they knew that Jesus would affirm his words and clarify for them the horrors that he had to suffer. The disciples did not want to know the things that they did not want. This also explains why so often people do not want to accept the reality of a persecuted Church --- they do not want to know anything about persecution and all of this appears as demagogy.

The disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about the reasons for his suffering. Instead of fleeing from a harsh and bloody explanation, one must confront the question and ask the question and accept the reality of persecution. Jesus desires that we have no fear and that we follow him if we want to be faithful: *Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me* (9). Only in this way can we be a true follower of Jesus. Jesus does not want fearful Christians: *Be not afraid! Accept persecution and know that this is the only authentic path for those who want to save the world together with me.*

My sisters and brothers, why persecution? We have persecution because it is the true power of redemption and is in conformity with the will of God: *Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done* (10). Jesus had to taste the bitter cup of persecution. When Peter took out his sword to defend Jesus he was told: *put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.* (11) *Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?* (12). It was necessary to take up the cross and be put to death like a vile criminal. This was important to do because this is what the Father wanted. It was the will of the Father that the sins of the world should be washed with the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. This was important to do because the sins of people were grievous sins. Hopefully we would think about this when we want to become rebellious because true holiness, the holiness of God, consists of asking for purification and turning away from sin. It was necessary for the Father to ask for the blood of his only Son and not excuse him because *it was our infirmities that he bore and our sufferings that he endured.*

The first reading explains the *why* of persecution. Yesterday in Guazapa some catechists asked me: *why the persecution? If we preach that which is good, why do people not want to understand this? Why do they misinform others and call our meetings subversive? You know why? Hopefully we would have the wisdom of today's first reading. The impious say: the just one ... reproaches us for our transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training* (13). This is the first reading: the attitude of the just reproaches the attitude of the unjust. It is like the dawning of day when darkness has to hide and flee. The holy justice of God cannot affirm the sins of the world. The world has to persecute the light. Jesus said: *they preferred darkness to light* (14). Thus we are able to know who we are: people who are with God or people of darkness. Yesterday in Guazapa I told the catechists: *Now is the time when we know who is who!* Now we know who are the true followers of Christ because despite persecution and misunderstanding and slander they remain faithful. They do not become weak but know how to bring the light to the world.

We find in the first reading another reason that explains persecution. Persecution proves and reveals the transcendence that we bear within ourselves. *He said he is the Son of God! Let us test him and see if God saves him* (15). How sad! These people believe that everything is resolved in worldly history. They believe that they triumph by humiliating Christians with torture and

imprisonment.\* Speaking about martyrs, Saint Augustine said: *Look at the executioner holding his triumphant sword over the body of a martyr! Who has conquered! There is no doubt that the executioner has conquered his victim.*<sup>3</sup> But the one who has conquered by the brute force of the sword has not understood the greatness of the one who was willing to give his life for a higher ideal. This is the true victory that overcomes the world.

This hour of trial will pass and the ideal for which so many Christians died will shine forth. We are living in a dark night but Christians are able to see that beyond the night the dawn already glows and they carry in their heart the hope that never fails. Christ goes with us! We are not afraid! We are children of God even though they laugh at this name just as they laughed at Christ --- *he said he is the Son of God! Let him save himself* (16). They laughed because they thought they had triumphed over the Son of God. Jesus could have come down from the cross and annihilated and made his enemies dust. Nevertheless he hid his inner greatness because he had to save the world with a conviction that the world could not understand. Therefore, persecution must be a reality so that those who bear a deep hope in their souls may put it to the test, so that perhaps the unbelieving may be converted and see that history's horizon does not end with life but reaches far beyond where the ideals of God's true children extend.

I read the words that John Paul II proclaimed concerning his predecessor, Pope Paul VI. His words come to mind like a ring comes to a finger because today we are reflecting on the reasons for persecution. John Paul II called Pope Montini an *apostle of Jesus crucified. He knew the interior dimensions of the cross. He was not a stranger to insults and lack of respect because he suffered as a servant and teacher of the truth. He was not a stranger to pain or anguish.*<sup>4</sup> I had the pleasure of meeting Pope Paul VI and saw in his glance the calm serenity of one who is persecuted for the sake of justice. His encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* was called a reheating of Marxism by the important newspapers of the world. His wonderful encyclical *Humanae Vitae* was vilely slandered as ignorant. When the Pope signed the encyclical he said: *this has cost us a Gethsemane (the prayer of Jesus in the garden) because we know what we are going to affirm is difficult, but it is necessary.* He was truly an apostle of Jesus crucified. What a beautiful title and it would be great if the same could be said of every Christian: an apostle of Jesus crucified. We are therefore invited to embrace the profound philosophy and theology of the cross and to carry this theology in the intimacy of our heart. In this way we become Christians who understand this dimension, namely, that the just are proved through the persecution of the Church and are not ashamed of this fact. We know the meaning of these words because they were applied to Jesus and led him to the gallows. But Jesus knew that he did not die for any other reason except that of obeying the Father who wanted to prove the incredible dimension of truly great people, a dimension that Jesus held in the intimacy of his heart: the dimension of suffering, the dimension of pain.

