

## GOD INVITES US TO BUILD OUR HISTORY WITH HIM

**Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
February 10, 1980**

*Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8*  
*1 Corinthians 15:1-11*  
*Luke 5:1-11*

My dear sisters and brothers.

At no time did I feel far from you and the trip that I have just made<sup>1</sup> was done with you and for you. I followed closely the problems that unfolded here in our country and in our Church and I brought all of these situations into my prayer. Even though I was far from you, I shared in all the trials and tribulations of this beloved people. I have attempted to be present at every moment and my physical absence from you was undertaken in order to share the unity of the Church here in El Salvador with the universal Church, with the Pope and other pastors of our Church.

In the meeting with the Pope I felt as though I was not participating in this event alone but rather felt that I was bringing with me the ministerial plan of the Archdiocese, the collaboration of the religious women and men and all the faithful. The Pope's words of encouragement seemed to me to be words of encouragement for the whole Archdiocese and so I want to tell you that the Holy Father said that he knows our work here and is in accord with our defense of social justice and with our preferential love for the poor. The tendency of the means of information with regard to our relations with the Holy Father is often seen as an attempt to put down our pastoral guidelines and pastoral practices and yet the Pope is better informed about all of this than the media that tries to distort reality.\*

In some of the information that was transmitted here in El Salvador some individuals stated that I had said that the Pope was not well informed about our situation. This is false and I never said that on any occasion. I did say that all those who communicate information about Latin America have a responsibility to be objective and must attempt to give an exact accounting of events so as not to distort the reality.\* Cardinal Martin, the Archbishop of Paris, told me: *This problem is not only felt by you, nor is it a problem that is unique to Latin America, rather it is a problem that the whole Church confronts\*. There are in the Church certain currents and individuals who are attempting to limit the movement of the Holy Spirit that was so beautifully poured out upon us during the Second Vatican Council and these same individuals are also attempting to manipulate the Holy Father.* We should all be aware of the fact that the Pope himself is very concerned about promoting the reforms of the Council and therefore we must defend the Church as she struggles against those currents that attempt to prevent the Church from becoming more and more committed to serving the world.

I also felt very close to you as I shared in the joy of the Christian communities there, especially in the gathering of the ecclesial base communities in the Diocese of Bruges where I was able to share this joy with Bishop DeSmedt who has provided many priests and Sisters to our Diocese. As a response to his generosity toward El Salvador he has seen the seeds of these base communities grow and produce fruit. As I shared in this experience with him I felt as though I was in El

Salvador for there also I met people with the same strong faith and profound joy. They shared and lived together in a way that showed that the Church was an important and intimate reality in their lives. I lived this joyful experience in the name of all of you who are members of the ecclesial base communities in our Diocese. I told the people in Bruges that I felt like Saint Paul because I was bringing greetings of the people, of the saints, as Saint Paul called them (1), of El Salvador to the saints of those communities which with such love and kindness continue to follow the history of our people here in El Salvador.

I felt the same joy as I met with the family members of the priests and Sisters who have come here to minister in our Archdiocese. I expressed to them the gratitude of all the people of El Salvador and told them that we appreciate the sacrifice that they have made in leaving their loved ones in order to come here and minister with us.

I also brought your love to so many sisters and brothers from El Salvador and from Latin America whom I met during my trip. Some were in exile and others were studying but all have a great love for our Church and I communicated to them the same words of hope that I continually attempt to proclaim to you.

I told them to continue to live in communion because as they do so they become witnesses of our ministry in El Salvador. Here I want to thank in a public way the priests, the Vicars, and the Vicars General for their diligent ministry. I thank Father Fabián who interpreted very well the Word of God last Sunday\*. I also thank the Sisters and catechists and all the pastoral ministers who have helped me see that the path of our Archdiocese is one of unity. Here it is not the ministry of one or another person that is important but rather there is a spirit in our Diocese and I give thanks to God for this and pray that day by day we might grow in this ecclesial communion.\*

I also said that this trip was for you. I would have preferred to remain here with you where you experienced the anguish of so many difficult situations. But I was convinced that I also had to bring to others this cause that we support and defend. I did not feel as though this was some personal honor but rather was sure that all of this would overflow in loving service to all the people of this community. In your name I traveled to Louvain to receive the hood that was placed on me as I received a doctorate degree, *honoris causa*.\*

When I developed the theme that the University requested, that is, the political dimension of faith from the perspective of the option for the poor, I told them: *I shall not try to talk, and you cannot expect me to talk, as would an expert in politics. Nor will I even speculate, as someone might who was an expert, on the theoretical relationship between the faith and politics. No, I am going to speak to you simply as a pastor, as one who together with his people has been learning the beautiful but harsh truth that the Christian faith does not cut us off from the world.* I said that as the Church takes the same risks as the poor and sees the destiny of the poor as her own then precisely because the Church defends the poor she will undergo persecution and will be slandered. However, in exchange for placing the gift of our faith at the service of the politics of our nation, especially at the service of the poor, the Church has received a generous reward, namely, a growth in our faith, a growth in our love for Jesus who became incarnated among the poor. Thus from this political dimension of our faith which draws us closer to the mysteries of our religion, we are learning how to be more Church. I remember well the attention that was given to this concept by the academic staff and the students, young women and men who filled the auditorium and expressed their understanding and acceptance of the faith, that is, Christian faith that is truly committed to undertaking the risks of being in the world without betraying its fidelity to the Lord.\*

I also want to tell you that this adventure that you and I are living, this adventure of a committed faith in the midst of the world and at the service of the world was widely accepted and spoken about in the media. I have brought home a folder filled with articles and reports about the acceptance of this message. By way of contrast I am sad to find two small clippings from our newspapers that instead of reporting on the events slandered and distorted the facts and became part of a plot of silence<sup>2</sup>. How foolish we appear!

