

## THE CHURCH PROLONGS CHRIST'S LIBERATION

**Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time  
November 4, 1979**

*Deuteronomy 6:2-6*

*Hebrews 7:23-28*

*Mark 12:28-34*

My dear sisters and brothers.

Before anything else I want to extend my warm brotherly greeting to the four priests who are present here and celebrating twenty-five years of priestly ministry: Father José Antonio Vides, pastor of Nuestra Señora de Fátima in La Rábida, Father Andrés Alvarenga, pastor of Concepción in Santa Tecla, Father Joaquín Brizuela, pastor of Ciudad Arce and Father Oscar Martell, pastor of Apopa. We also remember another priest from the same class, Father Jesús González who is ministering in the Diocese of San Vicente. This morning I ask you to pray for them and also ask you to extend congratulations to them.\* This morning I also have the pleasure of appointing Father Ramiro Jimenez pastor of La Basilica del Sagrado Corazón. He is also present with us and concelebrating the Eucharist.\*

This priestly presence, together with your presence, the presence of the People of God who have been sanctified through Baptism and have become participants in the eternal priesthood of Christ, provides us with a marvelous understanding of the meaning of our Sunday celebration that is presided over by a priest. It must be remembered that even the humblest priest has the authorization of Christ to convoke the People of God and preside at their celebration. The priest, together with the people who are active participants in the celebration, offer the most beautiful sacrifice that the world can offer to God and they offer this sacrifice as a priestly people through the ministry of the priest.

The second reading is the foundation for our reflection and providentially the reading is a priestly reading. The reading distinguishes between the transitory nature of the life of the priest and the infinite, indestructible priesthood of Christ. The letter that we have read today states: *but he[Jesus], because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away* (1). In 1954 young priests left the seminary and today they are celebrating twenty-five years of priestly ministry. They are older and have matured and they journey toward eternity. The Word of God is telling us the same thing: *Those priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office*. The priests are mortal men and like all mortals they grow older and die, yet they have the profound satisfaction of knowing that with the passing of years they will hear the words that were proclaimed today: *Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away* (2). Priests are not in competition with Jesus but rather are humble servants who make Jesus present in the world as God makes use of poor, mortal beings to become a transitory sign of the eternal and one priest whom our priests represent. Jesus is the one who is able to save in a definitive manner those who draw near to God because Jesus lives forever and intercedes on our behalf.

The priest, as he passes through life, is a messenger of the eternity of Jesus. The author of the letter to the Hebrews continues to speak to us about the eternal nature of the priesthood and the

effectiveness of the ministry that the priest exercises among people: forgiveness, offering the body and blood of Jesus and proclaiming the divine Word. The priest proclaims the Word because he is a messenger of the One who is eternal and infallible even though he himself is not infallible.

This is our reflection. Yet together with these ideas about man-priest-minister there appears the greatness of all of you, the priestly people. We, as priests, are chosen from among the people, from families like your own, and then we are anointed and return to serve the people. This means minister or servant. Here the only Lord is Christ and we his partners. And you are the principal part of this service to bring us near to Christ.

From the moment of baptism, each one of you, and I too when I was baptized, are incorporated in a priestly people; and every Sunday Mass is precisely a demonstration of Christ's priesthood.. We do not come to Mass as an act of piety but rather we come together to participate in a mystery that many do not understand. The smallest child who has come to the Eucharistic celebration, the most insignificant person in our midst --- all of these people are living members of the priestly people who sing: *you made them a kingdom and priests for our God* (3). I can tell each one of you that you are priests for our God.

For this reason the priestly theme is imposed on the other readings and provides us, as usual, with the title of today's homily. In the present situation of the country would not participation in the Mass be a form of alienation since there are so many other important political, economic and military interests that surround us? Would it not be insane to separate ourselves from these movements in which the whole country is engaged in order to come together and spend some calm moments in adoration of our God? No, in no way is this true! The world is being saved because Christ, the priest, is present to the priestly people on earth. Therefore as we participate in this reflection today I invite all of us, the priestly people, together with the priests who are celebrating their anniversaries and all the other priests (if they are listening to me) to seriously embrace our role as members of the People of God --- our role as bishops and priests. Let us not alienate ourselves from the history of El Salvador but let us become in history that which God desires of his people: salt, light and leaven. (4)

This is my greatest desire and I myself want to understand my role and live in a way that enables me to preach and minister so as to create the Church and thus guarantee the presence of the Archdiocese, the People of God, in the world and in El Salvador. May we be the People of God marked with the characteristics that are spoken about in today's readings and that provide my homily with the title: *the priestly liberation of Christ is prolonged in the Church*. Hopefully I will come to understand this great mystery better because while I do not understand the totality of this reality, I am aware of the fact that we, as members of the Church, have a great responsibility.

*The Church prolongs the priestly liberation of Christ*. I will develop the following points: First, the mission of the People of God, that is, our mission as priests --- defenders of monotheism, namely, there is one God and the Church defends and proclaims this truth; Second, the mission of the Church at this time and as seen in the readings --- builders of the civilization of love. How we need this leaven of love in our situation that has become rotten with hatred and violence!. Third, the Church is the minister of true worship of God. This is a summary of my thought; and I beg the Holy Spirit that your kind attention becomes an aim that you, the priests celebrating their twenty-five years of priesthood, the new parish priest and I, the bishop and servant of this community, that we all make the presence of the Church in El Salvador a sign of the priestly liberation of Christ: first, in defense of the true Lord and God, monotheism; secondly, by building a civilization of love; and thirdly, by being ministers of the true worship the people give to the one and only God.

