

CHRISTIAN HOPE, THE KEY FOR TRUE LIBERATION

**Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 18, 1979**

Daniel 12:1-3
Hebrews 10:11, 14-18
Mark 13:24-32

Beloved messenger of millions of Christian brothers and sisters¹

Through the applause of our beloved people receive our gratitude and admiration for this gesture of ecumenical fraternity. As you return I ask that you simply express what you have seen and heard and bring with you the testimony that with this people it is not hard to be a good shepherd. They are a people that impel to their service us who have been called to defend their rights and be their voice. Therefore, rather than a service that merits such generous honors I see this as my duty which gives me great satisfaction.

I thank you and all those who organized the visit that I was unable to make and I also want to tell you that our Church takes on a commitment in response to your commitment to pray for us and to be watchful in such a way that the Christian power, the great power of the North, might support our authentic human rights. We, as a people and as a Church, want to enthusiastically continue to walk on the paths that Christ marked out, paths of dignity and freedom and human rights for all the people of El Salvador.

My dear sisters and brother, Doctor Lara has called this celebration *a feast*. And it truly is a feast but let us also give this feast a character that the documents of the Second Vatican Council refer to as an ecumenical character. The Council did not invent this word but rather it arises from the efforts of Catholics and non-Catholics to live in unity. Without a doubt, the Council has encouraged these efforts to move forward.

No one should be surprised by this sincere partnership for this is a sign of the respect of the Catholic Church that extends her open arms to the open arms of others who are not Catholic. The Church has often spoken with Christian clarity: do not betray the integrity of the Catholic profession of faith but respect those who, through God's design, do not share with us the fullness of the Christian life as Catholicism perceives it.

Mutual respect means that we respect the conscious and informed profession of faith of our sisters and brothers. We have listened to a theologian and there is no doubt that his conviction merits our respect. Here we also want to warn against the danger of those persons who profess their faith in fanatical, resentful and/or a convenient manner ... a phenomenon which we see in many of our Catholic and non-Catholic sisters and brothers in El Salvador.

May our profession of faith be nourished by sincerity and a search for the truth which implies study. May we all be convinced that we are searching for the true God as we pray and reflect on the sacred Word of God. When this sincerity is not tainted by sin and voluntary separation then God has to bless us. Indeed, in such a situation the Council proclaims that we are living a true Christian spirituality that is also ecumenical. (1)

Today's readings nourish the common hope that is shared by Catholics and Protestants. Furthermore, this morning there might even be with us persons who do not believe in Christ but are sincerely convinced of their Jewish religion. The first reading from the Old Testament orients us with regard to the theme that is the basis of our reflection. Again, one does not have to believe in God in order to find in today's readings (which we know is the Word of God) a call to the good will of all people ... a call which the Council and theologians refer to as the *seeds of the Word* (*Ad Gentes*, #11), rays of divine inspiration, of the Spirit of God who transforms the heart of the atheist, the heart of the non-believer. God is the author of the Word and without a doubt these rays of God are present in every human being, even in those people who do not even recognize the existence of God.

In the movement of the will of the human person we find the desire that is spoken about in today's readings, a desire that is called hope. In our country and our difficult situation many people have lost the spirit of optimism and the joy of hope. As the Word of God responds to the good will of the human person we are told that we must nourish our hope. In order to better understand this message of hope the Liturgy today, on this thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary time, speaks to us about the end of time. Next Sunday, the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King and this is the crowning point of our liturgical reflection. But today we are like those persons who participate in a celebration for the end of the year. With the perspective of the end of the year, instead of seeing things come to an end and instead of focusing on the fluctuations of time and so many other realities, we focus our hearts on the great Christian hope that is present in the midst of the vicissitudes of life.

Therefore this morning I entitle my homily: Christian hope, the key and the power of our true liberation. In Christian hope there are three great convictions: First, the goal of our hope: the Kingdom of God; Second, the power of our hope, liberation in Christ; Third, the attitude of those persons who are filled with hope, the goal and dynamic power that I have referred to creates in individuals an attitude that makes them courageous agents of the liberation of people.

The goal of our hope: the Kingdom of God

The goal of our hope is the Kingdom of God. The gospel addresses a concern that existed in many Christians, namely, when Christ died and rose and proclaimed a Kingdom, people thought this Kingdom was very near and this constituted a temptation for them, a temptation to hope that it was near at hand. But Jesus told them that the Son knows neither the day nor the hour. (2) The ministry of the pastors during those early days of Christianity involved bringing people to the realization that the experience of the nearness of the Kingdom meant living with a certain tension. This is Christian faith and involves a tension that is called hope. To hope in Christ who promised that he would return. In our liturgical celebration we proclaim the words: *Christ will come again!* Christian people journey and are encouraged by hope in the Kingdom of God.

The framework for the gospel passage that was read this morning is the final days of Jesus' life. When Jesus was leaving the area of Bethany where he had been received with gracious hospitality, he admired the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem. In the evening when the sun shone upon the marble of the Temple it had to appear to be something that would be eternal, a symbol of the indestructible covenant between God and the Jewish people. Listen to Jesus' words to the Apostles as he admires the beautiful construction of the Temple: *Do you see these great buildings? There will not be one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down* (3). Concerned, the Apostles ask Jesus: *Tell us when will this happen and what sign will there be when all these things are about*

to come to an end? (4). In response to their question, Jesus begins to proclaim the famous eschatological discourse. This is the name that is give to this passage, one of the longest discourses that is preserved in the gospel ... the eschatological discourse, the discourse about the final stages, the last things ... thus eschatological means that which is ultimate and definitive.

