

THE HOMILY, LIVING PRESENCE OF GOD'S WORD

**Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 27, 1980**

Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10

I Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

My dear sisters and brothers

Thanks to God I am still able to say: *esteemed radio audience*, because the bomb that was intended to silence our radio transmissions¹ was unable to accomplish its objective and we are still able to proclaim the voice of the Church through this radio station that desires to serve the people.* I thank you for your expressions of solidarity and here I am going to gather together various messages that have arrived. To not take up more time on this point I am going to read the letter that arrived from the Sisters who are members of the pastoral team in Tepecoyo: *We are saddened by the loss of the radio station, the voice that guides the Church. As a Christian people we express our solidarity to you and offer you our Sunday collection. We are united with you in prayer.* I am also grateful for various expressions of solidarity that have been offered by other radio stations which have protested this brutal gesture of attempting to silence the truth of God through force. Today I say to you that the readings that were proclaimed provide us with a framework to render homage to that which constitutes the very heart of our messages: the Word of God.

Today's readings present us with two different homilies. The homily of Ezra and the Levites in the midst of the people of Israel as they returned from exile is an example of people being instructed concerning the Word of God. In the gospel we are presented with the most sublime homily that was pronounced by Jesus. After he had rolled up the scroll he said: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing* (1). This is what a homily is: saying that God's word is not a reading about times past but a living and spiritual word that today is being fulfilled here. Thus, you can understand our effort to apply God's eternal message, the Word that is light and power and comfort and counsel to the people's concrete circumstances. It is a good opportunity to comment today on what a homily is since, thanks to God, our words are catechetical and attempt to be what a homily should: a simple explanation of the eternal word and the practical application of this word which is light, strength to console and guide us.

The Second Vatican Council, which has brought about the present renewal of the Church, speaks about the role of the homily: *By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year; the homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself; in fact, at those Masses which are celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and feasts of obligation, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason* (2).

Here we are told that the homily must be a reflection on the Word of God. We do not invent the theme about which we preach but rather the Word of God imposes the theme: speak about this or speak these words to my people. What the preacher does is apply the Word to the people, to the assembly that has gathered together in order to have their reality enlightened. Above all, however,

the people celebrate the Word in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The whole Bible and all preaching revolves around the great saving mystery of Christ which culminated in his death and resurrection.

In the Mass, in which Christ has left us a memorial of his death and resurrection, the readings from whatever part of the Bible are centered on this mystery. It is from this perspective that the preacher must illuminate the reality, the paths along which people walk. The preacher must guide people in the same way that Ezra did when he spoke to the people and said: *Amen, amen, let us praise the Lord and give thanks to him* (3).

The homily is a discourse of a sacred, liturgical nature which leads the heart of women and men, of those who are listening, leads them to faith in God, to the celebration of redemption which becomes present in the Eucharistic sacrifice: we preach and we celebrate. Therefore, the Mass would be incomplete if we came together just to listen to the homily and did not remain for the Eucharistic sacrifice. What is primary is not the preaching ... this is simply the path to something greater. The primary moment occurs when we adore Christ and hand ourselves over to him in faith. Then illuminated with the word we go into the world to make this word come alive. We listen to the word, we accommodate the word to the reality, we celebrate and are nourished by the life of Christ and all of this leads us to make a commitment that we live out in our homes and in service to our sisters and brothers so that the world might be filled with the life of God.

The homily actualizes the presence of Christ. For this reason in the course of the Liturgical Year the Church has organized in a wonderful way the celebration of this mystery into seasons. At the present time we are celebrating Ordinary Time because there are no celebrations of a special character. There are three special moments during the Liturgical Year: the first one we have just concluded, the season of Christmas, the second one we will begin within a few days, the season of Lent which is followed by the third special moment, the season of Easter which continues for fifty days. Aside from these three special moments, the remainder of the Liturgical Year is referred to as Ordinary Time. After the Christmas season has been concluded and before the beginning of Lent, we begin the season of Ordinary Time. When the Easter season concludes with the celebration of Pentecost, Ordinary Time begins once again and continues until the beginning of another Christmas Season. In Ordinary Time there is no special mystery but rather we celebrate the whole mystery of Christ. It is for this reason that each year we reflect on a distinct gospel.

At this time the Church has more varied readings from the Bible and this year we will reflect on the third gospel, that of Saint Luke. Thus the reading that has been proclaimed, the prologue of Saint Luke's gospel, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, provides the theme for today's homily which will allow us to come to a more profound understanding of the spirit of this gospel which hopefully, my sisters and brothers, will become the gospel upon which we will all reflect during the coming year. Let us pray this gospel not only when we come together at Mass but also when we are in our homes. In order to present you a synthesis of the thoughts of this gospel I entitle the homily: *the homily, the living presence of the Word of God*. The homily actualizes, that is, makes present or makes real, as though the Word of God was here now with all its living power, here now among us. The homily is the reality of Christ who lives through his Word. I am going to develop this idea with three points:

First, Jesus is the living homily of the Father's revelation. The very person of Christ is like an eternal homily of the Father's revelation, the eternal will of God become man, clothed in human flesh and living here in the person of Christ, who even when he is not speaking, is nonetheless speaking because he is the eternal homily of God.

Second, the Church is the actual and operative prolongation of Jesus' homily. Jesus is preaching through his Church. The Church is the prolongation of the homily that Jesus initiated there in Nazareth: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me* (4). The Church is able to continue to say at every moment, just as I am able to say that today, Sunday, January 27th, 1980, here in the Basilica at 8:00am, *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing* (5). Here, the Word of God is present. You are the Church, I am the Church, and we are the continuation of the living homily who is Christ, our Lord.