## Defender of monotheism

Today's gospel places us in the presence of the events that occurred during the last week of Jesus' life. Throughout the gospel of Saint Mark we have followed Jesus going up to Jerusalem and announcing his passion three times. Now the time of his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem has arrived. Between Sunday and the day of his death many events occurred there. At the portico of the Temple and in the area surrounding the Temple there were many heated discussions that seemed to announce the tragic end of the Master of truth who would be confronted with fabrications and lies and mere human legalities.

The event referred to today seemed to lower the tone of the polemic in order to establish a friendly conversation with a scribe, a teacher of the law who, in line with the great discussions that were carried on among the teachers in Israel who tried to organize the countless laws of Moses and the traditions of the people, asked Jesus: *how might these laws and traditions be catalogued? What are the principal laws upon which the other laws depend, laws that make religion so difficult?* The scribe asks Jesus: *Teacher, which is the first of all the commandments?* (5). And Jesus replies what you have already heard.

It is beautiful that this reference Saint Mark places before us corresponds to that which the Jewish people called *shema*, that is, it begins this way. The word *shema* means *hear*. *Hear, O Israel* (6) and is a reference to the book of Deuteronomy where, according to tradition, Moses commanded the people to take to heart these words: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. And the second is this: love your neighbour as yourself.* (7).

Jesus invites us to open the book of Deuteronomy and find this famous profession of faith in the one God, to find the people's commitment of total love to the one God. Jesus invites us to open the book of Deuteronomy to the place where Moses warns the people, who had heard the revelation of the eternal and living God, about the danger that awaits them when they enter the Promised Land: the temptation of the Canaanites who adored false gods and false Baals. The people who were going to enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey (8) (words that refer to the abundance that would be found in this new land) would have to confront the temptation of following the god of the Canaanites who might appear to be more powerful than the God who had made them journey in the arid and harsh desert. This was a great theological temptation and Moses, in an attempt to prevent this, tells the people: *Be careful so that you do not adore false gods. There is only one God whom you shall love with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the door posts of your houses and on your gates* (9). In other words, their faith in God had to be their personal, family and social watchword. They were the People of God and had to distinguish themselves by their commitment to the one true God. The people of Israel professed a monotheistic faith in the midst of a polytheistic world. Their faith in God was joined to their taking possession of the land and these realities influenced their social and political relationships. As long as they were faithful to God they would inhabit the land flowing with milk and honey. Idolatry would always be a great danger.

My dear sisters and brothers, I want to apply the words of Moses to our beloved people of El Salvador. This morning I would like to recommend to you the practice of the Israelites who twice a day recited the *shema*. The text from the book of Deuteronomy that I have just read to you was

recited daily by the Israelites. They carried with them, either on their wrists or on tassels attached to their hats, these words of the law of Moses, the law of God. It was for this reason that Jesus criticized them when he said: *All their works are preformed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries in which they carry the scriptures of divine revelation and lengthen their tassels* (10). Incidentally, when Moses refers to these phylacteries and tassels, he is speaking in a figurative and not a literal sense. He is telling the people that they should be mindful of God in all their gestures and should keep before their eyes the vision of the only God. Some from El Salvador will say that this refers simply to a former era. True, the Baals of the Canaanites refer to a former era but today there are new Baals and idols in our land. Before these idols the Church, which prolongs the priestly mission of Christ, has to proclaim, like Moses, faith in the one God. This is the ministry of the priests --- they must tell people that they adore false gods and warn people and tell them that idolatry is offensive to God and destroys the nation.

In my Pastoral Letter I point out three dangers in the country --- three great idolatries. The first is the idolatry of private property and wealth<sup>1</sup>. During this reflection on the true God and as we examine the idolatry of private property and wealth, I invite you to think about the wise words of John Paul II who spoke to the pastors of Latin America with the following words: *The Church is continually concerned about the delicate question of property ownership*<sup>2</sup>. He reminds us about the tradition from the beginning of Christianity that was later synthesized by Saint Thomas Aquinas --- private property was never seen as an absolute or an idol. *This voice of the Church, echoing the voice of the human conscience, did not cease to make itself heard down through the centuries, amid the most varied socio-cultural systems and circumstances. It needs to be heard in our age as well, when the growing affluence of a few people parallels the growing poverty of the masses. It is then that the Church's teaching, which says there is a social mortgage on all private property, takes on an urgent character ... Christ did not remain indifferent in the face of this vast and demanding imperative of social morality. Neither could the Church. In the spirit of the Church, which is the spirit of Christ, and supported by its ample, social teaching, let us get back to work in this field*<sup>3</sup>.