Jesus sees the Temple as the symbol of the history of Israel, a people to whom God promised unshakeable eternity. Now as Jesus refers to the Temple and says that no stone will be left upon another he is not referring to this prophecy as a symbol. Jesus refers to the Temple and says that it is not deserving of this immortality precisely because it will be a symbol of the betrayal of God by the people. Thirty years after Jesus spoke these words the armies of the Roman Empire destroyed the Temple and all of Jerusalem as they crushed an insurrection of the people ... ploughs were used so that no stone was left on another.

As Jesus speaks about the destruction of the Temple he also reminds the Apostles about the destruction of the universe. The universe is also not definitive, neither the sun or the moon or the stars ... their light will cease to exist. Everything will pass away, heaven and earth, and there is only one thing that will not pass away: *my words will not pass away* (5). Here, Jesus speaks about a universal destruction. The gospel uses apocalyptic language (a style that the Biblical authors liked to use) to describe a simple reality, often times using incredible distortions and numbers that were only understood by the people of that time. For this reason we do not fully understand the book of Revelation and much of the imaginary but we do understand the content that Jesus wanted to share with us.

When speaking about the symbol of the Temple that will be destroyed and when proclaiming the prophecy about the stars that will fall from the sky (6), Jesus is telling us about the transitional preparations that must be experienced as we journey toward that which is eternal. Today's gospel highlights the Word of God: *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and majesty and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the end of the sky.* At the end of this Liturgical Year this is primary, namely, the idea of being united with Christ as the elect. We become the elect when we voluntarily unite ourselves with the Lord who will not pass away. We are not the elect when, instead of joining ourselves to the Lord, to the Eternal One, we unite ourselves to idols that will pass away just as heaven and earth will pass away.

Thus we can understand the Church's insistence on preaching the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Christ. Naturally this creates in the heart of men and women a virtue that is called hope. Hope is a theological virtue that unites men and women to God because they hope for things that by themselves they are unable to acquire. Their hope is founded on the promise of God. The promise of God is the basis of hope, otherwise it would be insane. Those without faith do not understand this foundation of divine promises, promises that have been made to humankind. People without faith believe that we hope in vain and only want to build a kingdom on earth. But when people understand that the Kingdom of God which was established by Christ in time is primary, then they are able to say that at this time there are seeds of eternity in the hearts of women and men who hope and believe in our Lord, the eternal Jesus Christ.

Thus, the second reading proposes to us a duality between that which is temporal and that which is eternal. We are told that after Christ's sacrifice he took his place at the right hand of God. This is Biblical imagery that enables us to understand that Christ participates in God's power and *now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool* (7). In other words, there is an eternal, unchanging position of Christ and we cannot damage this position during the course of earthly history, the time

that God needs to submit the sins of men and women to the power of the Kingdom of God. Whether they convert or not, God will overcome and the victory of his Kingdom is sure. Blessed are those who wait for this time to pass. What concerns us is to place the sins of the world at the feet of God. Those who live in sin or become rooted in situations of sin and injustice and disorder will pass away with heaven and earth which will also pass away.

The first reading, the passage from the book of Daniel, is most beautiful because it is the first time that we find reference in the Old Testament to the mystery of the resurrection of women and men. This morning it is good that we return to reflect on this inspired passage from the book of Daniel where we hear the words: *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever* (8).

This revelation of the resurrection is made to the people of Israel who did not have a clear idea of life after death. They believed in some kind of super-life, a super-life that was tempered by life here on earth. We see this idea expressed during the time of the Maccabean persecution: *It is not just that these people should live only as a nation. All those who struggle on behalf of liberation should also have a personal participation in the kingdom of heaven.* I remember that one day we cited here the words of an atheist who said: *I am not satisfied with a revolution that is seen as a community revolution in which some people die and others survive to enjoy the benefits won and guaranteed on the pedestals of the pain of those who have died.* There has to be a reward for every person who participates in the struggle and a collective revolution is not satisfactory. During times of persecution these two positions that are spoken about in the first reading are defined: *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace* (9). The oppressed and the oppressors will not have the same fate in eternity and the same can be said of those who act unjustly and those who are the victims of these injustices, the martyrs, the heroes of the great earthly battles. If these people place their trust and their hope in God, they will conquer even when it appears that they have disappeared in a silent death of pain and ignominy.

God's pedagogy, which is clearly revealed in the prophets, ought to encourage us. According to the reading from Daniel, the persecution which was occurring at that time would cease and there would come a Kingdom of God that would be more perfect than people had expected. Nevertheless a hundred years would pass before Christ would return and extend to all people the promise of redemption and resurrection. We could say that God deceived us. But that is not true because what we see here is the pedagogy of a father in relation to his child. They are about to set out on a long journey and so that the child does not become discouraged the father speaks about the beauty of the place where they are going. The child becomes tired and so the father begins to say: *Look, we are only going to that mountain top and after that you will see the beautiful kingdom that I described.* When the child arrives at the mountain peak, the father says: *It is just a little further.* In the same way the prophets led humankind and the Church uses the same pedagogy as the prophets. Therefore the Church does not say: *This political system that has conquered with so much bloodshed is definitive.* No, the Church cannot undertake to define here on earth the Kingdom of God. The Church continues to encourage liberators, continues to encourage the search for better government, continues to encourage the search for better political systems, but the Church herself is not political. She is one who encourages. She is like the father who leads his child further, and further, and who maintains a vision of the utopia. Thus the Church's position rests on a desire to make systems more and more perfect.

