

## WHAT GOD GIVES US IS FOR ALL

**Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**September 30, 1979**

*Numbers 11:25-29*

*James 5:1-6*

*Mark 9:37-42, 44, 46-47*

My dear sisters and brothers.

I announced at the beginning that we are celebrating this Mass in honor the great Pontiff whose reign was the shortest in this century: John Paul I. Yesterday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, was the one year anniversary of his unexpected death. Also during the celebration of this Mass which is the image of the pilgrim Church in the world, we accompany the great pilgrim, John Paul II who yesterday traveled to Ireland and later will arrive in New York where he will bring the message of the Church to all the people of the world.

Let us look at our first intention, namely, to honor John Paul I. I want to highlight him as a catechist. Even though he was the highest dignitary in the Church, he rejoiced in being the humble catechist who narrated the history of salvation and who initiated his Pontificate under the sign of a smile and simplicity. His brief Pontificate was enough time to reveal a new way of being, a new way of serving as Supreme Pontiff. Before he became Pope he wrote a book that was widely circulated under the title *Illustrissimi*. Each month as a bishop he wrote a letter to a famous philosophical or literary person. Today's readings from the holy Bible appear to coincide with one his letters that was written to Gilbert Chesterton, a famous English Catholic who wrote a work entitled, *The Ball and the Cross*. John Paul I developed this theme in a very wonderful catechetical style.

In Chesterton's novel there are two characters: Professor Lucifer and a monk named Michael. They are flying above London, above the dome of the cathedral. Professor Lucifer laughs and hurls blasphemy at the cross. Michael reproaches him: *I once knew a man like you, Lucifer*. The monk begins to tell the story of an atheist, a renegade, who climbed the steeple of the parish church and tore down the cross and hurled it to the ground. Later when he was walking home he saw an army of innumerable crosses linked together over hill and dale. He destroyed the forest because it seemed to him that he had to remove the cross from the world. When he arrived at his house he had become so obsessed with the cross that he thought he saw crosses on his furniture. So he destroyed all his furniture. *He burnt his house because it was made of crosses. He was found dead in the river*. His hatred of the cross drove him insane.

Lucifer said to Michael: *Is that story really true*. Michael responded: *Oh, no. It is a parable. It is a parable about you and all rationalists. You begin by breaking up the cross but you end by breaking up the habitable world ... If you take away God, what remains, what does humankind become,? In what sort of world are we reduced to living? I hear some say: "It is a world of progress, the world of well-being!" But what is progress without the cross?* Lucifer responded: *We struggle for a progress without God. God is not necessary because the efforts of the human person are enough. The idea of a paradise or a God who rewards people when they die --- this God*

*has been invented either by those who are oppressed because they want to find a way to evade their unjust situation or by those who oppress others and want to appease those who are under their power. The struggle is enough and this will save the world. Faith in God is an alienating faith but struggle and revolution will save the world. There will be no paradise that alienates people from history but here on earth people will build a paradise with their own efforts. .*

Michael responded: *You remember Dostoevski's Ivan Karamazov.* He refers to the story about an atheist who said he renounced the struggle in which only future generations would benefit. It is not just to struggle for a better world that is not rewarded with justice. Michael said: *And where will one who struggles for a better world find his reward? And who will give this reward? What is progress without God? What would the struggle be like if all we awaited was a paradise on earth? Would this not simply be an illusion? There is an innate sense of justice in the human person that leads them to engage in struggles for the just demands of people without thinking about future generations. I renounce a struggle in which I work until I die and thus I will have no participation in this better world and no reward. This innate sense of justice and innate sense of something beyond life is Christianity's response. There can be no struggle for a better world unless it is based on divine justice, on a God who rewards the efforts of women and men. A struggle without God has no meaning.* Michael tells Lucifer: *What has happened to you and me is that we have formed a false idea about God.*

According to the words of Pope Luciani, John Paul I, what many people combat is not the true God but a false idea that they have formed of God: *A God who protects the rich, who only asks and demands, who is envious of our progress in well-being, who constantly observes our sins from above to enjoy the pleasure of punishing them! My dear Chesterton, you know as well as I, God is not like that, but is at once good and just; father also to prodigal sons; not wanting us poor and wretched, but great, free, creators of our own destiny. Our God is so far from being man's rival that he wanted man as a friend, calling him to share in his own divine nature and in his own eternal happiness. And it is not true that he makes excessive demands of us; on the contrary, he is satisfied with little because he knows very well that we do not have much.*

This is the catechetical lesson of the great catechist of the world who looked at the universal history of the world and then God called him but only after giving us hope in the simple word of the true God, only after giving us hope in face of a world that had falsified their idea of God.

What is great in all of this is that the idea of God is not an invention of Pope Luciani. In today's reading I find the title for my homily which coincides with the thoughts of the Pope. Thus in this Mass we honor the doctrine, the catechist, the man with the wide smile, the man who knew how to confront the most absurd atheism with the simplicity of a catechist: *Do not be so foolish! A revolution without God, a God without women or men, men and women without God --- this is not the promise of history!*

I entitle my homily: what God gives is given for all people. I will develop the following points: One, spiritual goods, the magnanimity of God and the meanness of woman and men; Two, material goods, the justice of God and the selfishness of women and men; Three, excuse me for so much insistence on this point but again I want to speak about transcendence, the key to understanding the mind of God and strength to do what God desires. Without transcendence there can be no true struggle for liberation in the world.