In other words let us not cease to denounce the idolatry of wealth which makes the greatness of people reside in *having* and forgets that their true greatness resides in *being*. People's worth does not depend on *having* but on *being*. The idolatry of *having* is avarice and is opposed to social change. Yes, in our nation this idolatry poses a great danger. Perhaps the greatest temptation at this time when the transformation of our country is able to begin is the fact that the extreme right (fanatics of the idols of wealth and money, individuals who do not want their privileges touched) are associating themselves with elements in the military who are resentful, with individuals who want to see a countercoup take place.\*

During this time the danger of insurrection has been denounced with the mention of specific names of individuals in the military and certain wealthy people<sup>4</sup>. We do not know how widespread this feeling might be but it is certain that ideologically this danger exists. As long as those involved in this idolatry do not convert and embrace the gift of faith in the one God, then these idolatries will always be present in our country and will also pose a great danger to all of us. We have to take care to enter the process of repentance and conversion to the one true God. When we speak in this way we are not impelled by some form of social resentment. Thanks be to God we do not adore wealth nor do we feel a need for material wealth. Indeed, we possess everything because of faith in the one God and thus we experience ourselves as more developed and wealthier than those whose wealth depends upon gold and other earthly possessions. Pope Paul VI said: *The exclusive pursuit of material possessions prevents man's growth as a human being and stands in opposition to his true grandeur. Avarice, in individuals and in nations, is the most obvious form of stultified moral development* (11). Those who desire to have more and who desire to subjugate others under their

wealth are covetous, avaricious and envious. This constitutes a great moral underdevelopment because idolatry destroys the human person and offends God.

There is another idolatry that the Church must denounce and unmask at this time. In fact, at this time in our nation's history this denunciation is being done and ought to continue to be done courageously. Here we refer to the idol of power, especially when this power is called national security. *The interests and advantages of the few are thus turned into an absolute ... This perverts the noble function of the armed forces. Instead of serving true national interests, they become the guardians of the interests of the oligarchy, thus furthering their own ideological and economic corruption. Something similar is happening to the security forces. They, instead of caring for civil order, have turned themselves basically into an organization for repressing political dissidents. And finally, the high command unconstitutionally changes the political procedures that ought to decide democratically the country's course<sup>5</sup>. So we have regimes that are omnipotent, contempt of individuals and their rights, the total lack of morals in pursuing ends.<sup>6</sup> National security becomes sarcastically insecurity.\**

I state this in the spirit of Medellin. In the document of Puebla there is a section directed to military leaders: *With relation to the Armed Forces, the Church should impress on them that, in addition to their normal specific functions, they have a mission to guarantee the political liberty of citizens, rather than inhibit them. In addition, the Armed Forces are able to educate, within their own structures, young recruits to play a free and responsible role in the political life of the country.* (12)

As you see, sisters and brothers, the Church is not pessimist, nor does it share the views of those who can find no good in the military. The Church points to the great sins of the military, but this is to call them to conversion and in the hope that a young soldier may be truly orientated by noble ideals of service to the people, rather than seeking his strength in his own institution and oppressing the people. May he feel close to the people and defend their rights and interests.\*

For me this is a time of great hope. And as we preach, in accordance with our ministry, the monotheism of the one God, the Church's mission, and try to rid the false idols of their worshippers, as we have said, from the idolatry of money, but also from the idolatries of power and the force of arms. Let them not seek their greatness in this, but rather in using this force to serve those in need – already crying and bleeding too much - so that we may seek more effective medicines.\*

But I also say in my pastoral letter, and now repeat in the light of God's Word, with Moses as he calls the people to worship the one true God and to be careful about false Baals that they will encounter in their midst, so too there is another danger of idolatry among us and that is the idolatry of the popular organizations<sup>7</sup>. Organizations originally arise from the right of people to organize and defend themselves. We have said many times that this is very good and the Church defends the right of the people to organize. Organizations arise from noble objectives that can be prostituted and become false idols when organizations are created as absolutes. Then the organization itself becomes the supreme value and all other interests, including the interests of the people, become subordinated to the organization. The people are no longer of interest to them and the only things they are concerned about are the interests of their organization. When the organization becomes an absolute in this manner then a form of fanaticism arises and here we find some great dangers.

When an organization no longer seeks the one absolute which ought to be God who helps people seek the common good of the nation *then the activities of the organizations become too political, as if the political dimension were the only, or even the main, element in the lives of*

*campesinos, workers, teachers, students, and other members who go to make them up.* It is dangerous to politicize life in a way that people begin to believe that everything is politics. Politics is one dimension of life but is not the totality of life.

Another absurd result of absolutizing an organization is: the attempt to subordinate to its own political objectives the specific missions of other trade union, social and even religious organizations. This is to manipulate professionals for political interests. Even the Church is manipulated to serve a political concern. And there are many who yield to this temptation of wanting a politicized Church, and this cannot be. If the Church speaks of politics, it is as a Church without allowing manipulation by anybody.\*

Another great danger of this idolatry is when, after subordinating all the people's interests to one's political ideals, what was originally the desire of the poor campesino or worker is forgotten: namely to better their situation. It is changed into a political campaign which can lead to disastrous consequences. It is true one has to struggle till death; but it is necessary to ensure that the death is worth it, and not to die for any reason.

The idolatry of an organization can reach such a high degree of sectarianism that it can no longer dialogue with another organization, even in vindication. If at this time Salvadorans are searching to save the country in different ways, why cling only to 'my way' and not enter into dialogue or relations with other ways? We can find a solution all together!