Therefore, atheists who want to offer men and women a paradise here on earth are blind. Such a paradise does not exist. Beyond our efforts, God exists, and the only perfect reality will be our definitive liberation, immortality, and this will occur after death. This does not mean that we become alienated or that we do not work or that we die with conformity. The first Christians spoke out strongly against this attitude. The fact that one is hoping for heaven means that one goes out and works. Saint Paul says: *If anyone is unwilling to work then that one should not eat* (10). In other words, hope in heaven should not be the cause of laziness. One must work and those who have a vocation must develop their vocation. All of us must make an effort to better here on earth our political, social, and economic situation, but we must do so with the perspective of eternity. Hope encourages us to reflect here on earth the beauty, justice and love of the Kingdom. We can reflect nothing more because that which is true and definitive is reserved for hope and hope encourages us in our work. Hope should be the virtue of politicians and those who struggle for liberation --- Christian hope!

Without hope in God earthly liberation becomes mutilated. Without hope for that which is eternal, liberation becomes simply a change in some situation. We do not trust an atheist or a person without faith or without God who seeks power in order to bless the earth. They cannot offer a paradise here on earth because no such paradise exists, but, yes, there does exist the hope of working so that things might become better and better. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, the Church nourishes hope. She is not the one who analyses political systems or strategies, rather she simply encourages all systems and strategies so that they do not go astray and also orients these systems and strategies on paths of true liberation that can only be lived on the horizons that are pointed out by today's readings.

The power of our hope: liberation in Christ

My second thought is this: the strength of our hope is liberation in Christ. Complete liberation is not within our grasp because as we have said a thousand times, true liberation does not simply consist of better salaries, lower prices, or a change in government --- these are temporal liberation and, yes, they are part of our total liberation. Thus the Church does not distance herself from these realities but realizes that they are simply dimensions of partial liberation. The Church also points out the root causes of injustice --- why is there violence in El Salvador? Why are people discontent? Why are the demands of the people just? Why does selfishness consist in having all and not thinking of others? Certainly all of these are the basis of liberation but not of our total liberation.

As we have written in our Pastoral Letters, we repeat once again: we support the political pressure that is exerted by popular political organizations and we support the just demands of the people but at the same time we disapprove of these organizations when they abuse their power and when they make demands in a demagogic manner because these actions do not contribute to the struggle for people's true liberation. We point out these defects and strengths because we realize that these worldly liberations are rooted in a reality that can only be discovered with faith and a goal that can only be discovered with hope. The root is sin and the goal is the Kingdom of God. The root is sin because from sin springs selfishness and social injustice and violence. All of this is the fruit of sin. The goal is beyond history because despite all these earthly liberations, the human person is not content with finding earthly happiness but aspires to a definitive liberation, a life without death, the highest dignity of being recognized as a child of God. Who then leads us to these roots and who raises us up to these heights? Only Christ does this. Without Christ there is no true liberation.

It is wonderful to hear in the today's readings that the success that is proclaimed after Daniel's conflicts and after the destruction of the universes that is initiated by Christ, is found in the free initiative of God. Our hope is based on God's promises. We do not have to put pressure on God to act in this way. God is free and has freely offered us liberation from our sins. God has also promised to bestow on us the dignity of children of God.

In today's readings we discover that only the power of God can do all of this. *But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father* (11).

We are told in the first reading that the one who in the Old Testament represents the presence of the power of God ... we are told that this one accompanies the People of God who struggle for liberation. (12) The archangel Michael represents the power of God with his people and people can walk only with this power.

But I want to explain more fully my second idea, namely, that only in God can we hope for liberation and only in Christ the liberator can people hope for their liberation. The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews presents Christ as the cause of our liberating hope: *Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But Christ offered one sacrifice for sins and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he [Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being perfected.* (13) Notice the tense of the verbs: *by one offering he has made perfect* ... the past tense. Thus through an action that occurred in the past he has made perfect those who are being made perfect ... a present action. Christ has become the cause of perfection and blessed are those who take advantage of this gift.

Christ has become the cause of redemption and liberation because through his sacrifice he paid the debt of our sins and obtained for us the heights of heaven and eternal friendship with God. Thus through this power and strength all those who believe in Christ are brought to perfection. What hope for us to know that we are not supported by our fragile walking sticks and to know that our cries of liberation are not some form of demagoguery that is supported with weapons or violence or the things of the earth ... what hope to realize that hope is more powerful than all these acts of violence.

When some reporters asked me about the opinions of others who say that there will be no change in El Salvador without violence and that history has clearly demonstrated that the just demands of people are only obtained through battles and violence, I told them what I now want to share with you. Violence has occurred often in history because people have believed more in brute strength than in the love that the Lord has given to them and because people have not taken into consideration their ability to reason and dialogue and understand. At this time in El Salvador it is good to remember that the inspiration to change things here in our country will only come from Christ and from his love. If things that should be shared in love are taken by force then it is necessary to understand in time the great pedagogy of the gospel as well as the faith and trust that we must place in the only one who is the cause and the creator of our liberation: Christ our Lord.