Third, the messianic and salvific effects of Christ's homily on women and men. Some will accept the word and be happy while others will reject and word and continue to be obstinate in their evil ways.

Jesus is the living homily of the revelation of the Father

Above all else we can say that Jesus is the living homily of the Father's revelation. Notice that the event that was proclaimed in the gospel is a very emotional event. Jesus arrives at the synagogue in Nazareth, the town of his people and there he takes his seat among the teachers of Israel and, as was customary, they invited Jesus to read --- this same action is repeated among us when we call someone from among the people to read from the lectionary and to explain something to the people. Jesus takes the scroll (there were no books as we have now but rather parchment scrolls), chooses a reading or asks the attendant to select the passage that he will then comment on. The passage selected is taken from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus reads the passage. What an honor for Isaiah to have his writing read by Jesus! What a great honor! Then Jesus rolled up the scroll ... this is a very significant expression that we find in today's gospel: *Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him* (6). This is an expression that says that this event is more than an historical moment. You know that in the gospel we have to search for the profound theological meaning that the author of the gospel wishes to communicate in a inspired phrase at an historical moment. *The eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him* means that everyone was waiting for Jesus to proclaim words that would save. Jesus is going to speak the truth that the world needs and we all experience this desire. We are living in this moment and we are waiting for him to speak the words that God commands him to speak. Jesus' commentary is very simple but most profound because he tells us: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing* (7). What have the people just heard? They heard Jesus say that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and that he has been sent with the power of the Spirit. In fact the gospel goes on to say: *He went to their city filled with the power of the Spirit* (8).

Christ is present here as the revelation of the Father and the complement of all revelation. The Council document on Revelation presents Christ to us as the one who is the culmination of revelation. I want to read to you the words of the Council so that we can reflect on these words and experience the honor and pleasure of knowing Jesus Christ: *The Father sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God. Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." He "speaks the words of God," and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do. To see Jesus is to see his Father. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal* (9). To know Christ is to know God. Christ is the homily that continually

explains to us that God is love, that God is power, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus Christ, that he is the divine Word and that God's presence is among us.

Jesus Christ and the gospel are not two separate things. The gospel is not a biography of Christ. For Saint Paul, the gospel is the living power of God. (10) Reading the gospel is not like reading an ordinary book. We have to be filled with faith and focus on the living Jesus Christ, the revelation of the Father. We must feel, even though it be in silence, without anyone speaking, with deep faith in our heart, we must feel that Jesus is God's homily that is being preached to us while we attempt to fill ourselves with the divine power that has come in Christ Jesus.

By the Spirit ... let us be mindful of the wonderful theology of the gospel of Saint Luke which is called the gospel of prayer or the gospel of the Holy Spirit because Saint Luke's gospel highlights Jesus in prayer, in communion with the Father. Saint Luke continually speaks of Jesus being led by the Spirit. Therefore when Saint Luke, the author of the third gospel, also writes the Acts of the Apostles, it appears that the same Spirit that animated Jesus in his redeeming action is now transferred to the Church. The Spirit strengthens Paul on his journeys, strengthens Peter when he is imprisoned, and strengthens the Christian community in their prayer together. Thanks to the Spirit Jesus continues to live: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... Today this scripture passage is fulfilled ... the Christian era has begun ... now a phase of history has begun that is the fullness of time.* The Spirit of God has become the Spirit of those people who want to receive it.

The Church is the actual and operative prolongation of Christ's homily

In the first place, the truth of the Church depends on the truth of Christ. Saint Paul says: *We would be greatly deluded and great liars if we preached Christ and Christ was not who we said he was.* Therefore, in Saint Luke's prologue, which we have proclaimed today, he highlights the following idea. What did Saint Luke want to do when he wrote his gospel? He wanted to speak to us about certain events and actions: *Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received* (11). At this time when everything appears to be relative, when there is much confusion, when nothing appears to be true, how wonderful to hear these words of the gospel! The gospel gives eternal consistency to the Church. It is for this reason that we have repeatedly stated that the Church does not live according to the social-political situation but rather the Church lives an eternal reality that was accomplished and that eyewitnesses have seen and that other individuals, illuminated by the presence of the Spirit, have transmitted in living tradition.

What were these acts? Here we refer to the actions that we are about to speak about. When Jesus entered the synagogue he initiated his preaching which is consummated in his acts of redemption and resurrection. All of this constitutes the *kerigma*, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the proclamation of the coming of Christ to save humankind. This is the reality that is called Church which is born from the truth of the actions. Putting aside the fact of divine inspiration for a moment, historically there is no other book that has been proven to be so authentic and true as the gospels. For twenty centuries this book has been criticized not only by friends but also by enemies who want to tear apart what is said there. Yet all of this has only given greater splendor to the words of Saint Luke. The realities that the eyewitnesses saw and that have been transmitted to us are events that prove the truth and the soundness of the things that we believe.

My sisters and brothers, let us never doubt the truth of the gospel. It is dangerous to confuse the gospel with so many false promises of other people and therefore to come to think that the gospel will also leave us frustrated and disillusioned. The gospel, however, is a very distinct word and it is for this reason that I told you when YSAX returned to the air that it was an honor to be able to speak to you through means of their antennas. The power of people attempted to destroy our voice but as you can see no one can prevent the words of the gospel from being heard. The gospel lives in the Church and is a firm reality that is part of everyone's faith. No one can definitively eliminate this word.