Notice what the Council documents say about Christians who make different political options: *Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message. --- This often involves a manipulation of the gospel message by some people who believe they have a monopoly on the gospel. --- Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good (13).*

I believe that it is very clear that the Church preaches monotheism to those who practice idolatry. As we speak about the mission of the Church we could also say that there are other shameful idols that we could mention here, such as the idol of sex and pleasure and vice. Think of how many people are now on the margins of everything that is occurring in the country! They are not concerned about the well-being of people but only concerned about carnal pleasure, pleasing themselves, selfishness and hedonism. My sisters and brothers, all of this is idolatry, pernicious and shameful. This form of idolatry destroys the concept of fidelity in marriage, the nobility of human fertility, and the beauty of maternity. So many sacrifices of true values are offered to the idols of sex and pleasure. Before these idols the Church proclaims the great message that Jesus spoke to the scribe on the eve of his death: *The Lord our God is Lord alone (14).* In these words we find a synthesis of our monotheistic mission in the world.

### **Events of the week**

In light of these idolatries, allow me to pause here in order to sum up the events of the past week because in everything that has occurred today we can say that yes, there is something good about the events of the past week because we have been involved in a search for the common good of the nation and a search for ways to serve God. I want to emphasize there has been much of this in our

country. I believe in the good faith of many politicians today. I believe there is a half-open door before the country that we can open all together or, all together, fail to open.

My sisters and brothers, I believe (and this is not a blessing of the overthrow of the government) that if the recommendations that the Church proposes today were implemented, that is, a search for the common good of the people and from the perspective of people, worship of the one God, then I have no doubt that the path of our salvation would shine forth. On the other hand, if we begin to crush this hope with painful events such as occurred last week, then we will see bloodshed, horror and mistrust flourish in ways that we have never seen before. I do not want us to continue to walk on the dangerous paths that we traveled last week.

Despite the promises of the governmental Junta, this week we have to lament the bloody events of Monday and Wednesday that resulted in eighty deaths and one hundred persons injured<sup>8</sup>. We have heard two contradictory versions of the events that occurred on October 29<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>: one from the security forces and another from the popular organizations. It is urgent that a thorough investigation be made so that it can be determined who initiated these tragic events. Regardless of who initiated these actions, the results of the investigation should be published with supporting proof. The majority of the impartial eye-witnesses coincide in their condemnation of the cruelty and savagery of the security forces who attacked the demonstrators and the people in general.\* This explains the large number of dead and wounded, and in no way can this action be justified.

The popular organizations have been blamed for provoking this action and they have been accused of attempting to destabilize the government. Few people have dared to point a finger at the security forces who probably have greater responsibility and blame for the many persons who died.\*

I have been asked by Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero to read the following letter. I am not going to read the whole letter because it is very long. *With the hope of clarifying some of the confusion that has been created by the media through their distortion of facts we state: First, we whole-heartedly deny the accusation of having provoked the security forces that resulted in the massacre of October 29<sup>th</sup>. Second, said repression was cold-heartedly planned. Numerous companions have been arrested and as a result the number of persons who have disappeared and the number of political prisoners has increased. Third, we condemn the vile acts of looting that were committed by groups of thieves who were supported by the security forces,\* especially since these actions were taken against small businesses in La Plaza 14 de Julio on the day of the massacre. Fourth, we ask the Archbishop, the Legal Aid Office of the Archdiocese and the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador to intercede and guarantee the lives of those who have been arrested, disappeared, or injured and to request their immediate release.*<sup>9</sup>

We also have in our hands the courageous statement of the Human Rights Commission and I express my solidarity with their findings and conclusions. They state: *First, the political problems are not going to be resolved by military force nor by coercive actions of the State. Second, the repressive events contradict the promises formulated by the Revolutionary Junta of the Government that promised to respect human rights and ideological pluralism. These events demonstrate a continuation of the use of the repressive methods utilized by the previous government. Third, because of these actions that violate human rights, the Military Junta and the cabinet members have isolated themselves from the people and in an almost irreversible way impede the confidence and credibility and massive support of the people. Instead they are creating greater anguish, terror and mistrust. Therefore, we condemn the actions that have been denounced as violations of the right to life, the right to organize and the right to freedom of thought. We demand the immediate cessation*

*of repressive methods against the people and ask that human rights be effectively respected as promised. We call upon the civilian and young members of the military, honest and consistent in their actions, people who are members of the cabinet and the Military Junta to do everything possible to achieve an immediate and effective respect for the right to life, for personal integrity, for the right to organize, the right to freely gather together and the right to ideological dissent.*

Tuesday there was a confrontation between demonstrators and the Marines of the United States. The result of this confrontation: the demonstration was broken up with tear gas but there were no deaths and only some slight injuries<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, the demonstration that was broken up by our security forces resulted in many deaths and injuries.\*

Perhaps the security forces are repressing people in a brutal manner, more brutal than the previous regime, because they want to prevent the new government from obtaining credibility\*. I say this because I believe in the honesty of the young members of the military who are able to renew the army in the way that our Constitution desires. But as long as greater efforts are not made to restore the true dignity of this institution, the military will remain as puppets that are manipulated by those who have always abused that which is most sacred in our country\*. There are certain elements among the security forces who are responsible for past crimes and fear being discovered and brought to trial by the present regime.\*

I want to recount for you a tragic experience that occurred last Thursday night. Las Ligas Populares had captured a member of the army who intended to enter the church, El Rosario, with his weapon. That night I was told that the situation was very dangerous because the army was ready to go to the church to recover, dead or alive, their fellow officer. I was asked to intervene in the situation. I was pleased to go there and sought a peaceful solution to this serious matter. The public prosecutor also arrived but some other priests became aware of the fact that this problem really did not exist. Yes, a soldier had been captured because he attempted to enter the church with his weapon and he was being held by Las Ligas. This group, however, had called the prosecutor in order to hand the soldier over to him but the public prosecutor had been delayed in arriving. At the same time the army had received news that one of their members was being tortured and was going to be killed slowly. I am a witness to the fact that the soldier was released and at about one o'clock in the morning the army began to surround the Church and threatened to attack the church unless the soldier was set free. These were some very tense moments! Together with other intermediaries I pressured Las Ligas to hand over the soldier and in fact he was released. Thus the storm that was about to rage out of control was calmed.