Today I can broaden the analysis of our national reality and bring into our discussion the perspective of Europe. Many are not aware of our situation but there are also many others who are interested, very interested in knowing our situation. They receive news about us but often that news is out of context and they do not understand the true situation. I see in this the urgency to provide information that is not only factual: facts need to be put into the historical context in which our country lives. In this way our situation can be understood by others. I attempted to be objective and hope that my statements were made with a Christian spirit. This is what I tried to do in Europe. I knew that many people follow our situation very closely. They are sympathetic toward us and are in solidarity with the struggles of our people, in solidarity with our struggle for liberation.\* They are surprised that there exists here an oligarchy that is so closed and selfish, so insensitive to the suffering of the majority of people. This was not reported in the newspapers here but I attempted to tell people that yes, the members of the oligarchy were primarily responsible for our difficult and sad situation.

In this environment of sympathy and admiration, I tried to speak the truth about our situation. I attempted to speak objectively and with a Christian spirit. I tried to do this not only when I spoke with the Holy Father and his collaborators in Rome but also when I spoke with the public in general. I felt that many of my statements were truly a revelation to many people. Therefore I repeat that I am surprised that here, where these realities are lived, the situation is distorted and the truth of our reality is covered over. I thank the Secretariat of Communications for the Archdiocese and our means of communication for having echoed the truth of my message in those countries.

Now, within the framework of the interview in Europe and relying on the acceptance that the human heart gives to my message as we reflect together, I want to tell you that I am very pleased that today's readings affirm the doctrine that I proclaimed. The readings present to us the ultimate reason for our faith. Our Church, without fear, has to commit herself to the actual, historical, political situation ... but must do this and always remain Church, always remain as the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ\*. Faith in God involves a commitment to men and women in history. Today's readings offer us the criteria of serenity and efficacy so that we might be what every person in El Salvador desires to be: creators of nation's destiny but creators in light of the faith.\*

Especially at this time of so much confusion and psychosis and collective anguish I always want to be a messenger of hope and joy. My reason for this is that the vision that is presented to us in the Word of God, in God's revelation, is not one of affliction but one of the heavens of El Salvador pointing out a luminous solution to our situation. This morning in light of the words of the Lord I hope that all of us would understand what we are able to do, so that even the smallest of the small might be able to give a response of hope and joy to the afflictions that we experience at the present time. In the midst of tragedy and bloodshed and violence there is a word of hope and faith that tells us: There is a solution! There is hope! We can rebuild our country! As Christians we have a unique power, so let us take advantage of that power. For this reason I entitle my homily: *God calls us to build our history with him*. These words are true and not some fantasy or pious consideration that should cause us to evade and withdraw ourselves from this situation. On the

contrary these words should enable us to submerge ourselves more deeply in our reality. I am going to attempt to summarize the readings with three thoughts: First, the encounter of the human person with God; Second, God offers people a plan of authentic liberation; Third, the Christian commitment to create history according to God's plan.

### **The encounter of the human person with God**

It is wonderful to know that each one of us has an appointment with God. The account of fishing is wonderful. Certain men had been fishing all night. They caught nothing and were tired. In the morning Jesus tells them: *Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch* (2). Simon complains: *Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.* The catch was so great that Simon experiences that God is there, in their midst, and he experiences God drawing near to him and falls on his knees and says: *Lord! Transcendent One! I am a sinful man, depart from me!* (3). This is the moment of encounter between God and man.

In the first reading Isaiah describes the beautiful theophany as the prologue of his great mission. The description of God's majesty is incomparable, especially when compared to the death of a king: we see that the kings are fragile human beings. *In the year king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple, Seraphim were stationed above ... and they cried one to the other: "holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!" At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook and the house was filled with smoke* (4). This is a sign of God's presence. This is the magnificent description of a man who discovers his smallness: *Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips! I am a sinner!* (5). Before the majesty of God the people who encounter God experience their own smallness and limitations.

We can say the same about the second reading. Saint Paul speaks about how Christ, in the glory of his resurrection, appeared to the apostles and lastly he appeared to Saul, one born abnormally, an expression that means that he is repugnant and not worthy of love because he was one who persecuted others. (6) But our sins are not important, rather what is important is that we sincerely seek the Lord. Paul, even though he persecuted the Christians, believed that he was serving the true God. But the Lord appeared to him: *And by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been ineffective* (7). Can't you see the meaning of this encounter with God? If we analyze the encounters described in today's readings we discover three things.

First, *a revelation of God to men.* It appears that the Lord is transcendent and magnificent, but at the same time powerful and demanding. In Jesus God's power is made gentler through the incarnation but nonetheless is always revealed as the power of God and as a power that is unloosed in the infinite glory of his resurrection. This is our God. Blessed are those who encounter God, not like Isaiah in the external expression of a theophany, but rather encounter God in the simplicity of prayer and in reflection.

I have always liked the description of the greatness of the human person as described in the Council documents: *For by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things. He plunges into the depths of reality whenever he enters into his own heart; God, Who probes the heart, awaits him there; there he discerns his proper destiny before the eyes of God* (8). My sisters and brothers, this is an invitation to all people. No one is excluded because we all have this intimate sanctuary of conscience where God is waiting for the hour when we will go to him and speak with him and before his eyes decide our destiny. How wonderful to think that I am able to have an audience with God anytime I want! Whenever I decide to pray, God is waiting for me and

listening to me. This is what this morning's readings reveal to us, namely, that every person receives in his/her heart an intimate revelation of God.

The greatness of the human person is revealed in the glory of God. Blessed are those who are not disturbed, like Peter and Paul and Isaiah, when they find themselves before the majesty of God, but rather fall on their knees and are able to say: *Lord, I am a sinner!* (9) No, God does not take pleasure in humiliating us because of our sins but rather God knows that women and men by themselves cannot attempt to establish a relationship of friendship with him nor collaborate in his work. Therefore God awakens within us this sense of humility so that he can call us and say to us: *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men!* (10). The same God speaks to Isaiah: *Do not be afraid! See, now that this ember has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sins purged* (11); and Paul, recognizing his sinfulness, was made the great collaborator in God's work.