**Spiritual goods, the magnanimity of God and the meanness of woman and men**

The gospel passage is beautiful because undoubtedly when Saint Mark wrote this passage these things were occurring in the primitive Church where he wrote the gospel that was dictated by Saint Peter when he was in Rome or Jerusalem. Here the apostles tell Jesus: *we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us* (1). The magnanimous response of Jesus is that which we are trying to learn: *Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us* (2).

Charisms, the wonderful gifts that God gives for the good of the whole Church, should not be monopolized by anyone. No one should feel less because someone else preaches better, because someone has received a gift from God. It would be absurd to attempt to cut off and mutilate what God is giving as a gift, perhaps giving to someone insignificant. How beautiful is Jesus' response: *if someone does miracles in my name then even though you do not think such people are with us, they are with us*. (3)

The first reading is even clearer. Moses had received the gift of prophecy from God and shared it with the seventy elders. One of them said: *two men, Eldad and Medad, are missing and they are prophesying in the camp* (4). A young man runs up to Moses to tell him this and Joshua, Moses' collaborator, tells him: *stop them!* Moses responds to Joshua: *Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of God were prophets* (Numbers 11:29). This is a magnanimous heart, a heart that knows that God gives his charisms and gifts not to be used according to the whim of those who have received these gifts but to build the kingdom of God. Saint Paul says that the Spirit gives to some the gift of healing, to others the gift of counsel, to others the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation.(5) Different charisms but all these gifts come together for building up the body of Christ which is the Church. This is the doctrine that is given to us in this first part of our reflection today.

Here we learn about the Spirit and institutions. Today it is stylish to see an antagonism between the Church as institution and the Church as charism and gift. There are people who see an opposition between the Spirit and the institution and therefore want nothing to do with the hierarchy, with the institution and want to be led by the Spirit as they perceive the Spirit in their own lives. Other people want the hierarchy to prevail in such a way that the gifts of the Spirit become useless. Yes, the Church is constituted by a harmony between these two gifts of charism and institution.

This is true and the Second Vatican Council has spoken about this: *Christ, with his gifts, did not confine himself to the Catholic Church. Outside the Church, among our Protestant, Muslim and Jewish sisters and brothers, indeed in the whole world, there are many elements of truth and grace that are the gift of the only redeemer of humanity, Jesus Christ* (6). We do not say that only in the Catholic Church does one find Christ. This would minimize Christ. We have to say that Jesus came to save all people even those who know nothing about Christian baptism but who with good will are living out their religion as they understand it.

True, the same Council stated: *In the Church founded by Christ and handed over to the Apostles, Jesus has left it with all the means of salvation. Thus if people doubt that in the Catholic Church the fullness of salvation can be found and make no effort to know the Church or become a member of the Church, then these people would sin* (7). They would sin because they have doubts and make no attempt to clarify their doubt with the truth. But as long as people, with good will, worship God in their own way, then there are elements of truth and grace because without grace no one can be saved. And who knows, my dear Catholic sisters and brothers, if outside the Catholic

Church there are not more holy people than inside the Church? Who knows if we, members of the hierarchy, who glorify ourselves because we are inside the institutional, hierarchical Church, are not as holy as those outside the Church whose heart is simple, who respect their sisters and brothers, who know God and the Spirit and who are grateful to the Lord.

This is the great lesson of spiritual goods. Look at the marvelous harmony of God! We have the inspirations and revelations that God has made known in the course of history. Generally these are not made to the institutional Church but to humble people of God. In Lourdes, a young woman, Bernadette Soubirous, was sent by God to her bishop and told him to build a Church. In Tepeyac, Mexico, Juan Diego receives from the Virgin the gift of the Spirit. But the hierarchy is needed to analyze and validate this inspiration and order all these things for the building up of the Kingdom of God. But this is what is so wonderful! In order that the hierarchy does not become filled with pride, a humble member of the People of God comes to them; and at the same time, so that this individual member of the People of God might not be mistaken, they go the hierarchy to prove their inspiration. Both institution and Spirit make the Church.

My dear sisters and brothers, here we focus on the reality of our Archdiocese. I give thanks to the Lord because in you, the people of God, religious communities of women, ecclesial base communities, humble people, *campesinos* --- how many wonderful gifts of the Spirit! If I were jealous like the people in the gospel or in the first reading, I would say: Stop them! Don't let them speak! Only I, the bishop, can speak. But no, I have to listen to what the Spirit says through people. Yes, I have to receive the Spirit's word from the people, analyze that word and then, together with people, build the Church.

Yes, we have to build our Church. We must respect the hierarchical charism that discerns and unites and that brings together the various charisms. At the same time the hierarchy and the priests must respect that which the Spirit of God has given to the People of God. Many times what occurs is that which Moses desires: *Would that all the People of the God were prophets!* (8). I believe that in our Archdiocese this is happening: people are receiving the Spirit of God. When I visit the communities I respect the people and try to guide the spiritual wealth that I find in very humble and simple people. The Lord asks us to build together in harmony.