What I am talking about here is the aggressive attitude that I experienced first hand. At the same time I noticed that the young officers were trying to calm the situation and were willing to dialogue. There were other elements, however, that acted with an almost uncontrollable aggressiveness. I am telling you this, my sisters and brothers, because I want to affirm here the need to prudently renew the army.

Later, a similar event occurred. The police had been misinformed that two of their members had been captured, but this was a false rumor. The police admitted having conducted a search and I personally accompanied them but there were no police officers among the living or the dead --- there were twenty-one bodies there. Thus again on Thursday night a second phase of the storm was calmed.

I am aware of the fact that we are living in a situation where we are separated by an abyss of mistrust and fear. Evil exists and it is necessary that the security forces remember that many times



they have been commanded to carry out evil orders. Thus when we speak about renewing the military we can see that those who must be judged and punished are high ranking officials who have corrupted the minds of those under their command.\* This is the great task of the new government because here there is a great danger of continuing the repression of the past and continuing this repression in an even more violent manner. Many people want to cover up past crimes with new crimes and this cannot be tolerated.\* As I mentioned before, in addition to punishing those culpable of previous crimes I would also suggest encouraging subordinates in the military ranks to collaborate in the renewal of this institution. There are therapies and people can begin a process of healing. Therefore please do not mistrust anyone as long as there remains a spark of hope for conversion. Let us do everything possible to make this process of conversion possible. I believe that all of us need to be converted more and more to the one true God.

I do not understand how the governmental Junta, through the secretary for communication, was able to issue an official statement that made a hasty judgment on the actions that occurred and yet failed to listen to the different versions of those events from the various groups involved. Instead of ordering a thorough investigation of the events, the Junta tried to justify the massacre by arguing that the government responded to the aggression of the demonstrators by exercising the right of legitimate defense of the citizens and the right to use the necessary means to protect the great majority of the persons who would have been innocent victims of these events. Those who might be inclined to violence should be mindful of the conditions for legitimate defense. Indeed the following requisite is necessary in order to have recourse to legitimate defense: defensive action must be in proportion to the action of the unjust aggressor. If someone comes to assault me with his hands and no other weapon, I cannot respond by using some lethal weapon\*. Even when there might be offensive motives, in no way can a disproportionate defense be justified that results in a massacre such as occurred the other day. The warlike methods employed and the results of that action clearly demonstrate that this moral principle was trampled upon\*. It is impossible to say that this action was taken on behalf of innocent persons because a large number of innocent people were killed as a result of this action\*.

The Attorney General, who was present on that ill-fated Thursday night in the church of El Rosario, promised a thorough investigation. This is what must be done. I congratulate the Attorney General and I beg him to be faithful to his promise so that we do not have a recurrence of broken promises that characterized the previous regime\*. If there is to be a break with the past, then the best sign of this break would be that people do what they say they are going to do.

With regard to the massacre that resulted from breaking up a group of protesters, the Minister of Defense stated he had fired the head of public relations of the Treasury Police for having lied in his statements about the non-involvement of the security forces in the events that occurred on Wednesday. This is a magnificent gesture but I am not totally satisfied\* because this does not resolve the question of why he had to lie. If the Treasury Police were only victims of the provocation, then why hide this fact?

On two occasions during the past week the United States government has manifested their support of the Junta and has offered economic and military assistance.<sup>11</sup> It seems to me that the best way for the United States to support us at this time would be to condition their assistance on the following: renewal of the security forces\*, satisfactory resolution of the problem of those who have disappeared and the punishment of those guilty of crimes against the people\*. If these conditions are not made prerequisites for assistance then the military help of the United States will simply reinforce those persons who oppress our people\*, even though that assistance might consist of

arming them with tear gas and providing them with bulletproof vests. This will simply allow people to repress others with greater confidence.

One of the consequences of these events was the burial of twenty-one bodies in the church of El Rosario. There have been many protests and also many understanding voices. The Archbishop has also been blamed for allowing this to happen. But I tell you that the actual events do not warrant placing any blame on the Archbishop. Facts are facts and these events occurred without the consent of any authoritative figure. In serious cases the Church is in agreement with the handling of the deceased in this way, especially when the common good is involved. Members of Las Ligas said they did not want to take charge of the burial because they felt more bloodshed would occur. If this is true, then this should also be part of the thorough investigation. I believe it was prudent to bury these people in the church.\* During normal times two permissions are needed in order to bury people inside a church. Permission must be granted by the Holy See and only the Pope can authorize burial inside a church. Permission must also be obtained from the civil authorities, that is, the Legislative Assembly (when there is one). Therefore not only I, but the civil authorities have played a role in this matter. For my part I say that when the time allows, we will legalize this matter. Meanwhile, I must inform the Holy See about what has occurred and provide a proper explanation and I have no fear in doing this\*.