Second, *the human person discovers his/her human dimension in the glory of God.* Women and men do not truly know themselves until they have encountered God. The reason that we have so many people who worship themselves, so many people attached to their possessions and adoring false gods is that they have not encountered their true greatness. How disgraceful is the life of those people who instead of encountering the true God bow down and worship false gods: the god of money, the god of power, the god of arrogance, the god of pleasure: all these false gods! My sisters and brothers, how I would like each one of us to say that the fruit of today's preaching is the following: we went out to encounter God and now we will live the joy of his majesty and the joy of our smallness: yes, our smallness!

Third, *in this encounter with God, God lifts up and purifies our smallness.* Symbolically, the first reading tells us that a seraphim took an ember from the altar and touched the lips of Isaiah. The fire purified him: *No, do not say that your lips are impure because now that this ember has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sins purged* (12). Isaiah then *heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"* Isaiah responded: *Here I am, send me!* Those who experience the greatness of God are able to be the Lord's collaborators. The same occurs in the second reading when Saint Paul rejoices for all the things that have happened: *But by grace, God is in me, God is with me and not I in God or I with God. I would be unable to do this work were God not with me.* Just as Jesus spoke to Simon so, too, Jesus speaks to Paul: *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men!* (13). Thus begins the great mission among the gentiles, the great work of collaboration with the Lord.

My sisters and brothers, it is for this reason that I told you that this morning you can find a better horizon in order to resolve the crisis of our country. In the depths of prayer each one of you, as well as I, can encounter a response to the question: what does the Lord want of me? What can I do in the present situation of our country? And instead of mere political deliberations we will find the plan of God.

### **God offers humankind the plan of authentic liberation**

This is my second point: God reveals to humankind the plan of authentic liberation. The gospel passage that was proclaimed this morning is most graphic. We are told: *Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat* (14). Commentators see the boat of Simon, the first Pope, as a symbol of the Church. Thus Jesus continues to teach from the midst of the Church. Jesus communicated the revelation of the Father and the plan of God for all people. Only Christ knows the deep secrets of all politicians and organizations. Only Christ knows how all the problems and crises of the world

can be resolved. Blessed are those who draw near to Christ in their reflection and ask the question: *Lord, what is your plan?*

In today's second reading Saint Paul summed up what Jesus taught while sitting in the boat and what he later taught the Apostles who were sent to towns and villages to teach his doctrine: *I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain* (15). This is the truth that God has communicated to us and that must be treasured as a sacred reliquary. One should not toy with the gospel nor should it be interpreted or manipulated for the sake of convenience. It is the gospel that saves, the gospel that Jesus proclaimed and we, the Church, continue to proclaim.\* Many times the gospel is opposed to our whims, our desires for pleasure and our selfishness and therefore blessed are those who allow the gospel to prevail over their caprices. It is better to say: *I am a sinner* in light of the gospel than to subjugate the gospel to one's sins.

What is the gospel that Paul preached and that saves people? Paul gives a summary of what every preacher proclaims. (16) *For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received -- Paul is one who communicates the message --- that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve ... Last of all, as to one born abnormally because I persecuted the Church of God, he appeared to me.* Only Christ is the salvation of saints and of sinners. Only in Christ can we place our hope and find our security. This is our salvific plan. God does not want his Church to commit itself to any concrete plan. Today in our country there are three plans to rebuild the Republic: the plan of the right, the plan of the left, and the government's plan. The Church cannot identify herself with any of these plans because the Church can only identify herself with the ideals of the Lord and thus can judge with authentic freedom the three plans of El Salvador and all the other political plans of the world.\*

Therefore I conclude my reflection even though I could still go into more detail here. I strongly recommend that all Christians daily read the Bible which contains God's thinking. Try to encounter God and discover how God's plan is one of integral salvation and how all the political plans are limited. No political plan gives us the dimension of salvation that God desires to give to all people. No matter how bold the plan of agrarian reform and the nationalization of the banks might appear to be, they cannot compare to the nationalization of the children of God and the freedom from sin that God wishes to give to all people.\*

The gospel presents us with a plan of integral liberation and I want to remind you of some famous words of the Second Vatican Council which states: *Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. To the extent that the former, that is, earthly progress, can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God\** (17). The plan of God is the plan of the Kingdom of God. All the world's plans for progress should not be confused with the plan of the Kingdom of God, but more and more they should become a reflection of the Kingdom of God. Our country will resolve its problems to the degree that an attempt is made to reflect here among us, the people of El Salvador, rich and poor, the justice and the love of the Kingdom of God.\* Those who are opposed to the plan of the Kingdom of God are the same individuals who are impeding true material progress in El Salvador and the plan of the Kingdom of God is opposed to the reality in which a few have everything while the majority have nothing.\*

## **The Christian commitment to create history according to the plan of God**

My third thought is the Christian commitment to create history according to the plan of God. My sisters and brothers, now is the time to make some serious decisions for our country. People must make decisions with regard to work in the rural areas, with regard to human progress and politics. But if we are truly Christian then we have the plan of God engraved in our hearts and minds and will keep this plan before us in all our activity. All political persons who today are involved in government and who are truly Christian must make every effort to reflect the plan of God in the reality of the nation. All young people who are members of popular political organizations or members of any other political group, if they are truly Christians, must attempt to reflect the plan of the Kingdom of God in their activity. They must be salt of the earth and light of the world (18) and not exchange the plan of the Kingdom of God for any other reality. Therefore in the midst of your organization or political group, attempt to reflect the Kingdom of God. If you do not do this, you are not Christian\*.