Do not be surprised at being innocent and having to suffer. The more innocent that one might be when bearing the cross, the greater is one before God. This past week I celebrated Mass for a young boy who died of cancer. I told his grieving parents and those who attended the Mass: *do not be scandalized that God takes these measures. It appear to be unjust. Why this innocent person? No! Does God want to show heaven and earth that everything in this world is lost? In this world there is so much violence and hatred, so much evil and sin and yet God can uproot such a pure flower and bring it into his kingdom and place it beside his throne. The innocent ones are not ashamed of their innocence nor are they scandalized by their suffering. They are flowers that God is cultivating in this valley of mud and sin. They are holy victims that have a need for his purification.*

In the same hospital, a little girl is suffering. She is about ten years old and has cancer. They operated on her brain and she is going to die. Why her, Lord? The book of Wisdom gives us the answer: *the impious want to throw their injustices in the face of God* (an adaptation of Wisdom 2:12). But God returns the sentence and says that the good behavior of the innocent ones is a reproach of sinners and that this is necessary in order to reveal to the world the reality of human transcendence which does not come to an end in history but rather God is cultivating this human transcendence for eternal life. This is not opium but gives real value to the suffering of this world.

How much suffering! So much poverty! So many hovels! Even the government has said: *people live in conditions where they are totally deprived of hygiene, health and sustenance*. Why this, Lord? This occurs because of the sin of those who are evil. Looking at these injustices, the sinner who enjoys his home and does not allow those on the margins of society and those who are suffering to obtain more decent homes --- naturally these people are scandalized. They throw in the face of God the very injustices they are committing. But God has atoned for this suffering and so we ought to repent. As the Pope said when speaking about the Virgin beneath the cross: *her's was not a suffering of alienation. Mary was not in agreement with the injustices of the Empire. Mary knew and sang in her Magnificat that God was able to throw down mighty rulers for their thrones and send the arrogant away empty handed*. (17)

Hopefully the lesson of Jesus that is communicated to us in Saint Mark's gospel is understood and lived in our time when we are in so much need of the truth. Our poverty and alienation and suffering and hunger and underdevelopment should not lead us to violence and vengeance and hatred but rather should lead us to true liberation. Let us offer up all these realities in the same way that Jesus accepted the cross as the will of the Father. Let us do this not so that we die in conformity with this oppression but rather change his resurrection from oppression into the true liberating force of our people.

### **Service animated by love**

This idea is presented to us in today's readings. Another dimension of truly great people: *I have not come to be served but to serve and to give my life for the salvation of the world* (18). These are the words of Jesus who wants to teach us the same lesson that the apostles had to learn. The disciples had been discussing among themselves who was the greatest. Jesus was aware of their discussion and so when they arrived at the house in Capernaum he asks them: *what were arguing about on the way?* (19). No one dared to say anything. It was such an embarrassing theme to talk about in the presence of Jesus.

We have forgotten the true Christian spirit and are thinking about who is the greatest, who can do more, who has more money or has greater influence in the political arena. These greatnesses of the earth Jesus leaves languishing. If a person achieves a position of leadership in the political or social or economic arena, this person should not view his greatness from the perspective of material things which can escape from one's hands when one least expects.

Jesus says: *true greatness, the one who wants to be the greatest and the one who wants to be first must become the last and the servant of all* (20). In light of this principle we can discuss among ourselves who is the greatest. Will not the greatest one be the person who serves with greater humility and love? Anyone who is chosen for society's needs, to be a cabinet member, to be president of the republic, to be archbishop --- is the servant of God's people. That must not be forgotten. The attitude to be taken in these offices is not: *I'm in charge here! What I want must be*

*done!* We are only a poor servant of God. We must be at the Lord's beck and call to serve the people according to God's will and not according to our whim.

The will of God is what prevails in the service of authority. True many have thrown in our face the fact that we preach against authority and are subversive. We have never preached against true authority. Yes, we have preached against the abuse of authority. \* All authority comes from God and must be respected. If somebody is great it is because the one administering this authority knows that it has come from God and pertains to a moral order that should not be transgressed. But when authority trespasses on the moral order and commands such things as abusing people and other abuses of authority, then that is the time when we must remember Saint Paul's words: *all authority comes from God* (21). Let us also be mindful of the words of Saint Peter: *We must obey God rather than men* (22).\*

When Jesus organized his Church he taught his disciples the true characteristics of the Church. Another name for the Church is *diakonia*. This is a Greek word that means *service*. This word came into use when there were not enough apostles to attend to the growing number of Christians. (23) The apostles called seven men who were filled with the Spirit of God and called them deacons. Deacon means servant. Thus the Church was given the name *daikonia* or service. The Church is one who serves.

