

LENT, OUR TRANSFIGURATION THROUGH CHRIST

**Second Sunday of Lent
March 2, 1980**

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Philippians 3:17. 4-1
Luke 9:28-36

My dear sisters and brothers present in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart and my sisters and brothers who because of our friends at Radio Noticias del Continente from Costa Rica are in communion with us on this second Sunday of Lent:

Receive first of all a fraternal greeting and may the Word of God enlighten the reality of our people. Since, thanks to God, we have received invaluable collaboration from Costa Rica, we hope that our friends outside the country might be able to understand our situation and manifest to us their solidarity through prayer to Jesus about whom the eternal Father has spoken this morning: *This is my chosen Son; listen to him* (1). I do not want my words to be anything else but a humble echo of the Word of God who became incarnated in Christ and became a light and guide for all people. The Kingdom has been established among all people and God has commanded us to listen to the voice of Jesus.

Lent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the Christian Passover. We celebrate our redemption and our celebration of Lent cannot be separated from the concrete situations in which people and Christians celebrate such a significant season, namely, it is the time of our redemption. Redemption is the same as liberation, salvation. And our people are in need of liberation and salvation, their own liberation.* The celebration of our Easter Passover, our Holy Week, the mystery of human redemption is so profoundly incarnated in the history of the people of El Salvador that we can now say that Lent and Holy Week have been made for us: this is the celebration of our redemption.

Today's gospel presents to us the figure of the transfigured Jesus in whom is personified the redemption of humankind and the hope of people. Saint Luke uses the scene of the transfiguration as a preamble to Jesus' going up to Jerusalem. The gospel tells us that Jesus spoke of *his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem* (2). This is a warning for all of us: the path of redemption has to lead to the cross and the path of the resurrection has to be the path of Calvary. All the blood of our people ought to be united to the blood of Jesus that was shed on the sorrowful journey to Calvary.

This Lent, which we observe amid blood and sorrow, ought to foreshadow a transformation of our people, a resurrection of our nation. The Church invites us to a modern form of penance, of fasting and prayer --- perennial Christian practices, but adapted to the circumstances of each people. Lenten fasting is not the same thing in those lands where people eat well as is a Lent among our third-world peoples, undernourished as they are, living in a perpetual Lent, always fasting.

For those who eat well, Lent is a call to austerity, a call to give away in order to share with those in need. But in poor lands, in homes where there is so much hunger, Lent should be observed in

order to give the meaning of the cross to the sacrifice that is everyday life. But this should not be done with a mistaken sense of resignation. God does not want that. Rather, feeling in one's own flesh the consequences of sin and injustice, one is encouraged to work for social justice and a genuine love for the poor.*

Our Lent should awaken a sense of social justice. Let us observe our lent in this way, giving our sufferings, our bloodshed, and our sorrow the same value that Christ gave to his condition of poverty, oppression, abandonment, and injustice. Let us change all of that into the cross of salvation that redeems the world and our people. With hatred for none, let us be converted and share from our poverty both our joys and material assistance with those who may be even needier.

This Sunday we begin the week of voluntary sacrifice and at the end of the homily Refugio Alvarez, one of the principal promoters of this work, will speak about a form of Christianity that knows how to put its faith in Jesus into practice, that is, knows how to reveal its faith through love and charity.

In the same line of thought I want to read some letters to you, letters like the one that arrived from Laguna, Chalatenango: *Through this means, we, the Christian communities of Laguna, want to express our solidarity with the communities of Las Vueltas, Chalatenango. We offer them our moral and financial support and according to our possibilities, we also offer housing to those families who have been affronted. At the same time we condemn the ruthless persecution which has been carried out by the security forces and right-wing organizations and which violence has affected the people of Las Vueltas. We condemn and repudiate these horrible crimes that are clear violations of people's human rights. In our country it appears that basic human rights are not longer respected. We denounce the assassinations that are carried out in this area in an unscrupulous and barbaric manner.* This is a wonderful letter and so I thank you and congratulate you because this is precisely how we should live our lives as Christians.