On the other hand, during this past week the popular political movements<sup>12</sup> have acted in some very unbecoming ways. They have assassinated at least eight members of the security forces, abducted Jaime Hill Argüello<sup>13</sup> and undertaken a series of actions that are impossible to enumerate here. Look at the situation of violence in which we live! Perhaps many people are taking advantage of this situation for their own personal interests. At the same time the four people who have been abducted have still not been released<sup>14</sup>. I express my solidarity with the anguish of their families and once again I call for a cessation of the violence. I want to speak to those of the left who have resorted to violence and tell them that their actions are provoking a counter coup of the right. Who knows if these persons are not instruments that are being manipulated because the persons have been pointed out by name? The ashes of our country should not be disrespected.

The governmental Junta has appointed the Attorney General, a member of the Supreme Court and another honorable person to investigate the cases of those persons who have disappeared. They have stated that they are willing to clarify the whereabouts of those who have disappeared. The Junta has formed a commission expressly for this purpose. This gives us hope. May this commission that has the total support of the people, as well as the military members of the Junta and all those who are responsible for the new situation of our country, issue a report that conforms to the reality. May the members of the military be effective and energetic and may the Junta, which has had the opportunity to unite itself with the security forces, work together so that this commission might be supported by all the different sectors of our country. May the people receive a response to their long-suffering --- a result of the absence of their loved ones.

The present government has treated the problem of those who have disappeared as an inheritance from the past. People, however, have disappeared during the present regime and their whereabouts are also unknown. Therefore as Church I am personally asking for information about the sacristan from the parish in Soyapango who, together with his pastor, was brought before the Treasury Police and no further news has been received regarding his situation\*.

John Paul II referred to events similar to our own but events that occurred in other countries. This week in Saint Peter's Square the Pope spoke about the drama of persons who have disappeared or who have died in Argentina and Chile: *We pray to the Lord to comfort those who no longer have*

*the hope of embracing their dear ones again. We fully share their grief and do not lose confidence that such painful problems will be clarified for the good not only of the relatives concerned but also for the good and internal peace of those communities so dear to us.*<sup>15</sup> The Pope also said: *The real way, the fundamental way to peace is through each human being, through the definition and recognition of and respect for the inalienable rights of individuals and communities of people*<sup>16</sup>.

Since the government wishes to resolve this problem, the Church, as she has already done, offers the services of the Legal Aid group that has a list of proven cases that could be helpful to the investigating commission. I repeat once again that the Church will continue to express her solidarity with the families of those persons who have disappeared until the freedom of their loved ones is obtained,\* or in the case where they have been assassinated, until a thorough investigation of the crime is completed, those culpable for the crime punished and the families compensated for their loss\*

We denounce the vulgar action of those who placed bombs in *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica*.<sup>17</sup> I have often denounced before you the silent accomplices and the publication in the media of information that is very slanted. I state once again that I do not approve of those who combat the violation of the freedom of expression with violence. Ideas are combated with ideas and not with bombs and other weapons\*.

We listened to the statements concerning the government emergency program and it is very satisfying to hear words concerning the reactivation of the economy with a clear orientation in favor of the people: control of inflation and creation of jobs. With regard to the government's political plan there is reference to respect for human rights, distancing themselves from the corrupt politics of the past, increased participation of the people in the management of the government and elimination of governmental corruption<sup>18</sup>. I want to experience these words as a new ray of hope that will become a reality as these plans are implemented --- plans that the people so urgently need.

Since we have been reflecting on the idolatry of violence and the popular organization and other idols created by the people, I want to speak about the situation of the occupation of the building of the governmental ministries. The majority of the employees, who were being held as hostages, have been released. A group of coffee growers who had gone to the Ministry of the Economy to negotiate on behalf of the small and middle-range growers have informed me that there are still persons being held hostage there who have nothing to do with the operation of the government offices. The Junta has agreed to dialogue with the Popular Revolutionary Bloc if they release the hostages. This appears to me to be a very positive gesture of the Junta which has recognized members of a popular organization as intermediaries, something that did not happen in the previous regime. The fact that the Junta has manifested an attitude of dialogue and an interest in studying the proposals of the Bloc appears to be very positive. I also understand the mistrust of the organizations and their hesitation in releasing the hostages since their fear of being repressed is real, especially in light of the actions that were taken against the popular demonstrations that were held this past week.\* I express my solidarity with the families of the hostages and I understand their anguish. Some of them have asked me to mediate a solution but I repeat mediation needs the collaboration of both sides and the Bloc has not accepted the mediation of the Archbishop. In order to overcome this impasse in negotiations and in order to be attentive to the pain of so many people who feel oppressed by a form of fascism and suffer the absence of loved ones, I would suggest that the members of the Bloc and the military Junta look for ways to overcome these obstacles and enter into dialogue and begin by negotiating the freedom of the hostages. The other organizations ought to do the same. Because I have mediated these situations I know that the Junta has offered to dialogue with these other organizations but they have not accepted this offer.