Thus the Pope in his first discourse said: *Do not be afraid! Open the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. God knows what is man. He alone knows it.*² You who struggle from the depths of misery, from the pain of torture and abuse ... do not trust solely in the strength of your arms or your ingenuity. These must be brought into play but it is of primary importance that you support your desire for liberation in Christ the Lord and in his omnipotent love.*

Attitude of people who have hope

I end my sermon with this third point: the attitude of people who have hope. It is not a passive attitude. I said the other day that Puebla reminds us (14) that in the present situation of the people of Latin America, a situation like the one we are living here in El Salvador, there are two forms of reaction: some are passivists who wait for everything to come from God. They are saddened by the situation and cry but they do nothing. On the other hand, others are activists who say: *God is far from us and so we will fix things ourselves*. As a result of this attitude we find all the manifestations of violence. All forms of activity are undertaken but the presence of God is never considered. Thus we see crimes and bloodshed and none of this can be the price that we have to pay for our redemption.

Therefore the document of Puebla points out the true doctrine of the gospel. (15) Jesus hoped in God and was a man devoted to Providence, one who believed the birds and the flowers are clothed by God and are provided with food. (16) At the same Jesus understands that as a human person he must be the creator of history. Thus he collaborates with the Father and waits for the hour and the will of the Father to be revealed before handing himself over forever to this hour and will. When the time arrives in which God asks people to sacrifice themselves, then it is time to say: *In you Lord I place my hope*. Then one must launch out into the deep with complete confidence in the Lord. God and the human person make history. God saves humanity in their own history. The history of salvation is the history of El Salvador when we, the people of El Salvador, look for the presence of God, the Saviour, in our history.

Therefore the attitude of true Christians and of true hope is found in the word that Jesus speaks in his eschatological discourse: *Be watchful* (17). This is the word: *Be watchful! Be alert!* Jesus then uses comparisons: *Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near* (18). Here in our eternal spring time we do not notice these differences, but in those countries where the seasons are marked by very different climates one sees that winter is like death, because all the trees have died. But as spring arrives the leaves begin to grow anew and then the flowers and fruits. Jesus says: *you know that summer is near* (19). Jesus also says: *The time of God must also be observed so that when the Lord passes by you might collaborate with him*. At the conclusion of the discourse that we read today we heard the following words: *You do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find your sleeping* (20). This is a Christian attitude: to truly experience hope. One does not fall asleep believing that God will do everything and then come. Hope awakens in us a desire to collaborate with God and gives us the surety that if we do our part God will also not fail us and save the country.*

In today's readings, when Jesus and the prophet Daniel present us with these scenes of destruction and suffering and pain they are not telling us that God has abandoned his people. Anyone might be tempted to say: *God has abandoned us and left us alone!* But no, this is not true. I read a commentary on this passage that greatly impressed me and said that here we are presented with the pain of birth and not with God's abandonment. The prophet speaks words that could be applied today to El Salvador: *It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time* (21). These are difficult times like the difficult time when a woman gives birth. Something new is born and something else passes away. History is always like this. Those who see history as static and able to be measured with scientific instruments ... such people do not have a true concept of history. Those persons who use their criteria and models to evaluate everything that happens in the country and are unable to evaluate their strategies and systems and procedures, unable to adapt to the new way of the nation ... these individuals do not understand that history is

like a mother who gives birth: something old dies and something new is born. This is history. People of hope know that all the pains of the country, like the pains of the family and suffering in the homes, are the pains of a new creature that is being born and will be born if in the pain we lift up our hearts to God who also wants us to use our pain and suffering in such a way that we are able to collaborate with God in the salvation of our people. The times are difficult but our Church must be calm.

Life of the Church

Therefore, my beloved sisters and brothers, allow me to evaluate this past week so that with the joy that belongs to a people who are nourished by hope, we might offer the nation the authentic contribution of the Church --- so that we might offer this contribution in the same way that I offer it in my Pastoral Letter. You and I are the ones who must be nourished by a Christian hope that is based on God's promise and the price that Jesus Christ paid ... a hope that our nation is in danger of losing.

This Wednesday, November 21st, we will celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Peace in San Miguel. In 1966, Pope Paul VI proclaimed Our Lady of Peace as the patroness of the Republic of San Salvador. Therefore, I invite you, the people of El Salvador, to offer many prayers and if you are able to participate in the pontifical celebration at 9:30am, know that your presence is most welcome in San Miguel. For my part, I will participate in this celebration to which I have been invited by the bishop of San Miguel and in my role as metropolitan Archbishop and in the name of the Archdiocese, I will render homage to the Blessed Virgin. No one should interpret my presence in any other way. Indeed I go there as a pastor who knows that Mary intercedes before God for peace for this land and we all must ask for this gift of peace.

During this past week the clergy of the vicariate of San José Quezaltepeque made their retreat. I was with them and congratulated them for their efforts with regard to renewal and the enrichment of their priestly spirituality.