Just as the Church is born from the gospel so also we discover in Saint Luke's prologue another wonderful element: the Church is converted into the messenger of the gospel. The Church is evangelized in order to evangelize. Thus, Saint Luke tells us that he has gathered together the testimony of others. Saint Luke was not an apostle and did not personally know Jesus but he was a disciple of Saint Paul and was in Rome where he listened to the apostles and listened to the women and men who formed the first Christian communities. It is wonderful to know that the gospel created the Christian communities. The gospels that we proclaim today: Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke and Saint John are the homilies of the Christian communities. An eyewitness spoke with a group about what he had seen and stated that he believed and was willing to offer his blood in order to testify that what he was talking about was the truth. Those who listened believed because the Spirit of God illuminated them and they were evangelized. Thus we have a community that received the faith and that also experienced the need to communicate this faith to others. These individuals were able to spread the faith because the same Spirit also enlightened them.

Saint Luke is nothing more than a link in the chain of tradition. Saint Luke did not know Jesus and he did not personally see the events that he writes about but he was convinced about the reality and the soundness of these things and knew that the community in which he participated was nourished by faith. This cannot be doubted. Through the commentaries of the Christian communities the evangelists wrote the gospels that have been handed down to us. Each of the gospels has distinct characteristics even though they speak about the life of the same person, Jesus Christ. They are homilies, reflections that were made in very distinct historical contexts. Saint Luke wrote for non-believers while Matthew wrote for the Jews and Mark for the Romans. Saint Luke wrote for non-believers and therefore was not concerned about Jewish formulas but was much more concerned about motives that would be able to move people to faith.

Thus the doctrinal characteristics of Saint Luke's gospel place in parallel positions the activities of Jesus and the ministry of the Church. Jesus is presented not as the fulfillment of Judaic prophecies but rather Jesus is a new prophet who will subsequently fulfill what he says about his Church. Saint Luke presents Jesus as a prophet who establishes in the world a Kingdom without end (12) and the passing of the years will only confirm the words of this prophet and founder of a church. Saint Luke also highlights Jesus' activity among the gentiles, the poor and the marginalized. This activity of Jesus moves people who have not made their religion into some kind of privilege but rather base their religion on a new knowledge of Christ who also understands the painful world of the slaves and those who live on the margins of society.

The gospel of Saint Luke has been given some wonderful names. For example, it has often been called the gospel of mercy and the gospel of great forgiveness. No other gospel speaks about the prodigal son and the repentant sinner. The gospel of Saint Luke best expresses the tenderness of Jesus' heart when sinners approach him and ask for forgiveness. It is also called the gospel of the poor. The account of Jesus birth in Bethlehem is very descriptive because at the time of his birth Jesus is surrounded by the poor, the shepherds, those who in the eyes of the world have no future.

It is these individuals who form the court of the King who has been born in a stable in Bethlehem. This event gives rise to the preferential option for the poor.

It is also called the gospel of absolute renunciation. Saint Luke writes for those who have created idols of honor and wealth and he tells them to leave everything for the Kingdom of God. No one is as absolute with regard to this renunciation of things in order to become truly poor as Jesus is in the gospel of the poor.

It is also called the gospel of prayer and the Holy Spirit. The gospel of Saint Luke best presents the transcendence of the gospel message and elevates us toward God. As a result of prayer and the presence of the Spirit during solemn moments Jesus chooses his apostles, is transfigured and establishes his Church in the world.

And it is also called the gospel of messianic joy. Those who want to hear a message of joy and optimism should read the gospel of Saint Luke. Notice the joy with which the good news is spoken about, the good news that Jesus brings to sinners, to those who are marginalized, to those who need good news. All of these are found in Saint Luke's gospel and it is for this reason that his gospel is referred to as good news.

The Church becomes a community that communicates Jesus Christ, that continues the homily of Jesus in a style particular to the women and men of this era. It is wonderful to see how each community, each preacher, each catechist, each religious congregation and each element of the Church has its proper way of being. Among all these elements, however, we come to see the wonderful fact that Christ lives in us through his Spirit.

Here I would like us to read once again or, at least, to recall to mind today's second reading. There Saint Paul, the teacher of Saint Luke, refers to the composition of the Church as a body in which we are all members and united to one another. Christ is the head and the Spirit which animates the head also animates all the members who form the Church. Indeed the Spirit animates the members with the same life of the head of the body.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I tell you once again what I have said to you before when we feared that we might be left without a radio station: God's best microphone is Christ and Christ's best microphone is the Church and the Church is all of you* Let each one of you, in your job, in your own vocation --- man, woman, married person, bishop, priest, high school or university student, day laborer, wage earner, market woman --- let each one of you in your own place live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God, our Lord. In this way the Church will always be preaching, will always be a homily even when we do not have this wonderful opportunity that we presently have each Sunday, that is, the opportunity to enter into communion with so many communities that during the week have manifested to me their desire to hear once again our radio station which has in many cases become bread for our people. The day when the forces of evil leave us without this instrument of faith, an instrument which they have in abundance, when they consider the Church the least of all, know that nothing bad has happened to us. On the contrary, we will be even more lively microphones of the Lord and we will proclaim his word everywhere.

The messianic and salvific effects of Jesus' homily

Lastly in this homiletic reflection, that is, in this homily, I want to speak about the messianic and salvific effects of the homily. In other words, I want to speak about all the gifts that Jesus has brought us, salvific gifts that are the power of liberation and the power of the words of the gospel.