Saint Paul has told us this morning that we should persevere in the gospel that he preached and that we should remain faithful to the gospel teaching in all that we do and this includes our political activity *because if we do not hold fast to the Word then it will appear that we have believed in vain* (19). Can you imagine what Saint Paul would say to those who prefer their political identity and therefore are willing to betray their Christian identity!

About this plan of God's Kingdom, it has also been said: *Evangelization will also always contain --- as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism --- a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy. And not an immanent salvation, meeting material or even spiritual needs, restricted to the framework of temporal existence and completely identified with temporal desires, hopes, affairs and struggles, but a salvation which exceeds all these limits in order to reach fulfillment in a communion with the one and only divine Absolute: a transcendent and eschatological salvation, which indeed has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity* (20). This is God's plan and it is not opposed to the plans of the earth. Yes, it is opposed to the sins of the plans of this earth and it is for this reason that the Church preaches the Kingdom of God. Indeed, through her preaching the Church hopes to root out sin from all the plans of the earth and also wants to encourage people to be mindful of the Kingdom of God as they carry out their earthly plans. This is the great work of Christians in the world and this is also the commitment that today's readings invite us to make. God sends Isaiah into the midst of the world, sends him to speak to the king with purified lips and with his eyes filled with the vision of God's glory so that he might keep before his eyes the only God who is to be adored, the One who does not want his power to be united with any perishable power of the earth. Isaiah is to be mindful of all of this as he stands in the midst of the idolaters of gold and power, as he stands in the midst of the majesty of the kings.

My dear sisters and brothers, within this context there is another text that I want us all to be mindful of because at this time when there are so many concrete options with regard to the way in which we will create the history of El Salvador, this observation might be very useful. *Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message ---* In other words, let us suppose that a political party or organization believe that they possess the solution to certain problems, believe that they are more Christian than other Christians

and therefore want to monopolize the gospel ... the Council states: *Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good* (21). We must always reflect the Kingdom of God and his justice (22) so that all people who attempt to realize the plans of the earth might be illuminated with the light of faith as they attempt to create a new society here on earth. This is the great mission of Christians in the world. When I spoke in Belgium about the political dimension of faith I stated that in order for people of faith to be authentic they must be involved in the realities of the world but they must also cling to Jesus Christ.

## **Life of the Church**

As pastor of the Church and as the Christian community that we are, let us see if our ministry, from the perspective of our faith and our growth in faith, is the same as the ministry of the three persons who were presented to us in today's readings: Peter, kneeling before Jesus in order to learn the meaning of his liberation; Paul, learning about the gospel and asking to remain faithful to the gospel in order to be effective in his efforts at liberating people; Isaiah, feeling overwhelmed by the greatness of his mission and yet bold when God sends him into the world to proclaim his word. Are we truly messengers of the Kingdom of God? Are those who have a political vocation or those who are involved in political organizations and parties or those who are involved in the government or the armed forces or in any other way involved in the political process of our nation ... are they truly Christian? Are they living out their faith as they deal with the realities that they confront? Our Church attempts to build itself up upon this evangelical foundation and as we give an account of the ecclesial events of the week I am filled with joy because our Church is ministering in the same way as Isaiah, Peter, and Paul. In this way we have before us a vision of the Kingdom of God that enables us to minister to and with those involved in the world's political situation.

The academic year has begun at the Major Seminary and we have great hope. Young men have been called to follow in the footsteps of Isaiah, Peter, and Paul. During their seminary years they must embrace the Kingdom of God so that they might then reflect this Kingdom in the midst of the realities of the world. I want to publicly thank the young men in the Major Seminary for the beautiful letter they sent to me. As they welcomed me back from my trip and informed me about the beginning of their studies they expressed their solidarity with the bishop and with the ministry of the Archdiocese. They want to be ministers of the actual Church that is filled with so many wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Together with the Inter-Diocesan Seminary, there are two minor seminaries, one in San José de la Montaña and the other in Chalatenango where young men are able to obtain their high school diploma as they reflect on their call to priesthood.

We have an introductory year into seminary life. This is something new that we initiated this year when God has blessed us with so many vocations that have come to us from different high schools. This is a period during which we are able to orient these young men in their priestly vocation and this introductory period will continue for one year.

We will also have a Diaconate year. This is a new experience in our diocese and during this time the young men interrupt their studies. The young men in their fourth year of theology suspend their studies to engage in a year of pastoral ministry. The following year they will complete their studies and be ordained after having had a year of experience in the pastoral life of the diocese.



As the fruit of our pastoral ministry I am happy to be able to offer you a group of older men who are preparing for the priesthood. I have spoken to you about this on other occasions and I want to tell you here that these men are very animated in their studies. This is a group of men who thought that because of their inability to complete their studies and their economic situation that they could not be priests but they have discovered that God has opened a path for them and without a doubt they will be very good priests.

Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of our Lady of Lourdes and we want to greet the different communities that live under the protection of the Virgin of Lourdes who reflects an image of the Church coming down from heaven in order to understand the actual situation of women and men and becomes incarnated, with a mother's love, in the midst of the realities and afflictions of the earth. It was also on the feast of Lourdes, February 11, 1913 that Saint Pius X created our ecclesial Diocese. In other words, previously the Republic of El Salvador was composed of one Diocese and in 1913 three dioceses were created: Santa Ana, San Miguel, and the diocese of San Salvador was elevated to the status of an archdiocese. Later, two other dioceses were created: San Vicente and Santiago de María. Thus we can say our diocese celebrates its birthday on the feast of our Lady of Lourdes.

Father Ramiro, the pastor of the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes underwent surgery at the Policlínica and we pray for his speedy recovery.

The Pope has once again condemned the arms race. He opposed the installation of 572 missiles in Europe, missiles manufactured in North America. The Pope said: *The cause of peace and justice has never been achieved when it has been united to violence and the suffocation of the deepest aspirations of humankind.* We should be mindful of these words in our situation where there is so much violence.