The vicariate of Libertad came together for a day of study and the theme of their reflection was the Fourth Pastoral Letter. Yesterday we, Dr. Lara³ and myself, came together with priests, women religious and laity and shared in the joy of a Church that experiences herself more deeply rooted in the midst of our communities.

Last Sunday we celebrated the feast of San Martín and here I want to highlight the work of the catechists and the enthusiasm of the young people in this parish that is directed by Father Rutilio Sánchez. The Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament also work there and I had the pleasure of greeting them.

I also want to highlight the youth movements in Colonia Santa Lucia as well as the adults who live an intense parish life ... I congratulate them on their commitment.

The people of Dulce Nombre de María in Candelaria, Cuscatlán, celebrated their feast and I accompanied them and their temporary pastor and congratulated them for the flourishing of their parish school which celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Friday, in this Basilica of Sagrado Corazón we gathered together for a liturgical celebration for peace. The participation of Doña Lidia Pineda and her message of peace gave laypeople the means by which they can be instruments of peace in the midst of our difficult situation.

Yesterday in Reubicación of Chalatenango, areas two and three, we celebrated the feast of Saint Theresa. At this place I became aware of the fact that there are more than a thousand people in this provisional situation and thanks to God, despite the poverty that exists in this area, religion is producing fruits of much joy and devotion. I greeted Father Efraín López and the Assumption Sisters who are ministering there.

This afternoon we will bless a rural chapel in the parish of Santo Tomás.

I rejoice at the gathering of young men in the seminary yesterday who are discerning a vocation. We expected about fifty young men and more than 100 young men have come together --- almost all of them are high school graduates and probably many of them will seek entrance into the seminary. It is amazing that at this time, a time that was spoken about by Doctor Lara and a time that the prophet Daniel refers to as a difficult time yet at this difficult time the heroism of these young men flourishes and it is clear they are looking for God's adventure in history.

I rejoice in the fact that this week the Hospital de la Divina Providencia was able to acquire the land that will enable them to extend their work on behalf of orphaned children and incapacitated elderly people. Seventy-five thousand colones are still owed before this land is owned.

We are saddened by the accident that Caritas suffered as they were transporting assistance on behalf of those persons who are poor.

Events of the week

Raising our eyes toward the universal Church I find that two ideas of the Pope seem to illuminate in a marvelous way the situation of El Salvador. First, the situation of hunger and second, the situation of abductions.

With regard to hunger the Pope spoke to the Food and Agricultural Organization, a commission that is part of the United Nations that deals with matters of nutrition and agriculture. The Pope pointed out the true causes of hunger in the world and stated that assistance programs are not enough, rather structural changes are necessary. Here I repeat some of the Pope's words: *Hunger in the world does not always come merely from unfavorable geographical, climatic or agricultural circumstances, the ones you are endeavoring to palliate gradually; it comes also from man himself, from deficiencies of social organization which prevents personal initiative, and even from the terror and oppression of inhuman ideological and political systems.*⁴ Here the Holy Father is telling us, the people of El Salvador: now that you, government officials, are speaking about change, if you truly want to merit the people's trust, then you cannot rest until you have made profound structural changes. Thus, it is necessary to take seriously the words of the Pope because our problems of hunger and nutrition are not going to be resolved through paternalism and gifts but through profound structural changes that go to the very root of our existence as a people.

The experts in nutrition say that fifty million people in Latin America suffer severe malnutrition and five hundred million people in the world are in the same situation. The number of people who suffer malnutrition is increasing rather than decreasing. Latin America is the region that is most effected by this problem and what complicates this problem is the dramatic rise in the price of basic consumer products. Take note of the following: since 1975 prices in Latin America have increased at the rate of 319% --- in other words, prices have more than tripled. On the other hand, in more developed countries with better laws, the rate of increase in these same products is only 31%. This

indicates that here in El Salvador we could buy beans and corn at lower prices but that we also need laws that regulate these prices. Since 1975 here in El Salvador --- and these are official statistics --- the nutritional defects in the people in our country constitute one of the most dramatic dimensions of our social situation. More than fifty percent of the people in El Salvador, because of a lack of economic resources, suffer problems of malnutrition. In light of this it appears to me that the measures of the government are right on target when they speak of freezing the prices of some of the basic food products⁵ and increasing the salaries of rural farm workers.⁶

You are aware of the fact that those who harvest coffee will be paid 14.25 colones while those harvesting cotton will receive 8.00 colones and those harvest sugar cane 9.00 colones. It is not enough to point out these deficiencies but changes must also be made because the needs of our workers are the same whether they harvest sugar cane, cotton or coffee. The worth and the dignity of their work is the same. Therefore it would be good if the government took steps to resolve these anomalies. It is also necessary that these steps that I speak about do not result in detrimental effects for the small and medium producers of these products. A commission composed of women who work in the markets spoke about the effect of lower prices on small businesses that very often buy these products at higher prices than they can sell them. Therefore we say: these are moments of sacrifice and everyone must do all that is possible so that this sacrifice is shared. It would also be good if government officials would be mindful of the fact that larger producers and businesses are different than small producers and businesses and therefore the laws must take these differences into consideration when seeking justice in these matters.*

On page five of our newspaper, *Orientación*,⁷ you can read the discourse of the Pope which was proclaimed in Des Moines where he spoke about the problem of food and farm production. I simply refer here to the words that were also stated in the documents of the Vatican Council: *God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity* (22).