I want to apply this thought to the situation of our country. My beloved sisters and brothers, no one alone has the key to resolve our present situation. If a popular political organization does not want to enter into dialogue with other liberating forces of the country, then they are committing a sin of meanness and they are saying to Moses: *stop them! Those others are wrong and only we are correct in our thinking.* At such a serious time in our history no one person possesses the whole truth. We all need to make an effort, an effort that enables us to ask God for the truth. The inspirations that we receive as individuals or as a group or as an organization --- these inspirations should be shared with others so that the common good can be achieved. This is the great lesson that we have to learn from the meanness of those who criticized the prophets. The objective of all the gifts that the Lord gives is the construction of the Kingdom.

In my Pastoral Letter<sup>1</sup>, the fourth part deals with some pastoral matters. I make a distinction between an apostolic spirit and pastoral organization. I am very concerned that you understand this distinction. There are many movements in our Church: Charismatic Movement, Christian Cursillo Movement, Marriage Encounter --- a series of movements that have been divinely inspired and that lead me to give thanks to God. We should rejoice in the fact that God has given us these wonderful gifts. But as I say in my Pastoral Letter, an apostolic spirit is one thing and arises wherever the Spirit speaks. Pastoral organization is something different. An evangelical apostolic spirit without

pastoral organization is like those torrents of water that have no channels and so instead of doing good they hinder the flow of water. The pastor is responsible for organizing all that the Spirit gives us and should organize this in some form of a team effort. No one should feel that they are better than someone else but rather we should all feel as though we have received a portion of God and so we have to join our portion with the portion of everyone else because it is in this way that a local Church becomes constituted. The local Church is not the whole Church. The Church of our Archdiocese is very unique but there are other Churches in El Salvador and Central America and each one has its own unique characteristics. The Council states: *The beauty of the great universal Church arises from the variety of local Churches which are united under the teaching and the authority of the Pope since he is the one who coordinates and gives a pastoral orientation to all the spiritual wealth of the charismatic gifts of the Lord* (9).

In other words, my beloved sisters and brothers, on this first point of our reflection, let us endeavor to know our own charism or the charism of our group. When we look around and see other charisms that seem to be more attractive and beautiful than the charism that God have given to our group, we should not feel envious like the disciples of Jesus and Moses: *Stop them! Don't let them do that*. Rather let us listen to the words of Jesus: *There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me* (10). Listen also to the words of Moses: *Would that the Lord might bestow his Spirit on them all* (11). This prophecy was fulfilled at the time of our baptism. Through baptism all of us who were born were incorporated into the great charism of the Church. Vocations ... charisms ... ways of being! What wonderful differences. Some are called to the vocation of priesthood or religious life, others are called to marriage, and still others are called to be single. Some people are called to be professionals and others laborers. There is nothing wrong with any profession but we must know how to contribute our gift for the good of the community.

If God calls some people to become involved in the political arena and thus organize for the good of people, then people must take advantage of the Lord's gift because this is a calling from God. Politics is a vocation and not everyone is given this gift and thus not everyone can organize. I also cannot push everyone to become a priest just as married people cannot push everyone to marriage. Every person has to search for their own vocation. Let us respect what God says to each man and woman and let us all contribute to the beautiful and pluralistic unity of the Kingdom of God and of the Church.

### **Life of the Church**

Before beginning my second point, let us pause here briefly to see if our local Church is being built according to the principle of generosity. Let us look at the ecclesial events that occurred during the past week and rejoice in the many and varied gifts that the Lord has given to us.

Today, September 30<sup>th</sup>, is the feast of Saint Jerome, the patron of the parish in Nejapa. We greet the parishioners who celebrate their patronal feast and I want to tell them that their patron gives a unique character to the parish because Saint Jerome was a man who dedicated his life to Sacred Scripture. Saint Jerome is also the patron of our beloved brother, Bishop Rivera Damas who celebrates his birthday today. We send him warm greetings. With your applause may Bishop Rivera feel the unity and closeness of our Archdiocese with the Diocese of Santiago de María and with his wise direction of the Diocese.

The priests from the Vicariate of Asunción and Flor Blanca made their spiritual retreat this past week and from October 8-12 the priests from the Vicariate of Cuscatlán will make their retreat.

I promised to communicate this message to you. A missionary from India came here because he had heard about our Archdiocese and felt that we have been an inspiration for the universal Church. He wanted to live among us for a few days and he said: *I truly experience that the way in which you live here is something miraculous.* I told him: *Perhaps because we are accustomed to this life of persecution and adventure we are not aware of the miracle but I thank you for your words which I will communicate to the people of the Archdiocese. This way the people will know what others expect from us and this will enable us to not betray the hopes and expectations that people have placed in our pastoral ministry.*

There was a meeting of the Vicariate of Mejicanos to honor Father Nicolás González, the pastor of Paleca, who obtained a Master's Degree in Philosophy. The Vicariate of Mejicanos has prepared a course in Biblical Christology which they will offer this week, from Monday to Friday at 6:00pm – 9:30pm in El Externado San José. We invite people to take advantage of these efforts of the Commission for Evangelization and Faith Development of that vicariate that is organizing themselves very well.