I want to thank Bishop Claudio Humes, the bishop of San Andrés, Brazil, who expressed his solidarity with our Archdiocese and with its valiant struggle on behalf of social justice and freedom. He admires the participation of the people of El Salvador in this struggle and wrote: *May Jesus Christ sustain your courage and may God bless the Church and the people of El Salvador.\**

So that you may see the beauty of our Church I want to read to you a telegram which, in addition to the universal testimonies, arrived from a pastor who ministers in the rural area of Chalatenango, Father Proprawa de las Flores. He says: *Many people, even though they are poor, are offering Masses for the peace of the nation ... this is a good sign ... deep religious sentiments ... I am happy ... greetings.\** I want to take advantage of these words of Father Proprawa in order to express to you my admiration for all of you because you pray often for El Salvador. I repeat to you the words of John Paul II to whom I expressed my solidarity with the universal Church. On that occasion he told me: *Tell the people that I pray every day for El Salvador.* Thus we are able to rely on the daily prayers of the Pope. There are also religious and Christian communities in Europe and America as well as in our own Diocese who live a life of prayer. I believe that a people that prays cannot be lost. Let us pray that God will give us the solution that today we have found in the Word of God and that was proclaimed by the Lord.

As Church I want to express our solidarity with the people and the Church of Guatemala. The statement of the Jesuits of the Province of Central America<sup>3</sup> and the violent reaction of the right make me think of the serious situation and the great responsibility of the Church in that, our sister country. It also makes me reflect on the ways that we respond to the expressions of solidarity that

we have received from there ... we should pray often for the liberation of the people of Guatemala and enter into solidarity with their struggle.\*

### Events of the week

From the perspective of the Church we are unable to remain indifferent before the world and the events that have occurred during the past week. I want to speak about the statement of the UCA (University of Central America)<sup>4</sup> and I invite everyone to engage in serious reflection because this statement appears to me to very valid at this time. With a vision that is less technical, because I am not an expert in these matters nor is the Church competent in this area, but with a pastoral vision and in accord with my duty, I am going to express my impressions about the panorama of the country that I found as I returned from my travels. As pastor of the Christian people I am interested in inviting all of you to adapt God's plan to the work that is being undertaken to create our history. I invite you, as the People of God, to be witnesses and collaborators in God's plan so that the building up and the entity that is to be born from this painful birth in El Salvador might respond to the divine plan that wants to make us happy and also wants us to live as sisters and brothers here in El Salvador.

What I placed before those in Rome and said to the reporters from Belgium and France. During my last homilies I have used the same outline. There are three plans in play, three plans in this tragic drama of violence: the plan of the government, the plan of the popular organizations and the plan of the right. I reaffirm my total disapproval of the right that is opposed to the necessary changes that the people desire\*, and so once again I ask those who were so zealous in saying that I had defended violence (which is slanderous), why did you not publish the words that I spoke with such clarity, words which I proclaimed when I expressed my disapproval of the plan of the right? I would like to see this published in all the newspapers of El Salvador because this is the voice of the Church.\* With regard to the other two plans I said that I support the part that is good in these two plans but I repudiate the part that is evil, inhuman and anti-Christian\*. When I explained this matter to the cardinal Secretary of State, who is familiar with the political situation and who guides the Church, I said that the Church repudiates the plan of the right and with regard to the other two plans I stated that I invite people to collaborate with what is good in both of these plans and to cast aside that which is bad in these same plans. The cardinal told me: *That is the path!* I believe that this is what the Church can offer: the Church does not judge any of these plans as an expert in political matters but rather offers her evangelical and gospel criteria. This is the guidance that our Church offers!

The efforts on behalf of unity by the left and their openness to democratic elements and other honest sectors of our country: this points out a solution and as stated in the document of the UCA, it can provide an alternative to civil war<sup>5</sup>. Civil war must be avoided and will be avoided if the people who propose these three plans use reason and put aside their fanaticism and obsessions. Therefore I return to the same outline in order to situate the events of the past week.

Regarding the government plan, we do not deny the noble and sincere desires to envision some plans for structural changes that would result in benefits for the people, such as the nationalization of banks, land reform, the nationalization of foreign business and the creation of a constitutional statute which according to them will enable them to move forward with the announced changes. The desire and the proposal to resolve the occupation of the Spanish Embassy with violence will not resolve anything just as violence resolved nothing in Guatemala<sup>6</sup>. However, the desire to save the image of the country, to resolve some labor problems, to guarantee that the prices of articles of popular consumption are not altered ... all of this is very honest and valuable. But against all of this

there is still a negative element, namely, the demonstrated weakness of being unable to detain the repression unleashed by the security forces.\* Undoubtedly supported by elements of the National Army and in contradiction to what was stated on October 15<sup>th</sup>, illegal arrests continue and we also continue to see delays in investigating these cases. Indeed, there seems to be a certain impotence (I do not want to say bad will) in investigating all these criminal manoeuvres and actions of the extreme right\*. Here we have the testimony of a diplomat who has been attempting to resolve of the problem of the Embassy: how difficult it is to obtain information and act on behalf of those who have been arrested and those who have disappeared.

Legal Aid has informed us about different events that have occurred during these days and have made special mention of the case of the malicious assassination of Dr. Fernando Martín Espinoza Altamirano. René Marroquín Arrazola was abducted by civilians and his body was later found on the road to Mariona. The White Warriors Union has claimed responsibility for this action<sup>7</sup>. During this past week several bodies have been located in different places but they have not yet been identified.

ANDES 21 de Junio (National Association of Salvadoran Teachers) denounced the assassination of five professors during the last week of January. They have also denounced the recent arrest of Professor Vidal Elpidio Recinos. On Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, the body of the student, Oscar García, was found. Last Sunday Father Fabián denounced his arrest.