We have a saying: *by speaking with one another we come to a mutual understanding*. Let us learn how to speak the language of true politics and put aside the language of violence. Let us be flexible so that we can move beyond our own analysis and positions when these do not correspond to the reality. History is not formed by rigid systems. History is life and those who want to mold history through politics cannot take rigid positions but should be open and able to understand other positions and thus be flexible. We need organized groups to take on a role of true political leadership, to educate the people and to be a force in society that knows how to pressure and guide with an open mind because today, more than ever before, we are concerned about the good of the nation and not simply the good of any one organization.\*

Forgive me my sisters and brothers, but as I make this call I believe we find the solution to the problems that confront us. No one person has the key and therefore we are all suffering but through the collaboration of all people we will be able to find a solution. For this reason I congratulate El Colegio Médico of El Salvador because in their statement they make the following call: *We consider the participation of the other professional sectors with their proper competence to be necessary in order for our nation to move forward and return confidence to the nation. This process, which has been initiated, needs the participation of professionals so that immoral and dishonest elements that have tarnished the honor of our institutions might be held accountable for their actions.*<sup>19</sup> Thus we can say that we are all called to make a contribution to the nation's reconstruction. Therefore let us not destroy but let us build and (I am going to be brief in speaking about the other points) the Church offers another dimension of her mission: to be builders of the civilization of love.

### **Builder of the civilization of love**

The second mission of the Church, to build the civilization of love. The Old Testament passage that Jesus refers to in his dialogue with the scribe recalls the first command of God: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength* (15). Jesus reminds us that this was the foundation of the great nation that was called the People of God and that the people were commanded to entrust themselves to the only God with all their heart. This is the logic of the dialogue: there is only one God and therefore people should give God their whole being, their heart and their life. The covenant with God is not a legal matter but rather a commitment of love, a commitment of one's whole being, a handing over of self. Jesus perfects the law of the Old Testament when he responds to the legalists of his time: *The second commandment is this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself* (16). The uniqueness of Jesus' teaching is that he unites in one single command and under one single motivation the love of neighbor with the love of God. This is also the originality of Christians: we love one another for God.

When Puebla invites Latin America to make a preferential option for the poor it states: *This option does not imply any division or distinction between social classes but rather is an invitation to all to accept and take up the cause of the poor as if they were accepting and taking up their own cause, the cause of Jesus Christ himself: "I assure you that as often as you did it for one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it for me"*<sup>20</sup>. Jesus identifies himself with the human person and is able to say: *the first commandment is to love God and the second is very much like the first, namely, to love your neighbor for the love of God*.

If there were time we could analyze the message of Puebla that calls us to build the civilization of love<sup>21</sup>. I simply want to say one thing. Many people believe that the call to love is ineffective,

insufficient, and weak. This is so real that some reporters who have interviewed me have questioned me about this: *You preach often about love, do you really believe that love can resolve this situation? Do you not believe that violence is the only way since throughout history change has only been achieved through violence?* I tell them: *If in fact change has been achieved through violence it is also a fact that women and men have not utilized the power that is so characteristic of them. The human person is not characterized by brute strength. The human person is not an animal but rather is characterized by reason and love.\**

Puebla also speaks to those who proclaim that love is useless and tells them not to offend Jesus because it is Jesus who commands us to believe in love. Jesus, through love, has saved the whole world. We, however, have not made use of the power of love and so we experience in our surroundings mistrust, violence, fear, and vengeance --- realities that should be far from us. Puebla states: *There is no greater satisfaction than that of knowing how to forgive and how to become reconciled.*<sup>22</sup> I believe that those words give order to our Republic. Let us become reconciled and not polarized! Let us live the integrity of love! Let us live in the way that Jesus commands us: *love is not only doing good to those who love you and treat you well, but love means loving and forgiving and extending your hand in friendship to your enemies so that together you might seek that which is good and that which is of interest to the both of you* (17).

### **Minister of the true worship of God**

Sisters and brothers, I conclude with a priestly thought. When I say that the Church is the minister of the true worship of God, I refer to the beautiful commentary that was given to Jesus after he spoke about the great commandment. The scribe tells Jesus: *Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, "He is One and there is no other than he" and "to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself" is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices* (18). When Jesus saw that the Scribe responded with good sense he says: *You are not far from the Kingdom of God* (19).

When we understand that our religion is not simply worship or prayer while our hearts are filled with hatred, then we are not far from the Kingdom of God. True worship is spiritual worship and here we refer to those who love, those who hand themselves over in service to others, those who come to Mass after having lived a week of commitment in their homes or professional life, and those who have lived for others and not for themselves. Spiritual worship is above all else structured worship. The Mass, even though it is the presence of Jesus who died for us, has no meaning if we do not participate with the enthusiasm of Jesus who hands himself over to us. In the second reading (20) Saint Paul tells us that we should live in harmony with Jesus and this has been our primary theme: Jesus is the high priest who offers himself once for all people. Thus Jesus sanctifies all people. How fruitful is love and how fruitful is worship that is given to God when it begins from the depths of love.

### **Life of the Church**

This is precisely what our Church desires to be. Therefore, my beloved sisters and brothers, I invite you to live this worship as a priestly people in our Sunday celebration and to always worship God with a profound love. This is the Church that has lived events filled with love, events such as the following:

Tomorrow we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Religious Franciscans of the Virgin. This Congregation began in Murcia, Spain one hundred years ago and Mother Francisca Paula Gil Cano was their founder. They initiated their ministry here in Usulután, El Salvador in 1932 in the home for the elderly, Castilo de Santa Ana. Today, they also minister in a clinic in the parish of Concepción and a school in Metapán. We send them our kind greetings of love and our congratulations.\*

The Church has witnessed the love that we have spoken about today. In the parish of Colón we celebrated twenty marriages and many Confirmations. I want to congratulate Father Nicolás Menjívar and the Sacred Heart Sisters and the catechists for having sanctified so many homes last week.