The other problem that the Pope focused on and that is most real for us is the problem of abductions. The Pope referred to two cases: one in Spain and another in Italy. His words seem very appropriate for us in El Salvador: *I want to direct my words to those who have abducted Don Javier Ruperez, a distinguished member of the Spanish House of Deputies. I know that that action has been roundly deplored and condemned by public opinion. I continually ask the Lord to illuminate your minds and move your hearts --- you who are responsible for this abduction --- so that guided by the principles of coexistence and human sentiments you will free Mr. Ruperez and put an end to the anguish that he and his family experience at this time. I invite you to reflect on the fact that no human and just solution can be achieved by traveling the path of violence. No one, and least of all those who call themselves Christian, should have recourse to violent means.*⁸ We could speak the same words here in El Salvador to those who have abducted Jamie Battle and Jaime Hill and so in the name of love and civilization we ask that they be freed.

The problem of abductions leads us to another sensitive problem that is occurring here in El Salvador. For the same reason and using the same words of the Pope, I call upon the members of the Security Forces who have detained those who have disappeared or who have knowledge of what has happened to them to either free them or to come freely before the investigating commission and let us know what has happened to them and who is responsible for these actions.*

This week FAPU presented photographs that prove the existence of a clandestine cemetery on the cliff of Litoral. It is certain that these photographs are identical to those taken by one of the priests and so it might be asked: how did FAPU obtain these? I read the testimony of a militant

member of the PDC who stated that after he was arrested in San Vicente, the Security Forces threw him and four other *campesinos* into this place⁹. His statement has given clues to those in charge of the investigation of this matter. It is necessary that those persons who have information about this should collaborate with the commission which is clearly concerned about this matter¹⁰. I hope that the commission will not be satisfied with simply publishing a summary of the result of their investigation. I believe that in justice the commission must also ask for immediate compensation for the surviving family members of those who have disappeared --- those who are able to show that their loved ones have been assassinated or who are now presumed to have suffered this fate. I believe there are many helpless and abandoned families and therefore according to Christian and human morality those who are responsible for these actions ought to make restitution for the evil that they have done.

In this same line of thought the Human Rights Commission has asked the government to provide information about political prisoners who have been detained in the public jails and who have not obtained their freedom because it is said that there have arisen doubts about the interpretation of this decree.¹¹ For their part, the Legal Aid group working with the Archdiocese has presented the government and the commission a list of people who are believed to be imprisoned as political prisoners. This week they will also present a list of two hundred persons who have been arrested and/or disappeared and each of these cases has been carefully documented.

The Supreme Court of Justice has accepted a challenge that has been made manifest in their statement in which they speak about guaranteeing all recognized universal human rights. We have great hope as we listen to the following words of their statement: *We exhort all judicial officials to fulfill responsibly the obligations placed upon them by their position and at the same time insure the fulfillment of the norms that regulate the conduct that should be observed in the courts of justice*¹². The Supreme Court has also exhorted lawyers, as they carry out their functions, to collaborate in the quick, reasonable, and effective administration of justice so that in this way they might help to restore prestige to the judicial branch of the government¹³ ... a prestige that, as we have said here many times, is almost non-existent.

I received a letter from the mothers of those who have disappeared (four of them signed the letter) and they state that even though there are witnesses that may cause people to doubt this but the fact is that they are not being manipulated by Popular Organizations. Hopefully this is true so that the pain of these mothers is respected. My dear mothers, I respect your pain and suffering and therefore I will not allow your sacred pain to be utilized for demagogic reasons.* In their letter they also denounce the abuse that the National Guard inflicted on them on Tuesday, November 13th at 1:40am during their hunger strike at the Ministry of Justice. For this reason they decided to leave this place.

While speaking about those who have been abducted and those who have disappeared I once again want to ask for information about our beloved collaborator in the parish of Soyapango, the sacristan, Tomás López. We have heard nothing about him even though we know that when he was taken away he was wounded and all of this has occurred during the time of our new government. I know that this matter is being seriously investigated and I hope to be able to say something that will clarify this matter, otherwise the present situation of our government will be called into question.

Therefore it is necessary that the administration of justice and a prudent and wise purification of the Security Forces be put into practice.

Here I also must speak about a reality that I have consistently called upon all people to avoid: the reality of vengeance --- this is neither Christian nor human. After the publication of the decree that dissolved ORDEN, it was made known, supposedly by the same organization, that they would continue to operate with or without legal recognition.¹⁴ Some of their members will operate clandestinely, in those places where the government and the Armed Forces, by law, are unable to act. In other words, it appears that members of ORDEN and other individuals want to continue the repressive nature of this organization that has been condemned by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (a commission of the Organization of American States) and discredited by the new government.

As pastor, I want to tell Christians to realize that the members of ORDEN in your communities are capable of conversion. Some joined this organization out of necessity or because they were deceived. It is possible to speak with them and suggest that they desist from any further participation in this organization and from any further actions against the people. Help them so that they have no need to continue to participate in this organization and show them that they can find support and will be welcomed in our communities: let us be true Christians and embrace those who want to return to the Christian life. Despite the apparent threats in the statement that I have referred to, there is no reason that can justify the continuation of repression by members of ORDEN.