The gospel is Jesus' preaching and is presented in Saint Luke's gospel as a mission of grace, an offer of salvation. What was the text that Jesus chose from the Old Testament in order to present us with the messianic times? Saint Luke is not simply concerned about telling us about Jesus entering the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath. As Saint Luke presents this event in his prologue he wants to tell us that all the world now knows who is Jesus and the nature of his mission and what he wants to say to people. Therefore Saint Luke chooses the passage that Jesus read and with a degree of gratification places before us a passage which speaks about all the wonders of liberation.

The Spirit of God is upon me because he has anointed me (14). He has anointed me! Jesus is the anointed one which means Jesus is the Christ, Christ or Messiah. *Messiah* is a Hebrew word which means the same as the Greek word *Khristos* which means the same as the Spanish word *ungido*. Jesus is the Anointed One who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the fullness of the Spirit of God, the Anointed One.

He has anointed me and sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor (15). This is Jesus' mission, to bring good news to the poor, to those who receive only bad news, to those who are always trampled by the powerful, to those who watch the riches that satisfy others pass them by and realize that these riches are out of their reach. The Lord comes for them to make them happy and to tell them: *Do not covet. Consider yourselves happy and wealthy with the great gifts brought to you by the One who being rich became poor to be with you.(16)*

He has sent me to proclaim freedom to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. It was a year acceptable to the Lord which people had awaited with great yearning because it was during this year that everything that had been taken from them had to be returned, all debts were cancelled. These events marked the beginning of a new society. The hour that we await here in El Salvador is not the year acceptable to the Lord but rather a time that begins with the power of reconstruction that our people desire and that can be achieved with Christ who has come precisely to proclaim new societies, good news, new times*

Therefore I do not tire of telling everyone, especially young people who long for their people's liberation, that I admire their social and political sensitivity, but it saddens me when they waste it by going on paths that are false. The Church is telling them: this is the way, Christ's way. Put all your determination, all your self-giving, all your self-sacrifice, even the sacrifice of your own lives at the service of the cause of the true liberation guaranteed by the One on whom God's Spirit is poured out. He will not lead us to false paths and he will make his own the people's desire for liberation and justice. Their desire cries out to God and God must hear that cry. Let us, too, all take notice that the great leader of our liberation is the Lord's anointed One, who comes to announce good news to the poor, to give freedom to the captives, to give news of the mission, to give comfort to so many homes in mourning, so that society may be renewed as in the sabbatical years of Israel.

Another affect of the homily is to awaken people so that they worship God. Here I would like to reflect on the first reading. The historical framework is very moving. Nehemiah and Ezra are

two Jewish men who were returning from the Babylonian exile. When they returned they found that their city, Jerusalem, had been destroyed. They were disillusioned but nonetheless continued the work of reconstruction. We see that so often the efforts of people are not conquered by pessimism. They rebuild and do not destroy. As these people rebuild and complete their work, they gather the people together who had begun to recover their patriotic spirit. At this moment they celebrate a solemn assembly.

All the people were listening to Ezra who stood on a platform and read from the Pentateuch, the books written by Moses, the books which God commanded him to speak to the people. Ezra explains these writings in the form of a simple catechesis. He explains what God desires and what God wants to tell his people. He proclaims a homily to the people and does so with a simplicity of words, with no rhetorical or oratorical pretense. He simply speaks of God's love for the people so that they might come to understand God and enter into a relationship with God. This is also what we hope to do: I do not want to be an obstacle to your dialogue with God, rather I want to awaken in every heart a sense of gratitude, love, admiration, repentance so that all might return to God. Thus as we conclude the homily it would be wonderful to see the people raise their arms, stand up and respond: *Amen! Amen! Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the Lord, their faces to ground* (18).

As we conclude our homily, we also pray and celebrate the Eucharist. Each time that we celebrate a sacrament the Bible is read and we proclaim a homily. Look at the solemnity of the sacramental life of the Church! The Church is concerned that people prepare themselves before receiving the sacrament of Baptism. Then after that preparation people come forward, a passage from the gospel is read and the priest explains the meaning of the passage. Only after people's faith has been awakened is the child brought to the baptismal font. In other words, people must first understand the greatness of the action that they are going to confer upon their child. The same occurs in marriage which is also a sacramental rite. Here, too, the Word of God is proclaimed so that those who are going to love one another forever might find themselves inclined to await from God the joy of their shared love. All of this also means that people draw near to God. I do not pretend to do anything else, my dear sisters and brothers, and I rejoice when simple people discover in my words a vehicle that enables them to draw near to God. I rejoice when a sinner has repented and returned to God. This is the effect of true ecclesiastical preaching: the Church is the homily of Christ and continues to communicate the message of Christ.

The homily produces another effect, namely, that which is spoken about by Nehemiah when he says: *Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad and do not weep*, (19) for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: *Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our Lord* (20). We can say that the words of Nehemiah give us the spirit of Sunday, the day of the Lord, a day of joy. But here the joy that is referred to is not a selfish joy but a joy that shares with others who do not have. Therefore let us share what we have so that we might experience this joy. How beautiful will be the day when a new society, instead of selfishly hoarding and keeping, apportions, shares, divides up, and all rejoice because we all feel that we are children of the same God! What else does God's word want in El Salvador's circumstances but the conversion of all, so that we can experience ourselves as sisters and brothers!