When the Second Vatican Council examined her structures and reflected on the hierarchy, the bishops said that they do not pretend to be princes like those who have prostituted the figure of the bishop: we are not princes and we are not kings. We have not come to be served but as they stated in the Council document: *We are endowed with sacred power of serving our brethren* (24). My dear sisters and brothers, I am your deacon; I am your servant and all the pastoral ministers (priests, sisters and communities) whose ministry is derived from the responsibility of the pastor --- all of these persons should be viewed from this perspective of service. I am very happy --- in fact I want to tell you that I experience a great joy --- that each day our Archdiocese is coming to a more profound understanding of the meaning of service. If there still remain some unpleasant aftertastes of imperialism, of earthly power, of paternalism, then I invite all of the beloved priests and superiors of religious communities of men and women to understand that your role is not one of a *boss* but you are servants of the community, people who know how to listen to the desires of the people and also know how to guide the people toward God, who know how to serve the needs of people.\*

You, as lay people who are not priests or bishops or men or women religious --- what does the Council say about you? The Council states: *Jesus has shared his power with others so that serving Christ in their fellow men they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom to serve is to reign* (25). This is the greatness of Christian service: *to serve is to reign*. When I say that I am your deacon and that I am your servant I do not say this to obtain your applause. I have never looked for this from anyone but rather you have spontaneously given me your applause and I know that I am not mistaken about this because I know that here your applause is an expression of people who experience a certain unity with the one who is speaking these words and who is trying to serve you in your deepest felt needs.\* I say that this is not opportunism but is something more and forgive me for saying this, but I am not so interested in your affirmation as I am in the affirmation of God; I am not so interested in gaining your hearts --- which thanks to God I experience a certain kindness that has almost made me king of this community --- as I am in feeling that I am king before God. Serving him is to reign and the more humbly I am able to serve the people the more will I be able to reign.\*

The same could be said if we were to invert the words of the Council and instead of saying *to serve is to reign* we could also say *to reign is to serve*. In other words if people achieve a position of authority then this should be considered as a opportunity to serve others because only from the perspective of service can one reign. It is for this reason that we have so many problems because people have not understood the joy of being humble, because people have not understood the meaning of being a servant. Like the disciples we still want to discuss the question: *who is the greatest here on earth?* (26). We continue to make our joy and our power depend on the vanities of this earth. Hopefully we will change our ways. Hopefully all those who have positions of authority will change their ways so that they do not think that they have this high position because of their own merits but rather that they have achieved this position in conformity with the will of God.\* The Bible says: *Woe to those who are powerful because they will be judged more rigorously by God* (27).

We could continue to speak about this aspect because it is most beautiful and it would be a great lesson if we learned this Sunday how to be humble and if we allowed our joy to revolve around serving God in the person of the poor. This leads me to my third point, to the third dimension, the third reality of a truly great person according to the thinking of Jesus. Let us not forget what we have already said: the first dimension is to be just in the midst of persecution and the second dimension which we have just reflected on is to allow our service to be animated by love and humility., and the third a transcendence that identifies even the weakest and the most humble with God

### **A transcendence which identifies the weakest and humblest with God**

Here we honor the International Year of the Child. What a beautiful image as Jesus takes a child from the multitude and places him in their midst and makes him a symbol of his preaching. Jesus interprets the message of the child. During this Year of the Child it would be good to put aside some of our sentimental and romantic ideas about children that in reality often leave children in poverty and misery. Last night a friend said to me: *Last night how sad I felt when I saw a young girl on the Boulevard de los Héros sleeping and clutching some newspapers that she had been unable to sell the previous day. She was afraid to return home because she knew she would be reprimanded for not having sold all the newspapers. It was almost eleven o'clock at night when I saw her. This is the sad reality for our children.*

Jesus takes a child and places him in the center of the assembly. What a beautiful living parable of Jesus. Then the gospel recounts Jesus' words: *whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me* (28). Look at the beautiful relationship that Jesus establishes between the child and God. Even the smallest child is great when Jesus accepts that child as his own cause. This is the same struggle as the Church when the bishops in Puebla speak about a preferential option for the poor because the child is the most eloquent figure of poverty.