Another gesture of Lenten solidarity that echoes the truth of Jesus Christ ... I received a letter from Potónico where the people lament the bombing of our radio station YSAX and express their feelings to their pastor: *It is as though the tongue of the Church has been cut out and as though we, who listen to the voice of the church with so much pleasure, have had our ears cut off.* The people of this community, from their situation of poverty, offer their support so that within a brief period of time our destroyed YSAX might rise up with greater vigor than ever before.*

My sisters and brothers, this Sunday, as the person of the transfigured Jesus is placed before us we present our reflection with this theme: *Lent, in the person of Jesus the plan of God transfigures people.* A synthesis of my thinking: Lent reveals the plan of God to us and today the plan of God is revealed through the transfiguration of Jesus. God's plan is loving and powerful and capable of transfiguring all the miseries, injustices, and sins of the people of El Salvador, transforming all these realities and all women and men into people in whom the beauty of Christ's justice and holiness shines forth. As usual I will develop this idea with the following points: First, the transfigured Christ, the end and the fullness of the history of Israel; Second, in the transfigured Christ God offers a plan of integral liberation to people; Third, the transfigured Christ is the anticipated presence of a definitive liberation.

My first point is that the transfigured Christ is the end and the fullness of the history of Israel. The history of Israel is a fundamental element in the Lenten catechesis. God wanted to first reveal his liberation to the people that had been chosen from among all the nations of the world as his own. Then Jesus offered this same liberation to all people.

Israel is like the model of the history of salvation but after Christ the history of salvation becomes the history of every people. Therefore, during this Lenten season all Christians should call to mind the history of Israel in order to learn all that God desires to do today with the people of the world, remembering at the same time that this was anticipated by God and is revealed in the Old Testament.

Thus today's first reading presents us with the beginning of salvation history in the person of the patriarch and the father of that nation: Abraham. Until the appearance of Abraham we have what we might call natural or worldly history which could be seen as a canvass on which a painter is going to draw a marvelous picture that is called the history of salvation. Upon the picture of universal history, the history of the world, God begins to draw with a Hebrew man, Abraham, begins to weave the wonders of salvation history that will become entwined in the history of the world.

According to the rite of those ancient people, God makes two promises to them. First, he makes Abraham look at the stars: *Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be* (3). Anyone might say that God was ridiculing Abraham, elderly and sterile and without children: how could God promise him that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars? God also promised: *I give you this land as a possession* (4): here is where the people will live, the people who will come forth from the womb. These people were nomads, people without a history, people without land and God tells them: *I am going to make you a numerous people and this will be your land, your country.*

Naturally Abraham says to God: *How am I to know that I shall possess it?* (5). God commands him to participate in the ancient rite of swearing to a promise: the splitting of an animal into two parts.(6) This was a gesture that was made when a covenant was established: an animal was split it two and the parties involved in the covenant walked between the pieces of the animal as if to say: *If I do not fulfill the words that I have spoken then I should be treated like these animals that have been slaughtered.* The Bible speaks here of a gesture that was similar to that which occurred to Adam when the first woman was created: *The Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man* (7). Here in the case of Abraham, he sees a smoking brazier and a flaming torch pass between the slaughtered animals.(8) Thus God is saying: God swears with the customary oath that his word is not a lie and that his twofold promise of numerous descendants and a land flowing with milk and honey would be fulfilled in his time.