The gospel enables us see other effects of the homily: one joyful and one bitter. Those who are happy are those who are referred to in today's passage that was proclaimed.(21) We are told that the people admired Jesus and experienced joy because they were with Jesus and because they had received from him a great revelation. Then Jesus begins to explain his homily and denounces his

people, the people of Nazareth where he was unable to perform any miracles because they were incredulous and saw him as simply the son of Mary, the son of a man. Yet Jesus loved these people. Jesus tells them: *In former times there were prophets in Israel but they were not sent to the Israelites but rather to foreigners who came to them and accepted their message* (22) The people in the synagogue understood that this was a reference to them and that their false piety and incredulity were being denounced.

The synagogue, formalistic in its practice of religion, could not tolerate listening to someone who spoke against their form of worship and so they pushed Jesus out of the synagogue and *drove him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong*. But Jesus, using the power of God, passed through the midst of them --- his hour had not yet come --- and he was saved. The lot of the prophets! They will always have to say good things but in order to give happiness to sinners they will also have to point out the sins of people and call them to conversion. Those who are humble will listen and be saved while those who are not humble will remain obstinate and be lost.

Life of the Church

We have as our source Jesus, the homily of God. The Church is the homily of Christ and women and men either accept this message with love or they reject it. Now is the time to see if our Archdiocesan church, our communities and our work on behalf of the Church is truly a microphone of God and if we are clothed with the Spirit of God.

The ecclesial events of the past week are as rich as the civil events are tragic. Look at how our Church is becoming stronger in its life and indeed the circumstances necessitate this strength. I beg you, my sisters and brothers present at this homily and those who are listening to my voice on their radio, to be true Christians because in this way we will commit ourselves to make our Church a Church that is strong, a Church that relates her life to the life of Jesus. From this perspective the Church can enlighten and speak about our situation and be the people that proclaim salvation.

How beautiful was the celebration that occurred last Sunday in San Francisco in Mejicanos where we celebrated the first anniversary of the death of Father Octavio Ortiz and the four young people who were assassinated in El Despertar in San Antonio Abad! This was a lively celebration of the communities that from all parts of the Diocese gathered together for one purpose. I could very well compare our gathering to the Sermon on the Mount because so many people participated in this celebration that there was not enough room in the Church for them and so we celebrated the Mass in a grove.

In Apulo we had two beautiful ecclesial experiences. One, an academy for adult vocations where men who thought they could not become priests because of their age and the fact that they had not completed their studies, here they have the opportunity to take courses that later will enable them to enter our formation program. God willing, one day they will become priests who love their vocation above all other things. On the same afternoon and also in Apulo, while I was with these young men in the parish of Ilopango, I met with a group of young women with religious vows who are living in the midst of the world. They have been inspired by the Holy Spirit and so we come to see the power of the words in Saint Luke's gospel: *The Spirit that animated Jesus continues to animate his Church* (an adaptation of Luke 4:18). The communities of Ilopango are Church like every other community and blessed are all those persons who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Priests Senate (a group of priests elected by the priests to counsel the bishop) has been active during the past week. I want to thank them publicly for the light that they have given me, for their suggestions and opinions which have enriched my pastoral criteria.

Concerning the religious life, we greeted the Superior General of the Passionist Congregation and the Mother Provincial of the Spanish Carmelite Missionaries. Today, the Carmelite Missionaries will participate in the religious profession of the first Carmelite Missionaries from our land of El Salvador. The Carmelite Sisters of Saint Theresa have elected a new Superior General and we pray for the continued success of the Sisters in their ecclesial and religious ministry.

This week, with great difficulty, we celebrated the week of Christian unity with a very visible group of women and men. Catholics and Protestants gathered together in different churches to pray that Jesus' ideal would become a reality and that all Christians would live as one body. (23)

This week we will celebrate the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. At this time I want to extend my congratulations to the parish of Candelaria², and Candelaria in Cuscatlán and to all those towns and villages that honor the Virgin of Candelaria as their patroness.

Here I want to call to your attention the many expressions of solidarity that we have received. Today, in honor of the community Plan del Pino where a beautiful ceremony will be led by the Spanish Carmelite Sisters, I want to read the letter that their Provincial gave me, a letter from Sister Rosa Vaquerano who is greatly loved in this community. *I am aware of the problems that have arisen and equally aware of your many concerns. Together with the Sisters from my community I offer you my prayers and sacrifices and assure you that we will continue to pray for this nation which I love and to which I owe so much. God loves us and there can be no doubt about that fact and as a result we have much reason to hope that something great will come about from all of this. I cannot believe that so much suffering and bloodshed will not result in a great and abundant harvest. These are difficult times but God wants us to understand the profound meaning of our situation, wants us to interpret the signs of the time. As always I continue to believe in the Church of the Archdiocese and the example and the community life of this local Church always encourages me in my own personal life. May the powers of evil think clearly about and finally clarify their objectives! May these evil powers return to the path of harmony and selfless love! I will speak about what I have learned here and about the people with whom I ministered. I pray to the Lord for peace which is so desired by the people of this nation. As I read these words I greet the communities of Plan del Pino.*

I bring here before you teaching of the Pope because there are some wonderful ideas that comfort us and enlighten us. Indeed, the teaching of the Pope is a true homily of God, a homily that is at the same time the homily of the Church. When the Pope spoke about praying for the unity of Christians³, he also stated that the Church and the Pope have to be mediators that calm the tensions of the world: *We must plant peace everywhere.*

The Holy Father also pleaded for respect for the freedom of all women and men. In several countries terrorism and fear are increasing. *People who believe in Jesus Christ are called to be architects of reconciliation, pacification and fraternity among all people⁴.* Beautiful words especially today when we are talking about the Church as the microphone of God. Thus each one of us must be an expression of God's love for us and an expression of the way that God desires us to love one another.