I read in a commentary on the text of Saint Mark an historical note that said: *children in ancient times were not persons in the full legal sense ... Besides having to live under the authority of their parents they were also considered the property of their parents. They had no independence to act and were not seen as self-sufficient. This was truly a negation of oneself.* Jesus said: *whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself* (29), in other words, people must become like little children, like the human person who has no right to anything, who is unable to move unless told to do so by his father or mother. It is for this reason that so often the weak child is abused and not respected. But in today's gospel this weakness of the child is protected and embraced by Jesus who

says: *whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me* (30). Those who respect children are loved by Jesus and are also loved by God but not in some romantic way, as we have just said.

Children are delightful people but it is very dangerous if we see them as simply delightful. Children are so simple and naïve that any joke appears funny to them. Whoever sees a mother carrying her child in her arms says: *let me hold him/her* and takes the child into one's arms as one's own and feels as though the child is one with him/her. A child's smile is like a million dollars. How wonderful I feel when children trust me so much that they smile and hug me and give me a kiss when they leave Mass. It is as though I had a million dollars. Children are very precious not only in the human dimension but especially from the perspective that Jesus communicates to us today: the perspective of faith which allows us to embrace children in his name. This is the divine dimension of Christianity: to embrace a child in the name of Jesus which signifies that people see Jesus in this child, that they see incarnated in this child the Son of Man with all his divine greatness.

Therefore Puebla states that when we speak about a preferential option for the poor, this is not demagoguery or some vision of class struggle. Rather we invite all social classes, without any distinction, to take up as their own the cause of the poor and, even more, to take up as their own the cause of Jesus who at the end of time will speak to us words similar to those that he spoke today: *whatever you did for one of these little ones, you did to me* (31)<sup>5</sup>. This is transcendence. In my Pastoral Letter I say: *The transcendence of human beings is not an escape from problems here on earth, still less is it an opium that distracts them from their obligations in history. On the contrary, by virtue of this transcendent destiny people have the capacity to always remain critical vis-a-vis the events of history. It gives them a powerful inspiration to reach out to ever higher goals.* Transcendence propels people to become involved with the cause of children, the cause of the beggars, the cause of those who are ill, the cause of those who live in hovels. Transcendence propels us to share with all of these people. From their situation of misery and poverty we enable people to move beyond this earthly situation, to elevate it and promote it. We can thus say to people: *You are not garbage or a person on the margins of society.\** In fact we tell them just the opposite: *you are of great value! You are as valuable as the master who lives in the great mansions that you see and cannot possess. You are equal to all people because you are the image of God and are called to possess heaven.* This is the transcendence that provides a true dimension to great people.

When people accept the transcendent dimension and do not enclose themselves within the limits of temporal liberation, when leaders no longer massacre others, but incarnate a leadership style that gives all who follow them a dimension of true greatness, a dimension of divine transcendence, then this is the true liberation that the Church preaches. If the Church preached something else then she would be mutilating herself and would lose her originality and the power of liberation. The liberation that the Church preaches begins with the heart: freeing men and women from sin and elevating them to God, making them children of God.

Regarding the means to obtain this transcendent dimension, Pope Paul VI analyzed the present situation of humanity and said: *The spirit of poverty must be cultivated. (32) The spirit of poverty is far from all forms of covetousness which makes people want to have more rather than be more. Therefore we must cultivate this spirit of poverty because it will not allow us to kneel before the idol of wealth\* but will enable us to kneel before God.* Incidentally it is precisely with this dimension of transcendence that we find the dividing line between those who are truly holy and great and those who are evil and oppress. It is not I who am saying this but today's Scripture readings.



The first reading presents us with the impious who have an earthly vision: *let us torture the just one and let us ridicule him to see whether his word be true when he boasts that God is his Father. He reproaches us for our transgressions of the law; he disturbs us. Let us remove him from our sight and kill him* (33). What Biblical words: they can speak the language of so many criminals today! Why do they kill others? They kill them because they disturb and upset them. For me, the people who are killed are true martyrs in the popular sense. Naturally I am not speaking in any canonical sense where being a martyr supposes a process that involves the supreme authority of the Church that declares before the universal Church that such an individual is a martyr. I respect this law and would never say that the priests who were assassinated were canonized martyrs. But they are martyrs in the popular meaning of the word because they are men who proclaimed an identification with poverty. They are men who went to the dangerous limits where the White Warriors Union threatened them, singled them out and killed them as Jesus was killed. These are people who are truly just. Yes, they had their spots and wrinkles but who among us, my dear sisters and brothers, does not have faults of some kind? What person does not have to repent? The priests who were killed were men and yes, they had their faults, but these men allowed their lives to be taken from them and did not flee! They were not cowards but allowed their bodies to be subjected to torture and suffering and death. For me this is the same as baptism by blood because they were purified by their death. We have to respect their memory.\*

In the second reading we see more clearly the line that separates the impious from the just ones who are persecuted. Saint James, the practical man, clearly states: *the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits* (34). On the other hand, false wisdom arises from *your passions that make war with your members* (35). How rotten and decayed our bodies! It is from there that these passions make war within our bodies *from which arises jealousy, quarrels, disorders, every form of evil conflict, assassinations, selfish ambition, lavish displays of pleasure* (36).