We greet the parish of Merced where the people celebrated their patronal feast on September 24<sup>th</sup>. Our Lady of Mercy is also the patroness of prisoners. I want to express my admiration of the Good Shepherd Sisters for their ministry in the women's prison where I celebrated this feast with them.

The Somaschan priests, sisters and seminarians celebrated the feast of their patron last week: Mary, the Mother of Orphans --- a title that was given to them by their founder Saint Jerome Emiliani. We shared this day with the priests who were making their retreat. Also last week the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity celebrated the feast of their founder, Saint Vincent de Paul.

I am happy that in the parish community of San Pedro Perulapan the priest has organized a catechetical congress to promote the catechetical work which was so highly esteemed by the Pope whom we honor today, John Paul I, and by the present Pope, John Paul II.

This afternoon in the parish of Divina Providencia, the Legion of Mary will celebrate their anniversary.

Tomorrow in El Hospital Divina Providencia we will celebrate a Holy Hour at 5:00pm. As a sign of admiration for divine Providence which is truly experienced in this hospital, I want to inform you about the promise that the Sisters made, namely, that they would buy some land to build a house for orphans. Yesterday, a contract was signed and even though they still need much money, we can now say that the Sisters own the land and that our commitment to Christian charity is extending its hand. Let us be generous in helping the Sisters.

Last Monday at 9:30pm the seminarians and the rector of the Minor Seminary in Chalatenango were surprised by the army of Chalatenango. The army had been informed that a subversive meeting was being held there but all the young men were sleeping. They were all woken up and made to raise their hands over their head. I believe we have said much about Chalatenango, but what is so special about Chalatenango that there is so much distrust of our Church, our seminary and our Episcopal Vicar? The soldiers and military are lodged on the side of the church, so can't they see that we are not attempting to hide anything? Can't they see that we are doing the work of the Kingdom of God and doing this in the sight of everyone? I beg the military to be more careful

with the information they receive so that they do not put themselves in a ridiculous situation as they did with our seminarians.\*

I have good news concerning our means of communication. Yesterday all the copies of the present edition of our newspaper, *Orientación*, were distributed. I want to thank the press and the radio for the great advertising that they are giving us and we hope to increase the circulation of the newspaper that today is arriving at many homes.\* I want to protest against certain anomalies in the delivery of the mail. I have been told that the correspondent of *Excelsior* in Guatemala has not received any of the mail that we have sent him. The same has happened to Father John Deplank from Belgium and Dr. Segovía who is well known in San Miguel. Are you not aware that we are no longer under a State of Siege and that this kind of action is a violation of our rights?\*

Several sponsors of our Radio Station YSAX have withdrawn their advertising as a result of the threats from the White Warriors Union. I propose to our beloved Catholic people that hopefully one day we will have a station that will not have to depend on commercial advertising and one that will be able to sustain itself as a cultural radio station for Catholics. We make this proposal and believe we can achieve this goal. Thus we will not be dependent on the White Warriors Union that only gives voice to those who do not speak against the abuses and those whom they defend.\*

I am very gratified by the news that the Pastoral Letter is selling rapidly. Twice during the week all the copies at La Libería San Pablo were sold. *Excelsior* published a summary of the Letter and I want to thank the reporters of this important newspaper. The Letter has also been sent to various offices throughout the world.

I am grateful for the invitation from the National Council of Churches in the United States and during this visit I will be in contact with members of the United States Episcopal Conference. I say this to you so that we can experience together these pastoral joys and I ask you to pray for this trip.\*

I am also grateful for the kind word of FAPU concerning the pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese as well as the words of PAI-NEWS which continues to reproduce in their entirety the homilies proclaimed here in the Cathedral and loyally informs people about matters that are not published anywhere else: the relationships that we have established throughout the world, the expressions of solidarity that arrive from so many different places, for example, the letter that arrived from the bishop of Guernavaca and the solidarity of Puerto Rico which appeared in the newspaper, *El Visitador*.

My dear sisters and brothers, I want to ask your help for our Cathedral which at this time is in a difficult situation. You can bring your donation of money or materials to the secretary's office.

With regard to the universal Church we have said that we are celebrating this Mass in honor of the Pope who at this time is traveling and on pilgrimage. Hopefully his trip to Ireland will be able to promote the cause of peace and reconciliation. The newspaper<sup>2</sup> has commented about the great contrast between what occurred in Boston two hundred years ago and the great homage that is being prepared for the Pope's arrival. Two hundred years ago the image of the Pope was burned in effigy together with a grotesque image of the devil and today people are receiving the successor of Peter with a homage of Catholic faith. Thus as the Council states: the Church *presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God* (12). We should not be surprised that while here in El Salvador we have not burned people in effigy, but perhaps there is something more serious because here all types of slander against the Church are published with complete immunity. False signatures are signed on paid campaigns<sup>3</sup> against the Church and we know that the names of

the persons that appear in print are not paying for this propaganda but rather ANEP and other institutions.\*