Speaking to the diplomatic corps, the Pope referred to the problem of world hunger: *I made a point last year, of going to the headquarters of F.A.O., on the kind invitation of the Director General, to share, with the persons responsible for this International Organization, concern about the urgent necessity of increasing food products and distributing them more fairly. But the general plans which should reduce want now and in the future are compromised by so many obstacles which depend less on the possibilities of nature than on the faults of men themselves. How sad! There is hunger not because the land has not produced enough food but because some people have monopolized the fruits of the land, thus leaving others hungry. It is necessary that everyone understand that God has created the goods of the earth for all people and that fraternity becomes more necessary as selfishness becomes more pronounced. Their indifference to this problem, their lack of solidarity, and bad use of their resources ... This is a matter that should mobilize men and make the efforts of all converge. Instead of that, how much money is spent in multiplying armaments and engines of death! How many inconsistencies in terms of trade! ... Notice how these words of the Pope can be applied to El Salvador ... How many energies wasted in ideological struggles, policies of prestige and power! But power for whom? For what? For what common good? The generation to come will call us to account. God calls us to account⁵. A power struggle is very evident in El Salvador, a struggle between ideologies. Will people remember that power is a form of service and not the height of some achievement? Hopefully members of the government and popular organizations will be mindful of the questions raised by the Pope and will also remember that we are obliged to search for the common good and the not prestige of a few.**

I want to express in the form of condolences the sad news that has profoundly affected our beloved brother, Father Porfirio Martínez and his family. His father, Don Catarino Martínez, his mother, Doña Matea González de Martínez, a brother, two nephews and a guest of the family were assassinated. Indeed, a massacre ... not carried out by the army but a criminal massacre that cannot be tolerated. We also extend condolences to Father Julio Menjivar who is related to these victims.

I also want to express my condolences to one of the Sisters in the Hosptial Divina Providencia, Sister Teresa Alas, because in the area of Arcatao several members of her family were killed: Doña Concepción Alas de Mejía, her sons, Gregorio Mejía, Salvador Mejía, Damián Mejía and another brother. This occurred in the village of Yusique⁶, near Sumpul.

I also wish to express my condolences to the family of Dr René Quintanilla of San Miguel who also died, a victim of violence.

I also express my solidarity to the community of Arcatao where terror, threats and cruelty continue. In the newspapers, you were able to read that the body of the Guardia who was the cause for so much violence ... his body was found. He was assassinated in a barbaric manner.⁷ These reprisals are unjust regardless of the culpability of the individual. But at the same time it is also unjust to engage in acts of violence, such disproportionate vengeance as that which the Guardia in the area inflicted upon the people.

The community of Aguilares is in great pain and I want to express my solidarity to the people of this community. During the night of January 24th-25th, Jose María Murillo, Anibal Corado Tejada, Emilio Estrada Alegría and another unidentified young man were taken from their homes. In another village, Santos Rivas Lemus, Antonio Alas Pocasangre, Fidel Américo González, Efraín Ernesto González and in another place, Juan Umaña ... all these individuals were removed from their homes by the Guardia. What is sad about all of this is that on the following day the nine persons mentioned above and who had been arrested by the Guardia Nacional, were found dead in another part of this area. They were horribly tortured. It is said that the origin of these deaths was

the death of two members of the Guardia Nacional. If this is true, then this is another act of irrational vengeance. I want to add to my words that I addressed to the people of Aguilares and express my solidarity to the Sisters and the priest who were the courageous presence of the Church and who accompanied the families of the parish community who were pained and suffering.

From the area of Las Vueltas I received a letter from *campesinos* who were unable to sign their letter and instead put their finger prints on the bottom of the letter. There were some signatures but they were difficult to read. The people of this village have complained that they have had to leave their homes and seek refuge in another place because members of FECCAS (Christian Federation of Salvadorian Peasants) and UTC (Union of Rural Workers) have threatened to kill them if they did not join their organization. I state here that this is a form of tyranny because people are being deprived of their freedom and their right to make personal decisions.

Many families continue to live in the school of San José because they have no homes and nowhere else to go. This school has served as a refugee center but the beginning of the new academic year is near at hand. I call upon the Mayor to resolve this problem in an effective and timely manner, to resolve this situation in a way that will benefit those families who are now refugees and in a way that will also benefit the students.*

The Association of Bus Operators has asked me to express their complaints in light of the injustices that have been inflicted upon them and that have affected their desire to serve the people. They ask that they be provided with the technology that will enable them to better serve people. They proposed some alternatives such as a cooperative or nationalization and they concluded with a statement that causes me great concern. They stated that on Monday, January 21st, they had an assembly and decided that if these matters are not resolved they will initiate a strike.

I express my solidarity with Juan Francisco Cerna Rodas who asked me to draw attention to the fact the some individuals listed him as a member of the White Warriors Union. He sees this as a very dangerous slander and hopefully with the words that I speak here those individuals can see that he has no involvement with this criminal organization.

I want to conclude this list of expressions of solidarity with a call that I renew to the persons who have abducted Jaime Hill, Mr. Dunn, the former ambassador of South Africa, Jaime Battle and Mr. McEntee. Much time has passed and I believe the channels of dialogue must be opened and in every dialogue we must seek the dignity of the human person. The rights of the human person guide the Church in her action and in light of these rights there is no need to be whimsical in seeking for that which is impossible. Individuals must know how to subordinate their demands and strategies to the dignity of the human person because every person is a child of God.