Naturally these are two diametrically opposed sources of wisdom. The wisdom that comes from above, that which Jesus taught, gives one's life a dimension of service, love, suffering and offering of self to another. Then there is the wisdom that arises from the human person's desire for pleasure. What a struggle within our bodies! We all experience this desire for pleasure which Saint James speaks about so graphically. It is as though he is describing the situation of El Salvador when he says: *Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet what you do not possess and you end by killing others. You covet what you do not possess and so you struggle and quarrel. You ask but you do not receive because you ask wrongly and seek to spend your life in comfort* (37). Therefore we should not be asking God for these things because God will not become an accomplice of our shameful actions, but yes, God will collaborate in our suffering.\*

## **Life of the Church**

Illuminated by the Word of God I now want to review the events that have occurred in our Archdiocese. The various activities and the events of the past week ought to mean that as a diocese we place ourselves in line with that wisdom that comes from God. I, as the pastor of the Archdiocese, have no other ambition but that of building the Church. In my pastoral letter I say: *the prime contribution our Church ought to make to the life of this country: to be itself.*<sup>6</sup> When I summon my priests, religious communities, and pastoral workers to our pastoral labor, it is to build our Church. I am asked: *And when tomorrow things have been settled, what will the Church do?* I reply: *It will keep on being the same.* The Church is not developing itself for opportunistic purposes. It is trying to be part of the present time. At every moment the Church is ever Church. It

will feel fortunate if tomorrow in a more just order it need not speak about so many injustices, but it will always have the task of building itself on the foundation of the gospel. We will have that work to do in times of peace or persecution.

In the Chancery, that is, the headquarters or the central office of the Archdiocese, we have had some very important meetings. The Priests Senate met and this is a representative body of the priests that maintains a dialogue with the bishop. Through this body the bishop is related to all the priests who are represented in the Priests Senate.

We had a plenary meeting of the corporate members of Radio YSAX, in other words, our radio station is a legal entity governed by corporate law. We are not talking here about some underground radio station but one that has been legally constituted.

I also want to inform you about an important meeting between the priests who support our seminary and the formation team. Through dialogue we are always seeking for ways to provide a better formation for the young men in the seminary. I ask for your prayers in this regard so that our seminarians might be formed according to the actual needs of our Church.

I want to share with you some information about another Commission, that which deals with the administration of temporal goods and which helps the Archbishop to administer, according to the norms of justice, the goods that the Church needs for her pastoral mission. We dealt with the question of the Cathedral: the occupation of this building has had serious consequences not only on our worship but also on the construction that is taking place there. I would hope that people would be mindful of these realities because while the Church supports and is willing to struggle on behalf of the just demands of the people, we also ask organizations to be careful not to disturb or interrupt the public works of the people. At the present time the work on the Cathedral is at an impasse. The rector wanted to lay off the workers for an indefinite period of time but we thought that by doing this, everything would be lost. Thus we decided to make an effort to raise the money that is necessary in order to complete the work on the steeple --- a work that is urgent. We want to cover the large window frames and thus rehabilitate the Cathedral, the Cathedral of the poor. Even though the walls are not smooth and the large windows are not permanently installed, our Cathedral is a living witness of people who want to offer something great to the Divine Savior. We recognize our limitations in this regard and therefore we ask that you do not abandon us at this time of trial in the construction of the Cathedral.

The priests from the Vicariate of Asunción will be making their retreat this week. Each Vicariate has organized a time for their spiritual retreat. These retreats are a time when the priests separate themselves from their ordinary work and reflect on and evaluate their life and ministry.

With regard to the life of the religious in the Diocese, Sister Judith Chávez, who had been deported, has returned from Guatemala. This new decision gives us hope that the Department of Immigration is aware of the misinformation that was given to them by ORDEN but especially aware of the justice that the Church expresses as she defends herself and her ministers. What is most painful about this situation is that the telephone conversation between Sister and her pastor were violated and I believe we have a right not to be judged by our telephone conversations.

The Guadalupana Sisters who minister in Arcatao are defending themselves against false accusations before the immigration authorities. The immigration officials were shown that many of their facts were not accurate and also informed about the disrespectful way in which the Vicar General was treated. I want to state here: the Vicar General is the representative of the bishop and

in situations such as these has the right to accompany pastoral ministers as they defend the truth and justice.

I was happy to be able to visit the Claretian priests and seminarians in Santa Tecla. I also visited the Passionist seminarians who have taken up residence in the convent of San Francisco in Mejicanos.