The school Madre Catherina DiMaggio sponsored an activity to help Radio YSAX. The students, who are poor, gave us 500 córdobas. I want to congratulate\* the director, Mother Socorro, the teachers and primarily the students. Through your example you give meaning to the following words: people do not give because they have but rather because they want to give. Again I call upon everyone to continue to help us by supporting the cultural radio station of the Church.

In El Paraíso, the Bethlehemite Sisters celebrated a beautiful consecration of children but I was unable to share in this event with them because of other commitments. I thank them for the gift that they sent me.

Yesterday I was very pleased to see the promotional work that Father Vito Guarato is doing in La Palma through an academy of sewing and manual arts and a spirituality center that is located next to the convent.

I also want to express my solidarity with the group from the Marriage Encounter at María Auxiliadora as they come to the assistance of those who were injured in the explosion of a rocket in Ciudad Delgado. This leads me to call everyone to charity and Christian love and to help those who, as a result of these situations, live in poverty. The fires and other burglaries invite us to respond with the love of God.

The Catechumenate Community is gathering today in Planes de Renderos. May the Lord bless their efforts to sanctify themselves in the teachings of the Bible!

I wish to thank Mr. Duarte for his kind comments on his television program and also want to express my solidarity with the United Union of Construction Workers<sup>23</sup> and El Foro Popular.

Finally, I want to tell you, my sisters and brothers, that if there is no abrupt change in the circumstances here in our country, I will travel to the United States to participate in the ecumenical gathering of the National Council of Christian Churches. Thursday I will present a discourse there but I do not want this presentation to be simply my personal words. In the talk that I have prepared<sup>24</sup> I state that I am not traveling alone but am united with the beloved priests and religious and faithful --- with the whole community of the Archdiocese. Thus when I speak to the Christian communities in the United States I will thank them, in your name, for their many expressions of solidarity and for the honor that they bestow upon me by inviting me to participate in their gathering\*.

Before we move to the altar to celebrate with the Eternal Priest and with these beloved brothers who are going to concelebrate with me, I ask for your patience for just one moment more as we read the appointment of Father Ramiro and two brief messages: one from the new pastor and another from one of the priests who is celebrating his twenty-fifth anniversary.\*

<sup>1</sup> See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Discourse of John Paul II at the opening of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> On 2 November 1979, Jorge Schafik Handal, secretary general of the Salvadoran Communist Party, in a press conference in the Law Faculty of the National University, denounced plans for a counter coup d'état and presented a list of people, civil and military, involved in it. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 3 November 1979.

<sup>5</sup> *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país*, (6 August 1979), 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> On 29 October 1979 a demonstration organized by the LP-28 in support of the mothers and families of political prisoners and disappeared was suppressed. A few days later 21 victims of this massacre were buried in the church of El Rosario. On 31 October 1979 a facetious march organized by the BPR was also suppressed.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of the Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero to Mons. Romero, archbishop of San Salvador (3 November 1979), See *Manuscritos de los esquemas de las homilias de monseñor Oscar A. Romero*, Oficina de la causa de canonización de monseñor Oscar A. Romero, Arzobispado de San Salvador.

<sup>10</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 31 October 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 31 October 1979.

<sup>12</sup> In the context, we believe he wished to say *political-military organizations*, better known as guerrilla organizations: FPL, ERP, FARN and PRTC.

<sup>13</sup> A businessman kidnapped the 31 October 1979. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 1 November 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis McDonall, Fausto Buchelli, Jaime Batlle and Luis Escalante Arce.

<sup>15</sup> Sunday Allocution of 28 October 1979, *Osservatore Romano*, 4 November 1979.

<sup>16</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, and *El Diario de Hoy*, 29 October 1979.

<sup>18</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 2 November 1979.

<sup>19</sup> El Colegio Médico de El Salvador ante la conciencia nacional, *El Diario de Hoy*, 3 November 1979.

<sup>20</sup> See *Message to the People of Latin America*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> See *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>23</sup> The statement of the SUTC, dated 1 November 1979, says: The SUTC gives its full support to Mons. Oscar Arnulfo Romdero y Galdámez since it considers him a prelate of the Church who expresses the voice of the people and who struggles courageously for the respect of human rights, the reestablishment of social justice and to win the peace and unity of all sectors of the people." See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 7 November 1979.

<sup>24</sup> See *Orientación*, 11 November 1979.

*Marginal References* (1) Heb 7,23; (2) Heb 7,24; (3) Rv 1,6; (4) Mt 5,13-14; (5) Mk 12,28; (6) Mk 12,29-31; (7) Dt 6,4-5; (8) Ex 3,8; (9) Dt 6,4-9; (10) Mt 23,5; (11) PP 19; (12) M 7,20; (13) GS 43; (14) Mk 12,29; (15) Mk 12,30; (16) Mk 12,31; (17) Mt 5,44; (18) Mk 12,32-33; (19) Mk 12,34; (20) Heb 7,27.