The Pope reminded people that abortion is as serious as the use of physical force and oppression. This is a very helpful consideration that should be kept in mind by those legislators and governments who seem to act so quickly in matters that trample upon the moral order. The Supreme Pontiff states that the premature ending of human life is as serious as the use of physical force and oppression and said: *The whole history of law demonstrates that laws lose their stability and moral authority when they are used to restrict people with physical force or when they renounce that which is incumbent upon them with regard to unborn children or with regard to the sanctity of marriage. On the international level we cannot reject a law that might benefit those who are oppressed and then say that we are doing so in the name of truth. This means that we would abandon these people and thus leave room for dangerous forms of relativism. The search for truth is difficult but necessary and no jurist can avoid this task<sup>4</sup>.*

This is very profound because many believe that when the Assembly approves laws concerning abortion or divorce that this legislation makes these actions moral. Here the Pope is saying the Church has her own criteria and even though a thousand legislative assemblies pass laws against Christian principles, such laws are still sins against the moral order. The Church cannot waiver. Even though the whole world might accept a law, but if this law is against the source of life, against the sacredness of unborn children, then it is an immoral law.

Look, my sisters and brothers, at how the Church in these sacred inspirations of the Spirit that are given to the Pope and the bishop and the Christian community --- look at how all of this is bringing about that which Jesus spoke about: *If people are driving out demons and performing miracles in my name, then they are with us* (13). How many things have we never seen and yet they are part of our life. How beautiful to think about the universality of the Church, her morality, her dogma, and know that wherever anyone professes this faith, these persons are our sisters and brothers though we might never know them here on this earth, but, yes, they are Church, just as we are Church. I have often imagined the Church as a large tree with one branch at one extreme and another branch at the other extreme. The branches do not know one another but are receiving sap from the same trunk and they share the same life. So too the Pope will not come to know many people who are alive at the present time but we know that between the Pope and us there is a communion of life and to the degree that we enrich ourselves with the Spirit that is given to us we form this Church together with the Pope. It is not so important to be Pope, bishop or priest, but much more important to allow oneself to be led by the Spirit of God because this is what makes us great, namely, that the Spirit of God takes possession of us so that we can fulfill our mission. If we do not do this then we are doing more harm than good.

### **Material goods: the justice of God and the selfishness of the human person**

Material goods are most serious, or perhaps it is better to say, they are most visible. Someone once told me: *Instead of giving incendiary discourses why don't you just read the gospel?* It occurred to me today that perhaps I should simply read the text of Saint James as my homily. Tell me if there is anything more incendiary than the words of Saint James who speaks to us today: *Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries. Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten, your gold and silver have corroded, and that corrosion will be a testimony against you, it will devour your flesh like a fire* (14).\* Realise you are applauding the apostle St James.\* The apostle continues: *You have stored up treasure for the last day. Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested yours fields are crying aloud and*



*the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous one though he offered you no resistance* (15). Here I find a way to order the thoughts of Saint James by referring to the three great evils of wealth when such wealth is abused. Wealth itself is not condemned but rather the abuse of wealth.

The first evil is to make a limited good an absolute. Abundance is unjust and is a testimony against the property owner. When the apostle speaks of gold that has become corroded and the abundance of clothing that has become moth-eaten and not shared with those who are poor, he is saying: this abundance is a testimony that shows that these possessions should not be held as absolutes but shared. Thus the second evil is that of perverting the objective of wealth. Wealth should be shared with workers who help in harvesting the crops.\* I spoke about the third evil in my Pastoral Letter.<sup>5</sup> The idolatry of wealth not only offends God but also destroys those who are involved in this idolatry. Thus Saint James says in his letter: *You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter* (16). Last Sunday I could not remember the author of the phrase that I quoted in Italian and when we left the church an Italian television reporter who was with us told me: *Those are the words of Cardinal Montini when he was the bishop of Milan.* It is said that Pope Paul VI called together all the businessmen of Milan and spoke that famous phrase to them, *spogliatevi, se non vi spoglieranno*, that is, *strip yourselves of these things before they are stripped from you.* I believe that before these goods are taken from us through violence and bloodshed, we should lovingly give them to others.\*

We are also giving homage to John Paul II and I want to make a pact with all of you who are here and with those listening to their radios: let us accept all that the Pope says in the United Nations and I hope that our local reporters do not simply manipulate and focus on one aspect of his discourse.\* I want to tell all of you now that I want to be faithful to the Pope until the time of my death and therefore what John Paul II says in the United Nations will also be guidance for me. I try to repeat and accommodate my thoughts --- as I always do --- to the thoughts and the teachings of the Pope who speaks in the name of God.\*

Let us look at the Pope as he spoke to the bishops in Puebla: *You are the defenders and promoters of dignity.* These are the Pope's words: those familiar with the history of the Church know that in every age there have been admirable bishops deeply involved in the valiant defense of the humanity of those entrusted to them by the Lord. *This is where the Church's constant concern for the delicate question of property comes from. A proof of this are the writings of the Fathers of Church during the first millennium of Christianity.*<sup>6</sup> Those who read the writings of the early Church Fathers could very easily call them communists and yet they have simply interpreted the traditional doctrine of the Church. The Pope refers to Saint Ambrose and other Popes when he says: *From this arises the Church's constant preoccupation with the delicate question of property ownership. One proof of this is to be found in the writing of the Church Fathers during the first thousand years of Christianity's existence.* He then continues and says: *It is demonstrated by the vigorous and oft reiterated teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas. [The great theologian of the Middle Ages says private property is not an absolute but a relative right<sup>7</sup>]\** *In our day the Church has appealed to the same principles in such far-reaching documents as the social encyclicals of the recent popes. Pope Paul VI spoke out on this matter with particular force and profundity in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.* The voice of the Church, which is the echo of the human conscience and which has not ceased to reason throughout the centuries while in the midst of various social-economic systems and conditions, deserves and needs to be heard in our own time, especially when the increased wealth of a few is parallel to the increased misery of the masses.\*