A sister of the Dominican Congregation, Sister Cristina Rivas, who ministers in Chiltiupán has received threats from the White Warriors Union. The letter that Sister sent me seems to be in line with the words of Jesus when he said: *I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?* (38). Sister stated that she had been threatened and told to either leave or be killed because they believe she is doing evil work there. She wrote: *Here I take care of the community infirmary, give religion classes, work in the village of Las Termópilas and give first aid courses in the school and in the same village and also provide medicine for many people who are ill. For which of these work are they going to stone me?* This is the Church: always persecuted and always doing good.

There was a very beautiful Confirmation ceremony in the parish of San Juan, Cojutepeque. I am sorry that I was unable to personally visit the other parish in Cojutepeque but some extraordinary circumstances prevented this. I heard that the celebration there was also very beautiful.

In Guazapa and Aguilares we celebrated Confirmation for some young women and men who understand the significance of the commitment they have undertaken as they received the power of the Holy Spirit.

The community of Comasagua celebrated the feast of Saint Matthew on September 21<sup>st</sup>. I want to ask pardon of the parishioners because I was told that they were waiting for me but I do not remember having confirmed a commitment to go there because whenever I take on a commitment I fulfill it. I beg you, if there was any misunderstanding, please forgive me. I also want to greet you on the feast of your patronal saint.

I have received expressions of solidarity with our pastoral ministry from various places. Because of its significance and relevance at the present moment, I want to highlight here the solidarity that was expressed by the Human Rights Commission with our newspaper *Orientación*. They state: *Your newspaper is the only one that speaks the truth and informs and orients the people. Those who do not want to see this newspaper in the hands of the campesinos or the common people will be surprised because Orientación, like David,\* will overcome all the great campaigns of disparagement and misinformation carried on by the Goliath of the extreme right.*<sup>7</sup> Many thanks for your support and for your words of solidarity with the bishops and the clergy who are attempting to develop a liberating pastoral ministry as they build up of the Kingdom of God on earth. We also thank you for your on-going defense of human rights\* in El Salvador.<sup>8</sup>

Doctor Roberto Cuéllar, the director of the Legal Aid Office, continues to endure psychological warfare. Once again I ask people to remember that our Legal Aid Office provides an authentic service for the people. Any attempt to impede this work is frankly another form of persecuting our people.

Also the director of our YSAC is being persecuted. I wish to express my support and congratulations for this transmitter and what it achieves. In this respect, bear in mind the new

Catholic programmes it is trying to broadcast. I mentioned these the other day and there is information in *Orientación*.

I also protest the badly timed prank at the graduation ceremonies of Liceo Salvadoreño which frightened the girls and young women. The present circumstances and mental state of our people do not lend themselves to this kind of prank. I see here a lack of sensitivity on the part of the young men who did this. Hopefully they would use their enthusiasm and joy to take up the work of true liberation on behalf of our people.\* On top of all of this the newspaper misinformed people about this situation and then had to retract their statements.<sup>9</sup> We have said before that lies and misinformation are destroyed by themselves.

Let us now look at the universal Church. First, let us pray for the Pope's trip to the United States. You have been able to read in the newspapers the evil interpretations that have been given to the Pope's journey. Some people say that the Pope is traveling there to support Kennedy. The Pope is not concerned about these things but here I use the words of the gospel as words of comfort: *If these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry* (39).

On the first page of one of our newspapers<sup>10</sup>, it was stated that the Pope censured the Jesuits. Some people have said that I would not speak about this news because it is not convenient to speak on this matter. This is not true. I stated in my Pastoral Letter that in the body of the Church there are sinners and the mission of the Church is one of purification and repentance<sup>11</sup>. It is not surprising that the Pope would reconvene the Jesuits. But yes, I am offended when the press manipulates the news because so often once we obtain further information about these realities we begin to see how we have been misinformed. The press states that the Jesuits have been censured for certain defects but does not explain the nature of these defects. We ask for clarifications here. Because we want to be objective in this matter we are going to wait for the information that we have asked for and we will be honest in speaking about these things with you. On my part, I want to say that here in the Archdiocese the Company of Jesus is involved in a ministry that is most helpful for the Church and for the liberation of people. I believe that they deserve the full support of the Archdiocese.\*

### **Events of the week**

We could characterize this week as a week of statements because some very valuable statements have been published

ANEP has recognized that credibility in the democratic process and citizen participation in said process depends upon the creation of a climate of freedom and peace.<sup>12</sup>

AGEUS points out that during recent months instead of creating this climate of peace and freedom the economic, political, and social crisis has become worse.<sup>13</sup> They then enumerate some of the primary repressive actions that occurred during that time.