Events of the week

There have been many acts of violence during the past week. Here I want to provide a synthesis of the events and a pastoral commentary on the massacre that occurred on January 22nd. Once more I am saddened by the continued repression against one sector of the people of El Salvador and so we attempt to uncover the truth behind these bloody actions. I felt obliged to form a commission that would investigate why and how these events occurred so that I might be able to make a pastoral judgment on these actions.

The facts: after having listened to eyewitnesses and after speaking with numerous foreign correspondents who were present at the site where these events occurred, the commission came to the following conclusions:

First. The demonstration that had been convoked by the National Coordinator of Popular Organizations of the Masses⁸ was being carried out in a peaceful and orderly manner. From the beginning this attitude can be contrasted with the provocative attitude of elements of the right which the government Junta also found culpable in causing the disorder.

Second. Poison was being thrown from an airplane onto the demonstrators before the shootout began. The affects of this criminal action were not so serious because the participants in the demonstration were able to counteract these criminal actions and the fact that all of this occurred in an open space favored the demonstrators.

Third. The attitude of some members of the Guardia Nacional who were inside the Palacio Nacional was also seen as one of provoking the demonstrators.

Fourth. There is much agreement in singling out the Guardia Nacional in the Palacio Nacional as the ones who were responsible for the shoot-out.*

Fifth. Some of the demonstrators defended their companions by firing weapons*.

Sixth. The result of the shoot-out: 21 dead and 120 wounded.

Seventh. Even though later on there were some actions or repudiation and disapproval undertaken by some members of the Popular Organizations (burning of vehicles and looting), nonetheless these persons did not allow themselves to be provoked in the way that the members of the right desired. Many sought refuge in churches and nearby buildings. Several thousand people, without dispersing, sought protection in an orderly way by entering the confines of the National University.*

Eighth. The last action (entering the National University) provoked the Armed Forces to surround the University so that, according to the version of the government Junta, those inside the University would be protected from attacks from the rightist elements and also in order to impede members of the popular organizations from leaving the university and entering the residential areas to create disorder. The military blockade was maintained until Wednesday, January 23rd at noon. During this time there were many shots fired from outside and from inside the University. For many people this created the impression that the Armed Forces were once again considering violating the autonomy of the University.

Ninth. All the radio information about these events was controlled by the government which ordered all radio stations to enter into a national broadcast system for forty-eight hours. Thus only the official version of these events was communicated to the public.

Tenth. The national press only published photographs of the demonstrators who were armed but said nothing about the attitudes of the right nor about the attack of the Guardia Nacional.*

I want to share with you my judgment on these actions and I want to formulate my words in a pastoral manner. In light of these painful events and so many other tragic events that occurred during the past week which was stained with so much violence and bloodshed (some of these cases

I have already mentioned), I want, first of all, to address everyone, family members of the victims, and those who were wounded and beaten. I want to communicate to you words of gospel hope, words of pastoral concern and the prayers of the Church.*

As a pastor and as a Salvadoran citizen, I am deeply grieved that the organized sector of our people continues to be massacred merely for taking to the streets in an orderly fashion to petition for justice and liberty. I am sure that so much blood and so much suffering caused to the families of so many victims will not be in vain. It is their blood and pain that will water and make fertile new and continually more numerous seeds --- Salvadorans who will awaken to the responsibility they have to build a more just and human society --- and that will bear fruit in the accomplishment of the daring, urgent, and radical structural reforms that our nations needs.*

The people's cry for liberation is a shout that rises up to God and that nothing and no one can now stop.* When some fall in the struggle, provided it be with sincere love for the people and in search of a true liberation, we should consider them always present among us --- not only because they stay in the memory of those who continue their struggles, but also because the transcendence of our faith teaches us that the body's destruction does not end human life.* Rather, we hope that, with God's mercy, we humans will achieve full and absolute liberation after death*. Temporal liberations will always have to be imperfect and transitory. They are sound and are worth struggling for only insofar as they reflect on this earth the justice of God's kingdom.*

It also seems disproportionate and therefore unjust to have gagged people by imposing upon them for so long a time the messages that have been continually transmitted over the National Radio Station.* Up to the present time, the press and television have made known the "official" version which has given people the impression that the cause of so many deaths and so many wounded persons is the fact that the demonstrators were armed. Other versions have not been listened to or published because these versions implicate elements of the right and the Security Forces*.

In light of the horrible bloodshed and the violence of the past week, I call out once again to all the people of El Salvador, to people of every sector and in the name of the gospel I call upon you to walk away from the paths of violence and to seek, with greater vigor, rational solutions through dialogue. Rational solutions are always possible as long as people do not renounce their good will and reason.

Once again it has been proven that violence does not build up, especially when this violence is carried on by recalcitrant rightist elements who employ the repressive violence of the Armed Forces in order to violate (in their favor) the sacred human rights of freedom of expression and the freedom to organize in order to defend the rights of all people.* In light of this intransigent violence of the right, I repeat once more the Church's severe admonition, when it declares them guilty of the people's anger and despair.* They are the real source and the real menace of the communism that they hypocritically denounce.*

In response to the violence of the Armed Forces, I must recall their duty to be at the service of the people and not of the privileges of a few.* We would like to see the Armed Forces repress with equal vigor the subversion of the right which is more criminal than that of the left* and which can also be better controlled by the security forces.* Remember that bribery, even though it might be millions of colones, still degrades one and complicity in the abuse of human rights and disproportionate vengeance weaken the strength of the government which ought to gather together around the noble desire for change, gather together around the growing anger and selfless sacrifice

of people and gather together around the honor and tranquility of countless people and homes who are equally beloved because they are also part of our people.*