The Pope continues: *It is then that the Church's teaching, which says that there is a social mortgage on all private property, takes on an urgent character.*<sup>8</sup>

The other day someone told me that they did not understand this phrase and so if someone needs an explanation let me offer one here. If someone has a house that is mortgaged, the house does not completely belong to him until he pays the debt and the mortgage is removed. The Pope is saying the same thing with regard to private property --- even though one has properly registered one's property and has all the legal documents, yet there is no absolute right to this property because it has a social mortgage and the common good is the standard for private property. It is for this reason that we say we need to restructure our economic and social system. These cannot be absolutes and the idolatry with regard to private property is, frankly speaking, paganism. Christians cannot view private property as an absolute.\*

The Pope says: *In so far as this teaching is concerned, the Church has a mission to fulfill. It must preach, educate persons and groups, shape public opinion, and give direction to national officials. In so doing, it will be working for the good of society. Eventually this Christian evangelical principle will lead to a more just and equitable distribution of goods, not only within each nation but also in the wide world as a whole. And this will prevent the stronger countries from using their power to the detriment of the weaker ones.*<sup>9</sup> The letter of Saint James is updated for Latin America by John Paul II.

Therefore when we are criticized here for incendiary discourses we say: we are simply reminding people about a principle that has been forgotten and that is necessary as a foundation to transform our society. If we want to see a cessation to violence and all the uneasiness, then we have to go to the roots and the root is here: social injustice.\*

The Pope says that it is necessary to educate ourselves and here from the perspective of the Word of God I call upon all my beloved sisters and brothers of El Salvador, especially those who have perverted their minds and hearts because of their attachment to material goods, to study the true Christian doctrine concerning private property. Examine your lives and see if the more happy people are not those who have detached themselves from these goods and shared them with their sisters and brothers. The joy that we receive from these material possessions is not meant to be enjoyed by one individual.

### **Events of the week**

Finally, or perhaps better to say, here as we speak about social justice and before concluding I want to review some of the events of our civil life.

In the first place I want to denounce more violence. Incidentally we are speaking about the root that is not touched, that is fertile and that continues to produce social injustice that is based on an aberration of the meaning of private property and on the absolute value of wealth and that culminates by defending all of this with repression. This is the cause of everything: social injustice and repression.\* These realities contradict the doctrine that we have read about in today's Scriptures: (17) God has not given gold and clothing so that they become corroded and moth-eaten -- this is testimony against those who possess these goods. Rather these goods are given to be shared and to make happy those who each day are becoming weaker because the idolatry of wealth and property prevail among us.

Therefore we have to denounce the violence that appears in ever more shameful forms. This week there has been much violence but rather than enumerate the different concrete cases, I want to call your attention, my sisters and brothers, to the deceitful ways in which true crimes are covered up. For example, I have analyzed the different information that was given concerning the death of three people near the President's House. What contradictions between the different reports! One report concludes by saying that these people were found committing acts of violence. Now the case is presented as though their vehicle became trapped between two groups who were firing at one another and this is after it was reported that these same people had also been engaged in gunfire.<sup>10</sup> A series of contradictions that leads us to repeat what we have often said: investigate these cases and do not let the culprits go free. It is useless to attract new investors to our country in an attempt to cover up the deteriorating image of our nation with a thin coating of paint. These are the actions that remain to be clarified and punished and that in reality drive away tourism and investment and actually reveal the true image of repression that the people of our nation experience.

Another immoral case for your information. María Gladis Molina died near the station of the National Guard.<sup>11</sup> Various versions of this event have been reported but eyewitnesses have said that a bullet from the National Guard killed this woman.\*

The four people who died in Panchimalco were presented as being victims of a confrontation<sup>12</sup> but several people who saw their bodies noticed that their fingers had been completely cut off.

Several people who died last Tuesday as a result of the disturbances in the center were shot to death and yet these people were by-standers, peaceful people. Notice how many different reports have been invented with regard to this matter!<sup>13</sup>

I would like us to pray for so many people who have died and so many victims of injustice. I want the family members of these people to know that the Church is with them and cannot participate in giving deceitful information but rather is aware of the fact that she must cry out for the just demands of people and bring those who are guilty before the courts. In the end if there is no justice on earth for the Church then we must be aware of transcendence and this is the last point that we will analyze in our homily today.