Legal Aid has documented the illegal arrest of the worker Rigoberto Antonio Melgar Fuentes.

There is a very painful case, that of the family of Pablo Mendoza from San Pedro Perulapán. The family is known internationally because, in the years 75 to 78, fourteen members of this family suffered frightening repression and were killed<sup>8</sup>. A combined contingent of soldiers and members of the National Guard arrested two daughters of this same family, Laura Isabel and Rosa Paula Mendoza. They were leaving the village of Carmen Monte, Cojutepeque, and traveling to their house in San Pedro Perulapán. They are now counted among those persons who have disappeared.

Jesús Menjivar, Fidencio Mejía and María Emma Aquino have not appeared nor have the two students who were arrested near the North American Embassy, Arnulfo Ventura and José Humberto Mejía nor Albañil Peña Antonio Carillo, a worker.

During this wave of violence the house of Guillermo Galván Bonilla was machine gunned. Other people have been threatened by telephone and other means ... all of this has been done to frighten people. One of the victims of these threats is Dr. Roberto Cuéllar, the Director of Legal Aid.

We received news that on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the *campesinos* José Eduardo Vásquez, Abilio Cruz and Rodolfo Vásquez were arrested in Rio Mineral in Santa Rosa de Lima and nothing else is known about these men. The situation has been made more difficult because the people of La Unión have reported that last night, Saturday, the village of Conchaguita was surrounded by the army. The Vásquez family lives there and the eldest brother, Santos Domingo Vásquez, was arrested.

Coming into the basilica here, I was informed that a contingent of soldiers and guards had invaded the canton Carmen Monte, capturing Laura Isabel whom I have just mentioned. Besides the nine assassinations that we have denounced here, the number of victims in the community of Aguilares continues to climb and now twenty-nine people have been killed in the different villages. One of the most sorrowful cases is that of the two young workers of the Red Cross, Ana Coralía and María Ercilia Martínez, both of whom worked in the medical clinic connected to the parish of

Aguilares<sup>9</sup>. We are profoundly affected by their deaths and we express our solidarity with their families and at the same time we repudiate these criminal actions.

We received many painful letters from several families, such as that which we received from the family of Alberto Carpio Miranda who want some news about their son who was arrested in the city of Aguilares. Their letter is filled with anxiety as they write: *Even though we are poor and have suffered greatly we are doing everything possible to obtain news about our son. We have gone to different places but have not been given any answers.* We received a similar letter asking for information about José María Guevara: *On January 31<sup>st</sup> the army beat, arrested and killed the workers. Everyone fled including my son and we have no further information about him. We beg you to help us because we cannot bear the anguish and pain that we experience as the result of the loss of our beloved son.*

Here we are studying the government's plan which offers us structural changes. I want to make an observation that was also made in the statement of the UCA: *It seems very possible to join the demands to carry out profound structural reforms, especially land reform, with the massive repression of the popular organizations. It cannot be denied that there is a real possibility that the present government of the Christian Democratic Party may be playing a transitional role. Thus their function may not be one of carrying out profound structural reforms because the present situation does not lend itself to that process ... and if they were to attempt to carry out those reforms they might well fail and only provide a new pretext to the oligarchy. So what is their role or function? Their role is to stop the repression, to nullify the ability of the para-military and para-police forces of the oligarchy to act, and to neutralize the efforts of the military on the capitalist project. In other words, the Christian Democrats should have authority over all these elements. The function, the mission of the present government of the Christian Democrats should consist of indirectly forming a deeper alliance with all the democratic forces that might be able to collaborate in the restructuring of a new national plan.*<sup>10</sup>

It seems that the ideas expressed in the document of the UCA are correct when it is stated that at the present time it is difficult to talk about profound transformations as we experience this wave of criminal repression against people. Those who put forth the government's plan ought to take a step forward, even a small step, in order to demonstrate that they are concerned about the people. This step should be one that demonstrates that they have authority and the way to show they have authority is to put an immediate stop to the repression that our people can no longer bear\*. This is the same as I said before: the good part of the plan should be preserved but the corrupted aspects must be cast aside as soon as possible because these aspects are hindering the liberation process of our people.\*

The other plan is that of the right. As was denounced last Sunday, the right is highlighted by a powerful repression and a real provocation of the organized groups. Their cruel, crude, and ruthless violence is manifested in their cold-blooded assassinations which we have already mentioned. Other examples of this violence are seen in the arrest of doña Norma Guevara<sup>11</sup>, a member of the UND (Democratic Nationalist Union) party, and the machine gunning of the parish church El Rosario where three people were killed and twenty-five others wounded. All of these actions have been carried out by the right and the perpetrators of this violence have been protected, it would seem, from any impunity that no other assassin in any part of the world could rely on. Some people have come to believe in the possibility of an understanding between the security forces and the armed groups of the extreme right\*. The ill-fated organization ORDEN (Democratic Nationalist Organization), which was abolished by a government decree, has reappeared under another name<sup>12</sup> and is now brazenly proposed as a model organization.