Thus the people of Israel are born. But in this covenant relationship God asks for faith and indeed, faith becomes characteristic of this covenant. For this reason Abraham is not only the father of the Jewish people but is also the father of the new Israel because Christianity comes into existence as a result of faith. We, Christians, if we believe, we are children of Abraham and we are the descendants more numerous than the stars. Like the stars in the sky this people will never end: no one can put an end to the presence of Christians in the world.*

We have said that the history of Israel has a goal, an end, a fullness. The reason for the election of Abraham, the Promised Land, and the privileged race of the Lord is that through Abraham's descendants all people might be blessed. (9) The existence of Christ is involved in this phase of history. As man, Christ will be a child of Abraham and all his descendents. Mary, the virgin chosen to give flesh to the Son of God, is an Israelite, a daughter of Abraham, the flower in whom the goal and the objective and the glory of all history is brought to life: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

As we listen to today's gospel, two Old Testament figures are highlighted: Moses and Elijah, the great law giver and the great prophet of the people. (10) We also find revealed in this passage the great truth that we are attempting to understand: the transfigured Jesus, standing between Moses and Elijah, is the fullness of the history of Israel. Moses and Elijah, the patriarch and the prophet, the golden thread that God uses to weave the history of Israel, has an objective, namely, to gift us with a redeemer, to gift us with the Son of God made man.

The Son of God made man is here between the two great figures, the two great Lents of Israel.

The Lent of Moses: forty years journeying through the desert in order to enter the Promised Land. The Lent of Moses is also seen when Moses ascends Mount Sinai and spends forty days and forty nights speaking with God in order to bring the Decalogue to his people. Elijah is burdened in life because of the persecution of his people. He undertakes a journey, a suicide journey: *This is enough, O Lord! Take my life for I am no better than my fathers* (11). He lies down and falls asleep under a broom tree and awaits death. A mysterious angel awakens him and tells him: *Get up and eat!* Elijah is nourished by the mysterious bread of God and he is told: *Walk because you have many days ahead of you.* Elijah walked forty days through the desert and found himself once again on Mount Sinai where he had another theophany: he experienced a hurricane but God was not there. Then he experienced an earthquake but God was not in the earthquake. Finally, he felt a gentle breeze and he was told: *God is passing by!* (12). Thus we see that God speaks in the intimacy of prayer. Conversation with the Lord is personified as being strong like the hurricane and earthquake and yet before the injustices and the sins of the people dialogue with God is soft and tender: we see all of this occur when the prophets have to announce terrible things to the people who do not want to change their ways.

In the midst of these two Lents we see the protagonist of the Christian Lent. Christ, our Lord, is telling us that all these theophanies that are manifested in the clouds and the voice of the Father and in the splendor of Mount Sinai: all of this is occurring here. Now, however, there are no longer mysterious sounds of the natural elements but the voice of the Lord himself is heard. Christ is the glory of God present on earth, the humble and simple child of the virgin, but he brings in his humanity the hidden divinity. At the time of the transfiguration, Christ, our Lord, is presented as being in the clouds and in union with God, revealing all the secrets that were hidden so that the glory of God might be revealed. Thus a voice is heard from heaven, but it is the voice of One who has entered history: *This is my chosen Son; listen to him* (13): a great revelation. Blessed are those Christians who do not wait for Christ, like the Israelites, but rather see him present in their history!

Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah in sorrowful words about the passion. Saint Luke presents Jesus speaking about his exodus, his departure from the world (14): a painful departure that involves the cross, a humiliating departure: but he will be raised up in the glory of Easter that will have no end. This is a sign to all people of God's love: he suffered the pain of childbirth because new generations, new people are coming to life. My sisters and brothers, let us endeavor to make Christ a part our popular process; let us endeavor to make certain that Christ is not far removed from our history. What is most important for us at this time in our history is to understand that Christ is the glory of God, the power of God and the scandal and the suffering of the cross should not make us flee from Christ or make us attempt to eliminate suffering but rather we must embrace both suffering and Christ.*

In the transfigured Christ, God offers all people a plan of integral liberation

This is the hour of political programs for El Salvador but they are political plans that are worthless unless they attempt to reflect God's plan. The pastor's mission, the Church's mission is

not to enter into competition by proposing one more plan. Rather, with the autonomy and freedom of God's children offered by the gospel, our mission is to indicate what may be good in each plan in order to encourage such plans, and what may be bad in any program the Church must seek ways to have those elements removed.*