We have been informed of other acts of violence. The guerrilla groups are no longer occupying the Ministry of Labor. The minister has denounced the LP-28 for having taken several documents from the premises. We hope that the Ligas will explain this situation in the same way that they explained that they had been accused of burning a bus on Route 41 but that they were not responsible for this action. It seems to me to be very exemplary of the following consideration: let those persons speak up who know about these matters. People know that the transportation workers are part of the people and instead of trying to cause them harm by destroying their means of work we should be trying to incorporate them into the just defense of the people. Let us respect the people, their beliefs and our national symbols because they represent the need to cry out for the just demands of all the people of El Salvador.\*

I want to say once again that our Legal Aid Association is doing great work for the Church. They have denounced the disappearance of the *campesino*, Mariano Escobar Rivera who disappeared on August 5<sup>th</sup> and has left behind five children. His family has presented a petition of *habeas corpus* but no response has been received. Our Legal Aid group has also denounced the arrest of Carlos Alberto Aldana that occurred on September 10<sup>th</sup>, Dr. María Teresa Hernández Saballos, arrested on September 15<sup>th</sup>, José Adrián Minero, arrested on September 17<sup>th</sup>, Ricardo Cisneros Castro, José Humberto Sorto, Raúl Mercado Amaya, Víctor Manuel Rivera Valencia,

Germán Flores Cañas, Jacinto Huevo, Ovidio López Mejía and José Oscar López Mejía. A petition of *habeas corpus* has been presented on behalf of all these people and still we know nothing about any of them.

We have received other denunciations but we cannot speak about these here yet because we have not been able to verify these cases. We have as a principle that we only speak here about those cases that we have been able to verify and therefore people can see that we are not inventing things.

The family members of Félix Antonio Abrego have denounced his assassination. Three members of their family have been assassinated: Pedro Abilio Abrego and José Osmin Abrego. How sad is the destiny of certain families who must experience their loved ones die as a result of assassination because of a lack of justice in our midst.

With regard to the labor situation, the strike in Cartotécnica was resolved. This week, however, conflict has arisen in Lido in Santa Mercedes. Also the conflicts at IMES, COFEFAR, DURAMAS, and ARCO continue. Apex has come to the Chancery to denounce the strike that has continued for forty-four days and there is no end in sight. Three hundred workers need a solution and there is also a hostage there, Escobar Ezeta. We ask that everything be done to initiate a dialogue so that this inhuman situation can be resolved. One hundred twenty-five workers received compensation for the closing of El Gran Hotel in San Salvador and now there are more unemployed people in our midst.

The Nation Workers Union has published a platform of demands based on the fact that a worker's family of six persons spends 10.41 colones each day. The Assembly approved a law that the owners of farms should pay their workers 1.50 colones if they do not give them food and 0.50 colones if they give them uncooked food. An increase in the nurses salary was also approved and they will now earn 725.00 colones a month.

Finally, my dear sisters and brothers I want to speak about some news that gives us hope, namely, the statement of ANEP<sup>14</sup>. They have listed several factors that have influenced the situation of anarchy in our country but we are surprised that they make no mention of the detail that we have spoken about here as the root and the source of our uneasiness, making wealth and private property an absolute. ANEP has invited all the businesses to examine what they can offer their workers and this gives us hope. We say, however, that it is not enough to see the paths that one must take but it is also necessary to take steps along that same path. When people are asked to examine what they can offer the workers, I believe that this is taking a step that has been enlightened by God who wants the goods of this earth to be shared by all people. There was a proposal to join efforts to guarantee that all the inhabitants of El Salvador might rejoice in freedom, and health and economic well-being and social justice. Blessed be God and hopefully the reflection that we are presently engaged in will open new horizons. I recognize that there is much that still must be done both individually and collectively but we must continue to be concerned about the distribution of wealth. I hope that this is carried forth because there is still time to achieve what we desire through love and reason and do not have to obtain this with pain and bloodshed.

### **Transcendence is the key to understanding God's mind and the strength to do God's will**

Finally I want to end with this last thought about transcendence. I have often repeated the word *transcendence* and I believe that with the passing of each day it is more necessary because it is only transcendence that enables us to find a rational explanation of all that we are saying. I have said many times that transcendence is not merely a worldly perspective but rather involves us in the

horizons of the Creator, the horizons of the Lord and it is from this perspective that we are invited to look at today's readings.

The readings point out the goal and speak about goods and the great good. When the readings speak about two hands, two feet, two eyes (18) --- these are good. But the reading also speaks about cutting off a hand or a foot for the greater good of the Kingdom. It is preferable to enter the Kingdom with one hand or foot, limp and maimed, then to collapse in ruin with two eyes and two hands and two feet. Good things have to be subordinated to the greater good and the human person should not lose sight of the only absolute, the transcendent God, the great good. We should also not lose sight of the goal, that is, to enter into life, to enter the Kingdom of God. As a motivation to walk toward this goal Jesus said: *in my name*. See the child as someone who represents Jesus

Here we return to the preferential option for the poor. It is not demagoguery but gospel truth that causes us to be concerned about the interests of those persons who are poor and those who are children. We are concerned about them not just for any reason but because they represent Jesus and through faith we open ourselves to those who are humble, those living on the margins of society, those who are poor and ill. We see Jesus in these people and this is transcendence. When these people are seen as rivals, as people who are imprudent, as people who come to spoil our celebrations, then naturally those who are poor will disturb us. But when they are embraced as Jesus embraced the leper (19) or as the Good Samaritan cared for the wounded man on the road, (20) then we are embracing and caring for people in the same way that we embrace and care for Jesus.(21) Again this is transcendence and without this perspective, social justice is impossible. Yes, this is transcendence and this is Jesus present in the little children and those who are weak.