To the government Junta, I must say with my people that it is urgent to end the repression and thus demonstrate that it can control the security forces which at the present time seem to be a parallel government that is doing great harm to the Junta*. Each day that passes, marked by the security forces' repression, is a further weakening of the government and a new frustration for the people.*

Finally I speak to the popular organizations which this week have shown their maturity and good sense in not allowing themselves to be provoked but rather retreating with dignity. They have shown their superiority and the efficacy of reason over violence*. With their attitude they have proven that the Church has reason to teach that an ideology that is supported by violence demonstrates its own weakness.* The same Church that defends the right to organize and that defends all legitimate demands cannot be in agreement with the disproportionate violence of these organizations or with their strategies of destruction and cruelty. These actions are as repressive as the actions of their antagonists. We also cannot accept their strategies when they go against the faith and the sentiments of our people.* The Church expects of you, the organized, that you be reasonable political forces that act on behalf of the common good of the people. To create a revolution does not mean that one kills other people because only God is the master of life. To create a revolution does not mean that one paints on the walls of buildings or shouts outrageously in the streets. To create a revolution is to think out political programs that better build a people of justice and brotherhood*.

Finally, in my pastoral appraisal of these events, I want to tell you how the Church has intervened in this situation. Besides these prophetic reflections and denunciations, the Archbishop of San Salvador, for humanitarian reasons and at the request of the Human Rights Commission, advocated on behalf of several *campesinos* who, during the shootout, were pursued inside the Cathedral and the parish church of El Rosario. These individuals were later transported by the Red Cross and they remained in the Chancery until they were guaranteed that they could return to their homes without any further repression.

On several occasions I personally suggested that the government remove the gag order that had been placed on all private radio stations. When these radio stations were permitted to operate independently they provided a wonderful social service by communicating the names of those who had died and those who were wounded ... and they were able to transmit this news from the place where all of this occurred. I want to repeat here words that I have insisted on: do not attempt to take away from the people the means of communication. Rather give people criteria so they can use the media, so that they can learn to read the newspaper and listen to the radio. If this were done there would be no need for only one radio station to broadcast the news because people, with their own criteria, would be able to distinguish between what is true and what is not true.*

I accepted the request of the Junta to form a commission that together with the Human Rights Commission facilitated the removal of the military barricade around the University. In this way the thousands of people who were inside and who had not eaten for twenty-four hours were able to leave peacefully and in an orderly way.

Representatives from the Chancery, together with members of the Human Rights Commission, besides fulfilling the mission mentioned above, also communicated directly to the Junta the more probable version of the events of January 22nd. They also asked the Junta to guarantee the non-

intervention of the security forces in the funeral and burial ceremonies for those who had fallen ... this request was accepted and fulfilled. On the same day, in the Cathedral, we concelebrated a funeral Mass in the presence of the bodies of those who were killed.

We want to make it clear that the voice of the Church has cried out in protest against the irrational massacre of January 22nd.^{*} I asked the Junta to investigate these events and punish those responsible. Cleanse the security forces and prevent them from acting in a repressive and unjust manner. Compensate the victim's families and also compensate the families of those who have disappeared because of political motives and who were arrested by the security forces (here also I refer to those who disappeared during the time of previous governments as well as the present government).

As we said, the homily is the application of the Word of God to our reality. The Word of God enlightens our reality. This morning I believe the homily has fulfilled its mission. Only one thing is missing, that which is the objective of the homily, namely, to draw near to the reality, to draw near to the people who reflect and adore the living God, to draw near and unite ourselves in the Lord's Eucharistic sacrifice. Then from the depth of our heart let us pray and ask the Lord to save our country, to give the people of El Salvador good sense and good will so that we might discover the path that God has pointed out to us, the path that will make us rational beings. Let us travel this path together rather than travel the path of bloodshed and sorrow. Let us stand and proclaim our faith. *

¹ On 23 January a bomb exploded in the transmissions centre of YSAX, *Voz Panamericana*; the Archdiocese radio station was out of commission for four days. The extreme rightwing group Organización para la Liberación del Comunismo claimed responsibility. See Boletín de la Secretaría de Información del Arzobispado de San Salvador, *Orientación*, 27 January 1980.

² The Parish of Candelaria in San Salvador.

³ "Hacia la plena unidad de los cristianos", catechesis in the general audience (23 January 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 27 January 1980.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (14 January 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 20 January 1980.

⁶ *Yurique*, Canton of the municipality of Ojos de Agua in Chalatenango. See *Diccionario Geográfico de El Salvador*.

⁷ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 January 1980.

⁸ Integrated by the BPR, FAPU, LP-28, UDN, and also joined by the Movimiento Liberación Popular (MLP).

Marginal References (1) Lk 4,21; (2) SC 52; (3) Ne 8,6; (4) Lk 4,18; (5) Lk 4,21; (6) Lk 4,20; (7) Lk 4,21; (8) Lk 4,14; (9) DV 4; (10) Rm 1,16; (11) Lk 1,2-4; (12) Lk 1,33; (13) Lk 15,11-32; (14) Lk 4,18a; (15) Lk 4,18b; (16) 2Cor 8,9; (17) Lk 4,18c-19; (18) Ne 8,6; (19) Ne 8,10b; (20) Ne 8,10a; (21) Lk 4,22; (22) Lk 4,23-30; (23) Jn 17,21; (24) M 2,17.