I want to remind you of the commentary that was heard on YSAX concerning this proposal and many also saw on television that which I am referring to here. It was stated: *We want to single out the intervention of Mr. D'Aubuisson<sup>13</sup> for what it is, that is, defamation and filled with lies\*. We hope that the armed forces are able to see the lack of truthfulness in this man who wants to name a national hero one who is a torturer, one who wants nothing to do with those who have disappeared or been assassinated or tortured and one who confuses the words of the statutes of ORDEN with the reality of their threats and assassinations and puts forth false testimony that does not deceive anyone, not even the least intelligent person.\* He is like the person who said he was from Nicaragua and then confused the Caribbean with the Gulf of Fonseca\*. A plan that needs to be involved with this type of person ... well, you can see what good this will bring to people.\**

Another maneuver of the right. I have received a letter from an individual that was signed with his national identity number and he states that he confronts the following problem: *On January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> the Crusade for Peace and Work utilized my name and a false personal identity number to publish paid propaganda in El Diario de Hoy. On February 5<sup>th</sup> another communication was transmitted on Radio Sonora, naming me as the responsible person. I want to clarify here that I am well aware of the present situation but in no way could I possibly pay for such propaganda because my economic situation does not allow me to do so. I am dedicated to the care of my children and my home and have never been connected with any form of politics. Because all of this could prejudice me in a negative way, I beg that this situation be clarified.\**

Finally, referring to the third project, that of the left, we find ourselves before the positive efforts to overcome the partiality and fanaticism of the popular organizations as they search for unity. There are good intentions at work in some leaders of these groups as they approach others and seek rational solutions in the elaboration of a popular plan. When I first spoke about these efforts I said that these efforts were praiseworthy in as much as they suppose overcoming attempts to make idols of these organizations and thus can help the forward progress of plans for structural change that would benefit people. Thus there is no doubt that these efforts for unity and openness are hopeful signs\*. At the same time I asked, and today I do so in a more urgent manner, that these organizations inform us about their political plans. What are the proposals that will bring about this unity not only among those who are organized but also among those persons who will support them if they present rational plans and plans that have a vision of the common good? I insisted, and I do so again, that above all else the human, Christian and evangelical values of the people must be preserved. This is very valid.

Here I want to refer to a conversation that I had with Pope John Paul II. He did not scold me as some have said but rather it was a dialogue about criteria, like when Paul went up to Jerusalem to speak with Peter about the content of his preaching and was open to correct that which was not good. We are not firmly rooted in any one position, but we are seeking the Kingdom of God and want to save people in an authentic manner. When speaking with the Pope he told me: *Continue to defend social justice and promote love for those who are poor\*, but in the defense of human rights and the just demands of the people you must be careful not to lose sight of the Christian values that can easily become lost in those struggles and that in the long run can result in as much evil as the dictatorship that you are trying to eliminate.* I said: *Holy Father, this is precisely the balance that I try to bring to these situations. I attempt to support the just demands of people but at the same time I defend the Christian interests and the Christian values of my people.\** The Pope understood me very well and I continued to speak: *But Holy Father, in my country it is very dangerous to speak about anti-communism because the right proclaims a doctrine of anti-communism but they do so not out of some love for Christian sentiments but out of selfishness. They want to guard their*

*selfish interest*\*. The Pope observed me and said that he was in agreement with me: *The Church does not preach against (anti-) anything and the Church is not anti-communist*. I then said: *Holy Father, it is precisely for this reason that I do not present my teaching in that way, but rather I speak in positive terms. I praise the spiritual, Christian values of my people and I tell them they must always defend and preserve them*. Anyone would understand that I am referring to the danger of other ideologies that could rob us of these sentiments and exchange these values with others if there were no one willing to compare one value with another.

Therefore, my beloved sisters and brothers, I take advantage of this time to tell you, especially you who are members of popular political organizations: the demands of the people are just and we must continue to defend social justice and love for the poor\*. But if we truly love the people and if we attempt to defend the people, then we cannot take away that which has the greatest value, namely, their faith in God, their love for Jesus Christ, and their Christian sentiments.\*

For this reason, as I address the plan of the left, I say to you: above all else avoid the thirst for vengeance and violence that leads nowhere. In this sense then we condemn those spontaneous acts that appear to have no other objective but to provoke greater repression. For example, the assassination of members of ORDEN or members of the security forces, taking over towns and villages, the imposition of rules and regulations and stirring up people to create an insurrection which would ultimately be harmful to our people.

We hear about the negative consequences that are published in our newspapers: 3,500 sacks of rice (each sack contains a hundred pounds of rice) are burned in Zacatecoluca and the loss is estimated to be more than 200,000.00 colones<sup>14</sup>. Our people will now suffer as a result of this loss. It is also painful to hear about the burning of seventeen boxcars of cotton on the Carrera estate resulting in the loss of one million colones<sup>15</sup>. We will feel the loss of this money and cotton. We cannot hope to build a country from nothing. Let us gather together what we have and upon that which is unjust let us build that which is just but notice that we have something upon which we can build.

Regarding the occupation of the churches. It is time that we think of some other form of protest. These occupations are signs but in Europe these signs are not understood. People asked me: *How can they call you the friend of the poor and then the poor take over your churches?* I had to do much explaining. I say this so that those who occupy our churches can see that this action is not understood by people outside our country. At a time when efforts are being made to establish a greater unity and gain international prestige, we must be selective in the signs that we use so that we do not waste or lose what we hope to gain through these efforts. It is true that I am not in agreement with the occupation of the churches but I am also not in accord with the crime that is committed when people, armed with machine guns, enter our churches to drive people out.\* I was told that when the Cathedral was occupied someone climbed up to the cupola and opened fire. This is foolishness and a provocation. Again I ask: what kind of sign is this? Avoid all those actions that can cause you to lose your prestige and your popularity.

I am also not in agreement with occupying other buildings or embassies for whatever reason nor am I in agreement with the detention of hostages, especially when they are members of the diplomatic corps. They are our brothers who come from other countries and are involved in a friendly mission on behalf of our people. Yes, they are members of some political party but above all else they are human beings. In situations of long, unjust captivity nerves become unstable and difficult situations are created. I had the opportunity to visit the embassy of Spain<sup>16</sup> and I am in

solidarity with those people who are clearly suffering. Every deprivation of freedom is an abuse of human rights.

In the midst of the violent situation of our country, it is beautiful to hear of the heroic and beautiful gestures of the young people who have offered to come here and remain as hostages in the Spanish Embassy on condition that those who are currently being held there be released.<sup>17</sup> These young people come from Argentina, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, Panama and Costa Rica. It appears that these people have begun to travel here from Costa Rica\*.