The second reading is a reflection on those things that are transitory: *you have stored up treasures for the last day* (22). According to the mind of the apostles, the judgment day was near at hand and it seemed foolish that people, who were able to see the transitory nature of history and time, should store up things that will remain behind when they die. If we would only think about the transitory nature of the goods of this world! No, this would not be some form of alienation but we would then be giving the just, relative value to the things of this earth and thus, as the gospel tells us, (23) we would be able to buy heaven with these good friendships and not be destroyed with them in the depths of the abyss. Therefore Jesus speaks about those who are disturbed. They are disturbed because they do not want to understand. They draw others away from the criteria of the gospel: *Those who scandalize one of these little ones* (24).

My dear sisters and brothers, here I think about the many different political ideologies that have poisoned the minds of so many Christians. I say to all those who feel called to a political vocation and invite them to incorporate this calling into Jesus' transcendence and not kill the supernatural and transcendent spirit of those young people who feel the need to engage in the struggle. As John Paul I said in his famous letter: *The God that we profess is not a God of alienation but a God who wants to reward those who work for the liberation of the earth, a God who wants to give them an eternal reward if they incorporate their struggle and their effort into this transcendence.*

My sisters and brothers, when there is a strong temptation within us then that is the time to fulfill the paradoxical, Oriental words of the gospel: *if your foot scandalizes you, cut it off; if your hand disturbs you, cut it off; if your eye is an occasion of scandal, that is, if you care for the things of this earth in the same way as you care for your hand or feet or eyes then do not hesitate to pluck it out for the greater good. If you want to save your eyes and hands and feet but do not want to share them or submit them to justice according to the mind of God, then you will lose everything*

(25). Let us give in love so that later we do not have to hand these things over because of outside forces and thus enter into eternity without goods and without the greater good.

The present signs encourage us to become a society according to the mind of God. Hopefully we adopt as our own the words of Moses: *would that all the People of God were prophets!* (26). Hopefully we do not squander the Lord's gifts but desire that those gifts be bestowed upon all people, for as Jesus also said: *Whoever is not against us is for us* (27).

I am going to conclude by reading the final words of the beautiful letter of Pope Luciani and let us remember that we have made this reflection in his name. He writes: *Dear Chesterton, I am convinced, as you are: this God will become more and more known and loved, by everyone, including those who reject Him today, not because they are wicked (they may be better than either of us), but because they look at Him from a mistaken point of view! Do they continue to believe in Him? Then He answered: I believe in you! So be it.\**

<sup>1</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país* 6 August 1979), 87.

<sup>2</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 26 September 1979.

<sup>3</sup> On 25 September 1979, *La Prensa Gráfica* published a paid advert under the heading "The retirement of Monseñor" and signed by Martha Julia Guerrero in which, after accusing Mons. Romero of "spreading hatred" and "class warfare", said that "the most convenient thing would be for Mons. Romero to be substituted by someone who could recover faith and confidence in the Church, lost through an undeniably Marxist preaching which is leading us towards chaos". Also on 25, 26 and 27 of September 1979, *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* published several paid adverts signed by the "Frente de Cristianos Patriotas", the "Frente de Católicos Auténticos", the "Agrupación Patriótica Salvadoreña" and the "Frente Femenino Salvadoreño" in which several slanderous accusations were made against the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, the Jesuits, YSAX and Mons. Romero.

<sup>4</sup> Discourse of John Paul II in the audience of 24 September 1979 to representatives of the World Congress on Law. Mons. Romero quotes parts of this discourse published in *La Prensa Gráfica* on 25 September 1979. The discourse was published in the *Osservatore Romano* some months later on 18 November 1979.

<sup>5</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Discourse of John Paul II at the opening of the Third General Conference of Latinamerican Bishops in Puebla (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

<sup>7</sup> See St Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Teológica*, 2-2, q.32 a. 5 ad 2.

<sup>8</sup> Discourse of John Paul II at the opening. *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy*, 24 & 25 September 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 24 & 26 September 1979.

<sup>12</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy*, 24 September 1979.

<sup>13</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 27 September 1979, and *El Diario de Hoy*, 26 & 27 September 1979.

<sup>14</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 29 September 1979.

*Marginal References* (1) Mk 9,38; (2) Mk 9,39-40; (3) Mk 9,40; (4) Nm 11,25-29; (5) 1Cor 12,4-12; (6) LG 8; (7) LG 14; (8) Nm 11,29; (9) LG 23; (10) Mk 9,40; (11) Nm 11,29; (12) LG 8; (13) Mk 9,39-40; (14) Jm 5,1-3<sup>a</sup>; (15) Jm 5,3b-6; (16) Jm 5,5; (17) Jm 5,13; (18) Mk 9,43-47; (19) Mk 1,40-41; (20) Lk 10,33-35; (21) Mt 25,40; (22) Jm 5,3; (23) Lk 16,9; (24) Mk 9,42; (25) Mk 9,43-47; (26) Nm 11,29; (27) Mk 9,40.