The judicial branch of the government and Security Forces are being restructured so that justice might become a reality in our midst. Individuals should not see themselves as charged with the administration of justice because this only leads to abuse, injustice and the intensification of violence --- and this is true especially among people in the rural areas. For this same reason I cannot approve the assassination that was carried out by the FPL on eleven *campesinos* under the pretext that they were members of ORDEN¹⁵. It is right, as we have said, that the responsible members of the Security Forces who unjustly repressed the people, as well as members of ORDEN who participated in these injustices, should be brought to justice. But they should be tried and not assassinated ... neither the FPL nor any other group has the right to administer justice to these individuals ... this is why we have the Supreme Court of Justice.*

An eye-witness testimony was presented to me by a parent of one of those who was assassinated and I was deeply moved by her words: *In the village of Llanitos, Jutiapa, there are now only three alternatives: become a member of FECCAS or UTC, leave the village or be assassinated. This village had previously been known as a place where people did not use weapons but rather were characterized by a profound religiosity. Many families have had to leave the village as a result of threats from certain organizations. In the area of Jutiapa there are houses where three families live together ... such is the poverty of this area. Some of the people that have recently been assassinated were very Christian people who never harbored feelings of vengeance. Some were members of the village patrol and in various places these criminal acts are being carried out by people who are organized. This account should be kept in mind today when it seems that roles have been changed, that is, those persons who complained about the repression of the Security Forces have now become the repressors of our people.**

The attack on McDonald and Avis has been attributed to the FPL.¹⁶ Employees of McDonald came to the Chancery and I lament the fact that I was not present there at the time when they arrived, but another priest was able to attend to them and then communicated their desires to me and I want to express here my solidarity with them and make known to you the feelings of these employees. *The employees of McDonald vigorously repudiate the attack that was inflicted on one of our places of business and the cowardly assassination of the guard. This kind of action only inflicts greater pain on many poor and humble families who are in no way involved in the present*

political situation nor identify themselves with the ideals of the right or the left. Such actions also bring greater sorrow to many homes and damage one of the businesses that identifies itself with the needs of its employees since McDonald is one of the few business that is concerned about providing greater benefits to its employees. We want to take this opportunity to touch the consciences of these individuals because if your objective is the defense of the rights of people then you cannot continue to inflict pain on the workers by destroying the source of their work. Indeed in this kind of situation we, the employees, are greatly harmed and we all have families that we are trying to sustain.

Another statement was signed by the employees of Servi-Pronto of El Salvador: *We are dismayed by the vile and criminal attack on our place of work and strongly protest this action. We call on those groups who in one way or another are responsible for the state of anxiety in which we live ... we call upon them to put aside those attitudes that result in mourning and uncertainty in our homes. We are humble people who rely on this work for our sustenance and we cannot understand how certain sectors who raise their banners high on behalf of popular demands would then act in a contradictory manner and thus as a result of their actions plunge the working class into greater poverty and unemployment, etcetera.*.*

A fire in the ANDA water station in Olla Grande has effected the flow of water to Miramonte Poniente, Centroamérica, San José, Layco, Santo Teresa, Las Rosas, Ciudad Satélite and other surrounding areas¹⁷. Using the same reasoning in the above statements that I have just read I call upon all people to refrain from damaging public services to our people.

On the other hand I applaud the beautiful gesture of the Boy Scouts of Troop #30 in Mejicanos who have used their time and energy to repair the streets and do good. This is exactly how all the people of El Salvador should act: repairing things and not destroying them.*

There was an attempt made against the life of the Altamirano family and we also repudiate here every attack against the tranquility of our people.

I am happy that three demonstrations were held without any incident. As we have been saying, demonstrations by political groups such as ANDES, FAPU, UDN are necessary to bring pressure to bear on present structures so that a path is opened that leads to the implementation of democratic processes in our nation. But we have also repeated here a thousand times that our language should be one of political pressure and not violence.

There were difficulties in the Social Security [Hospital].¹⁸ You are already aware of this fact but I am happy that this matter was resolved with patience, wisdom, and dialogue. Doctor Saca stated that he is not a politician but a militant professional in the area of health. He recognized that the attitude of the employees did not represent a personal attack on him but resulted from his nomination to a position in the hospital. He promised the employees that through his actions he would demonstrate to them that he was in no way opposed to them. *La Cronica* stated that this is an example of how matters can be resolved without the need to prolong unnecessary violence. It is true that through dialogue we are able to come to a better understanding of one another and therefore the best solution to our problems will always be achieved through rational and intelligent ways.

I have been asked to echo the petition of the Association of the Bus Companies of El Salvador which presented the Minister of the Economy with a series of petitions¹⁹. I believe that given their willingness to act with justice, their demands will be attended to. For example, they are asking for a moratorium of six months, just financing with low interest rates, suppression of the onerous and

illegal compounded interest rates, suppression of the no-fault law, government subsidies, free fuel for public transportation vehicles in exchange for IQS courtesy passes, etc. There are fifteen points in their petition and I hope that a sense of justice and common sense will prevail among the parties who dialogue about these matters.

With regard to some other labor matters ... Several meetings were held in the Ministry of Labor and I mention this here because it seems that the problems at Lido, Apex, Arco, Duramás and Dimex are being resolved through rational dialogue. We are, however, saddened by the fact that several persons, representatives of these businesses, have not been present at this dialogue. At this time the absence of these persons might well be labeled a sin of omission because these individuals are not collaborating in resolving a situation that we can survive if everyone is resolved to participate in a rational dialogue.