For the organizations that are involved in the occupation of buildings and embassies I want to read this telegram from Amnesty International: *Urgent! Through your voice Amnesty International wants to inform the public of El Salvador and all political groups that it wholly condemns the taking of hostages and threatening them with violence, including the present occupation of the Spanish Embassy and the offices of the Christian Democratic Party of San Salvador. We also condemn the execution of abducted prisoners or hostages by the government or other organisms of whatever political affiliation.*(23) *We condemn the threatened assassination of Archibald Gardner Dunn, José Adolfo<sup>18</sup>, Jaime Hill Argüello and others. Sincerely, the General Secretariat.*

We are also not in agreement with these abductions. I was happy when I heard the news that Jaime Battle was freed<sup>19</sup>. I continue to wait for effective negotiations to begin for the release of Mr. Dunn, Mr. Hill, and Mr. McEntee. These abductions are a set back to the process of our people, weaken our unity, result in a loss of confidence, and also provoke repression. Do not forget that these acts of violence often result in affliction and pain for innocent people. We are not unaware of the culpability of the right. With the words of Medellín we have often reminded the elements of the right that they are responsible for the anger that is created in people. At the same time the left must mature in seeking solutions that are not the product of vengeance. Indeed, they must seek that maturity that will make them superior to those of other tendencies.

My sisters and brothers, I conclude by telling you that the Church and her pastors, without identifying with any specific plan, will always attempt to illuminate and maintain hope. We are not in favor of violence. We want to make more and more hypothetical the reality of a civil war. With great satisfaction I want to remind you of the words of the UCA document. After analyzing the plans it is stated: *We reject civil war as the only and immediate alternative. It is true that if we consider the number of victims, especially among the popular organizations, we could speak of a muted civil war. But if an armed popular uprising or an open and total confrontation between the armed forces and armed leftist groups were to occur, everything would be worse. The tremendous cost of this solution in terms of human life and material resources, so indispensable for the survival of our nation, means that we must look for the solution on another path.*<sup>20</sup>

We firmly believe in peace and for this reason I am going to conclude in the way that I began. God calls us to create our history with him. God does not want us to build on blood and pain. God wants this work to be a creation of the children of God who give a prominent role to that which is most characteristic of the human person: reason and freedom. Despite the deterioration of the situation in El Salvador, I believe that here we have very capable people who are able to offer a future to our country, a future in which we can create a society according to God's plan. So be it.\*

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<sup>1</sup> Mons. Romero left for Rome on 28 January 1980 and was received by Pope John Paul II on 30 January. A day later he continued his journey to Belgium where, on 2 February, he received a doctorate *honoris causa* from the University of Louvain. He returned to El Salvador on February 06. See *Mons. Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Su Diario*, Arzobispado de San Salvador, 1989, pp. 404-419.

<sup>2</sup> Among the headlines in the El Salvador newspapers concerning Monsd. Romero's doctorate *honoris causa* were: "Archbishop supports violence and says he doesn't believe in the Junta", and "The Church cannot oppose violence: Monseñor Romero." See *La Prensa Gráfica*, and *El Diario de Hoy*, 4 February 1980.

<sup>3</sup> See "Ante el dolor y la esperanza del pueblo de Guatemala", *ECA* 375-376, (1980) pp. 139-141.

<sup>4</sup> See Pronunciamiento del Consejo Superior Universitario de la Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas sobre la actual situación del país (2 February 1980), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 5 February 1980.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Ixil and Quiché indigenous people occupied the Spanish embassy in Guatemala to denounce the repression in Quiché; on 31 January 1980 the Guatemalan police entered, machine-gunned and burnt the embassy without allowing any chance for dialogue. In this action 39 people were assassinated, most of them indigenous. See "Los pueblos indígenas de Guatemala ante el mundo", *Diálogo* 50 (1980), pp. 126-131.

<sup>7</sup> See "Solidaridad", *Orientación*, 17 February 1980.

<sup>8</sup> See "Socorro Jurídico del Arzobispado ante el pueblo salvadoreño. Persecución, captura y desaparecimiento en la familia Pablo Mendoza (1975 a 1978)", *El Mundo*, 21 December 1979.

<sup>9</sup> See "Solidaridad", *Oriejntación*, 10 February 1980, and *La Prensa Gráfica*, 31 January 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Pronunciamiento del Gobierno...see above.

<sup>11</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 7 and 8 February 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Frente Democrático Nacionalista. The FDN was also a member of the Frente Amplio Nacional (FAN).

<sup>13</sup> From January 1980 Roberto D'Aubuisson, claiming to be a director of FAN, began to make frequent public interventions. This occasion was a television programme shown on 7 February 1980. See "D'Aubuisson denuncia conspiración comunista", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 February 1980.

<sup>14</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 9 February 1980.

<sup>15</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 8 February 1980.

<sup>16</sup> On 5 February 1980 the Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero occupied the Spanish Embassy in El Salvador. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 February 1980.

<sup>17</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 9 February 1980.

<sup>18</sup> José Adolfo McEntee.

<sup>19</sup> See *El Mundo*, 9 February 1980.

<sup>20</sup> Pronunciamiento del Consejo...see above.

*Marginal References* (1) Ep 1,1; (2) Lk 5,4-5; (3) Lk 5,8; (4) Is 6,1-4; (5) Is 6,5; (6) 1Cor 15,5-8; (7) 1Cor 15,10; (8) GS 14; (9) Lk 5,8; (10) Lk 5,10b; (11) Is 6,7; (12) Is 6,6-8; (13) Lk 5,10b; (14) Lk 5,3; (15) 1Cor 15,1-2; (16) 1Cor 15,3-8; (17) GS 39; (18) Mt 5,13-14; (19) 1Cor 15,2; (20) EN 27; (21) GS 43; (22) Mt 6,33; (23) M 2,17.