Here I want to highlight what I spoke about last week because I believe that the protagonists of the massacre that occurred during the demonstration of September 1<sup>st</sup> and the massacre of the children on an excursion to El Cuco ought to reflect on the following: if people have no freedom to protest and if such demonstrations are repressed with so much violence and bloodshed, then what can people expect from and how can people believe in this democratic opening that is so frequently spoken about?\*

The Chamber of Commerce has reminded us about important articles of our Constitution and they have encouraged the government to fulfill these articles.<sup>14</sup> I believe that here we have a key to the solution: a return to constitutionality. Thanks to God our Constitution is a good document even though it could be better. Nevertheless I believe that when the Constitution is trampled upon in the way that is now occurring, we become a people without law. A return to the Constitution would be a step toward civilization and we are in agreement with this call to constitutionality. The Chamber of Commerce has made a bold proposal: a change from a traditional regime that seeks power to a new regime based on civil values. Such a change would present us with the real possibility of giving our public life a more defined democratic orientation<sup>15\*</sup>

The Industrial Textile Association has supported the statement of FENAPES and, like the extreme left, has stated that a truce is not a passive action but provides us with an opportunity to initiate the structural changes that are so necessary.<sup>16</sup> If this truce is taken advantage of to initiate the changes that the people are asking for then I believe that we will also experience a cessation of many other actions that are reactions that arise from the fact that these necessary changes are being ignored by those in power. I therefore call upon those of the right and the left to come together so that we can begin to build a foundation for the initiation of true change.

Thus I would say that all of these statements that have been published and that point out rational paths for our future --- all of this is good. We cannot, however, be content with proposing theory and therefore I ask all these organizations to begin to contribute to this process according to your ability. Do not simply point out what should be done but also point out what you can contribute because this is most urgent. As each hour passes it becomes later and our contribution becomes more urgent. There is still time for rational solutions.

I am happy to have been given a copy of the common platform that was elaborated as a result of popular dialogue in which political parties, popular organizations, labor unions, etc., participated.<sup>17</sup> These groups were able to outline some steps with regard to a popular and democratic solution to the present crisis of our country. As I said to those who gave me this document, I believe this is a first step. As stated in the documents of Medellin (40) our people know how to engage in combat but they prefer peaceful paths. If we could begin to formulate some next steps that would make this document more concrete and thus move beyond theory and if all those organizations that have made statements during this past week would make a contribution to these next steps, then I believe, my sisters and brothers, that we would be able to find a peaceful and just solution to our crisis and would not have to experience more bloodshed which would surely be the result of an insurrection which will certainly take place when all other peaceful means have been exhausted. These peaceful means, however, have not been exhausted. I believe that the statements of the different organizations and the establishment of a common platform are inviting us to collaborate together with a generous and magnanimous spirit and to rebuild our nation. Let us engage in this task with reason and Christian faith and hope because this is how we, authentic people of El Salvador, are able to act. There is no need for any more bloodshed.

For this reason I want to criticize the results of the so called National Dialogue. Such poor conclusions! How clear that there is no desire to undertake the changes that the country needs!<sup>18</sup> It is necessary not only to listen to the voices of people who think the same as one does but also necessary to listen to the voices of those who proclaim the anguish of the people. These voices can be heard clearly in so many demonstrations that do not find an echo in those persons who should be speaking on their behalf. Instead of listening they resort to violence. Therefore I repeat that we urgently need to come to a rational understanding or else we will soon seek solutions in bloodshed and pain.

I am happy that several problems have been resolved. For example, after a six day strike the buses are once again moving. I send a very warm greeting to our people for their sense of collaboration and for finding a solution to their problem. I believe that we have all laughed a little bit and have had different experiences. During the time of this strike the pick-up trucks provided people with a means of transportation. Someone told me: *I believe that we have shared our joys and afflictions while riding the pick-ups more than we do when riding the buses.*

At the same time I want to express my solidarity with those who have suffered the loss of their buses as a result of past violence. I present the painful case of a bus driver/owner, José Alas, who placed all his hope in his work. He traveled on Route #30 and his bus, which cost 118,000.00 colones, was burned. He still owes much money on the bus and is examining the alternatives to be able to continue to work. We cannot ignore these situations. I believe that those persons who act so violently ought to realize that just demands are not achieved by such actions. These persons ought to take the appropriate means to listen to the people and enter into solidarity with people who seek an authentic liberation.

On my part, I have tried to be accommodating to the family members of the hostages being held at Cartotécnica and Arco Ingenieros who have approached me. Our Legal Aid Office has good news in this regard. As I said before I want to call your attention to this new manner of striking in which hostages are taken: I ask you to proceed with a true understanding of the human person. The way in which we seek just demands needs to be humanized. This movement should not be reduced to savage action but must be a movement that truly loves and looks for the solidarity of people, a movement that keeps in mind those humble persons who have been imprisoned and have lost their freedom. Let us respect people and be mindful of the words that Jesus has spoken to us when he tells us that children are an image of human impotence.