I also want to speak about the university. For several months this situation has been at an impasse. Several factors have influenced this and one of those is the conflict that exists among the student movements. One of the movements has taken over the administration building and has demanded a university wide general assembly to elect university officials.²⁰ Hopefully pressure is not exerted solely to normalize the situation. Other student groups must make an effort to come to an agreement and collaborate so that the University might once again become an authentic center of higher education, a place where people are formed intellectually and thus commit themselves to the people, a place where people use the knowledge that they have acquired not for self-enrichment but, as demanded by the present situation, place their knowledge at the service of the people.

Therefore, I want to conclude by making reference to the statement of the Federation of Academic Professionals of El Salvador²¹, an organization that is composed of dentists, medical experts and architects, economists, engineers, public accountants, chemists, humanists, etc. I call upon you to contribute your professional collaboration and participate in this process with your professional expertise and thus enrich the different political and economic and social alternatives and in turn enable us to sustain the bases of the democratization of our nation. Restate your commitment to the people, reaffirm their duty and right to speak up and participate in the area of public life, and reaffirm their right to orient and resolve those problems that have taken on nationwide dimensions. Encourage all the professional associations to make public statements about the situation of our nation. In the same way, make the people aware of the results of the investigation, recommendations and activities that move in the direction of the development of our people. My sisters and brothers, I believe if we all had this sense of collaboration that we are hearing about today, then there would be no doubt that the situation of our country would be resolved.

I forgot to invite you to participate in the theological course that will be offered in La Ceiba de Guadalupe beginning tomorrow, November 19th and continuing through December 15th. This will take place at 6:00pm to 9:00pm. There is a small registration fee but those persons in difficult economic situations simply have to make this fact known and some solution will be found.

I want to conclude by saying that as we allude to all of these things we have not departed from our theological and Biblical reflection. Hope is the liberating power of our people because it is based on a promise of God who is the foundation of our hope. Above all else our hope is based on the redemptive power of Christ who offered a sacrifice which continues to be the source of salvation for all people. We can say, like Daniel, that we are supported by Christ and thus the people are saved. In the third point of our reflection we said that we must collaborate in this work of salvation and clothe ourselves in the Christian attitude of hope. As people of hope we also live

out this hope in active collaboration with those who are called professionals and hopefully all people, professionals and non-professionals, all the people of El Salvador, those of Christian faith and those without faith, those who hope in Christ and those who are hopeless ... may all of us come to the realization that God exists, that God watches over our people, that God is with us in our struggle and that if we collaborate with God then the reality of liberation in El Salvador will very soon dawn. May God grant this.*

¹ Given the critical situation in the country, Mons. Romero decided to postpone a trip to New York where he has been invited by the National Council of Christian Churches in the USA. For this reason, Jorge Lara Braud, a Presbyterian theologian, visited El Salvador to bring him a message of solidarity from the National Council of Churches. Before his homily, Mons. Romero handed the microphone to Jorge Lara Brand who ended his message with the following words: Monseñor, I have been going from one celebration to another, but this is the more important one. Thanks to the invitation we made... thank you for not having gone. Thank you for having stayed with your people.”

² See Homily of John Paul II at the inauguration of his pontificate (22 October 1978), *Osservatore Romano*, 29 October 1979.

³ Jorge Lara Braud.

⁴ Discourse of John Paul II to the General Assembly of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (12 November 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 25 November 1979.

⁵ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 November 1979.

⁶ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 14 & 17n November 1979.

⁷ See *Orientación*, 18 November 1979.

⁸ General Audience on Wednesday (14 November 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 18 November 1979.

⁹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 16 November 1979.

¹⁰ It refers to the Comisión Especial Investigadora of “reos y desaparecidos políticos” set up by the government in its decree n. 9 of 30 October 1979. See *Diario de Hoy*, 14 November 1979.

¹¹ See Open Letter of the El Salvador Commission of Human Rights (12 November 1979), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 14 November 1979.

¹² Statement of the Supreme Court of Justice, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 16 November 1979.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Declarations of General JoséAlberto Medrano, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 15 November 1979.

¹⁵ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 November 1979.

¹⁶ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 12 November 1979.

¹⁷ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 17 November 1979.

¹⁸ Trade Unionists of the Instituto Salvadoreño del Seguro Social suspended work and occupied the administrative buildings to protest the unconsulted nomination of Dr Alejandro Saca Menéndez as director of the said institution. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 17 November 1979.

¹⁹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 17 November 1979.

²⁰ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 16 November 1979.

²¹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 17 November 1979.

Marginal References (1) UR 8; (2) Mk 13,32; (3) Mk 13,2; (4) Mk 13,4; (5) Mk 13,31; (6) Mk 13,26-27; (7) Heb 10,12-13; (8) Dt 12,2-3; (9) Dt 12,2; (10) 2Th 3,10; (11) Mk 13,32; (12) Dt 12,1; (13) Heb 10,11-14; (14) P 275; (15) P 276; (16) Lk 12,22-31; (17) Mk 13,33; (18) Mk 13,28; (19) Mk 13,28-29; (20) Mk 13,34-37; (21) Dt 12,1; (22) GS 69;