The Association of Farmers has confirmed the fact that 60% of the 481,000 houses of the *campesinos* do not have adequate hygiene or security. They propose building 200,000 new houses.<sup>19</sup> We would hope that this would truly better the conditions of our *campesinos* and not become a new way to exploit them.

The political-military attacks against the commanders and security agents have multiplied with the result that six guerrillas and four security agents have died, four others have been wounded and two by-standers were also wounded.

The following people have been abducted and we are concerned about their safety and identify with the pain of their families. Jaime Batle was abducted on September 13<sup>th</sup>, Dennis MacDonald<sup>20</sup> was abducted on September 21<sup>st</sup>, Mardoqueo Arnaldo Castillo, an accountant for the municipality of Apaneca and José Obudulio Borja, an alderman in the municipality, were abducted on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the young man Roberto Renderos, the son of the foreman of a large farm in the same area, was abducted on September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Lastly, and all of you are aware of this, Las Ligas Populares 28 de febrero has occupied the Department of Labor and has demanded a solution to the present labor conflicts, freedom for several of their fellow laborers and a satisfactory resolution of the case of Andrés de Jesús Aguirre who was arrested in Armenia. We pray to the Lord that this does not become another source of violence because we have seen that the security forces have drawn near to this place and also thrown teargas at the building.

Our people have suffered enough! I believe that it is urgent to undertake the changes that will get to the root of all these problems. I do not tire of pointing out the fact that if we want to

effectively end the violence then we have to eliminate the root of this violence, namely, structural violence, social injustice, the inability of citizens to participate in the public life of the nation and repression. All of these are the primary causes of the violence and everything else arises from this. We must enter into a reasonable dialogue and the statements and other indications that we have seen during this past week are signs of hope. I want to encourage these efforts that lead people to reflection and I would hope that this in turn leads people to be generous. I repeat here the words of an Italian bishop (or perhaps cardinal but I do not remember his name) who before the outbreak of the war told the people of his diocese: *Spogliatevi; se non, vi spoglieranno*, that is, *strip yourselves of these things before they are stripped from you*. The Church is saying the same thing: be generous and contribute what you can. It is impossible that a few people continue to rejoice selfishly in those things that are meant for the enjoyment of all people. Let everyone participate and share as sisters and brothers. There is still time to resolve our problems with charity and love, with justice and reason. If we do not do this then things will be taken from us by force and bloodshed. These then would be very costly victories! Hopefully things do not come to this extreme.

Here I conclude by providing a synthesis of the homily: Jesus points out to us the true greatness of the human person --- persecuted but just, serving others in love, and above all else, open to the dimension of transcendence, the Absolute. Only God can give the wisdom that makes the people of this earth wise. So be it.\*

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<sup>1</sup> *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, Fourth Pastoral Letter of Mons. Oscar A Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, 6 August 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Message of John Paul II to the Bishops of Latin America (23 March 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 1 April 1979.

<sup>3</sup> See St. Augustine, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Psalm 36, 2, 3; PL 36, 365.

<sup>4</sup> Homily of John Paul II commemorating the death of Paul VI (16 September 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 23 September 1979.

<sup>5</sup> See *Message to the peoples of Latin America*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Communication of the Commission of Human Rights of El Salvador relating to then homily given by the bishop of San Vicente, Mons. Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio (21 September 1979), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 22 September 1979.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See *Diario Latino*, 17 and 19 September 1979.

<sup>10</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 22 September 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Communication of the Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 20 September 1979.

<sup>13</sup> See La Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños ante la actual situación de represión en el país, *Diario Latino*, 19 September 1979.

<sup>14</sup> See La Cámara de Comercio e Industria de El Salvador ante el momento actual, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 19 September 1979.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 20 September 1979.

<sup>17</sup> See "Plataforma Común del Foro Popular", *ECA 371* (1979), pp. 843-845, and *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 September 1979.

<sup>18</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 September 1979.

<sup>19</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 21 September 1979.

<sup>20</sup> The General Manager of the firm Aplard of El Salvador, in the free zone of San Bartolo, Ilopango. He was kidnapped along with and Ecuadorian citizen Fausto Buceli Verdesoto. Two days after the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC) claimed responsibility. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 25 September 1979.

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Ac 4,19; (23) Ac 6,1-6; (24) LG 18; (25) LG 36; (26) Mk 9,34; (27) Ws 6,5-6; (28) Mk 9,37; (29) Mk 8,34; (30) Mk 9,37; (31) Mt 25,40; (32) ES 28; (33) Ws 2,12-20; (34) Jm 3,17-18; (35) Jm 4,1; (36) Jm 4,1-2; (37) Jm 4,1-3; (38) Jn 10,32; (39) Lk 23,31; (40) M 2,15.