We are presented with God's plan that is made actual in Christ present on the holy mountain, transfigured as the model person and in the voice from heaven bestows dignity on the God-man: *This is my chosen Son; listen to him* (15). The plan of God has to prevail over all human plans if these plans want to be truly human plans and not anti-human plans.* The Church always has before her eyes the human person. This is the star that guides the Church's journey, a journey that is often misunderstood and at times slandered because many people want their temporal plans to prevail. Yet for the Church, the human person is that which is most important ... the human person, a child of God. It is for this reason that we are pained when we find dead bodies, men and women who have been tortured, men and women who suffer. For the Church the goal of all plans has to reflect the plan of God which is focused on the human person. Every man and woman is a child of God and in each person that is killed we find Christ sacrificed and for this reason we also venerate our martyrs*.

In today's readings God reveals to us the two great extremes of his plan: to free from something in order to promote toward something; to promote toward something, to remove injustice, to separate individuals from sin, to redeem the human person from evil. Sin is the cause of all the injustices that occur in our history.* Thus there can be no true liberation until people are freed from sin*. All liberation groups that arise in our land should bear this in mind. The first liberation to be proposed by a political group that truly desires the liberation of people: such a liberation must attempt to free people from sin. As long as one is a slave to sin, of selfishness, violence, cruelty and hatred then such a person is not suited to struggle for people's liberation.*

The Father desired to make his mercy and love present in Christ and therefore he gave Christ human flesh because he wanted this human flesh of Christ to be nailed to the cross as payment of sin and as a sign of what sin means to God. Thus we see that sin is death. Therefore wherever there is death there also is sin. Death is a clear sign that sin reigns. It is frightening to think that in our nation there are so many deaths and that the sacred paths of our country are drenched with human blood. Sin reigns in El Salvador and the liberators of El Salvador have to begin there, have to root out sin from our people. This is the plan of God and the starting point of God's plan. All political plans that do not take sin and injustice into consideration are plans that simply want to maintain social injustice and want to continue the situation in which sin is enthroned and God is forgotten about and cast aside. There can be no liberation and God is not present in those situations where there is sin. Plans that are put forth to maintain scandalous privileges cannot be plans of God.*

This is the negative goal of redemption. Christ came to save us from sin ... We are responsible for the high price that had to be paid ... so much pain and suffering! Let us be mindful of all of this during this season of Lent! The crucified Christ is preaching to me and so before I speak and criticize others I have to look at myself ... I have nailed Christ to the cross because of my sins and as long as I am not redeemed, as long as I do not seek the liberation of my own conscience in order to be a child of God then I am in need of liberation.

Thus the second, positive and wonderful goal of the God's plan is that women and men who are freed from sin are then raised up to the dignity of the children of God: *This is my son! This is my daughter!* (16). There is nothing more beautiful than this and our conscience experiences this beauty and knows when we are not in God's grace especially when we have sinned in a way that

has caused repugnance or bitterness and made us feel that we have acted in an abominable way. My sisters and brothers, forgive my directness but who among us has not felt the bitterness of sin? Hopefully all of us can also say that we have experienced the joy of redemption because true promotion or development involves us in being able to experience ourselves as children of God, people who have been forgiven by God, heirs of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus and an eternal race.

Jesus, on the heights of Tabor, is a wonderful image of liberation. This is how God desires to find people: freed from sin and death and hell, living the gift of his eternal life, immortal, and glorious. This is our destiny and so as we talk about heaven we are not speaking of some form of alienation but talk in this way in order to motivate people to work with more energy and joy and to accept their great responsibility toward the world. No one works on this earth and on behalf of the political liberation of people with more enthusiasm than those who hope that the liberating struggles of history become incorporated into the great liberation of Christ. We must come to the understanding (as the Council states) that everything that we sow in this world, for example, justice and peace, and calling people to use common sense, all of this we will be transfigured in the beauty of our eternal reward.

Christ is the model of the liberating plan of God. I do not want to abuse your time but here there is a beautiful passage in the document of Puebla in which, following the outline that Pope John Paul II used when he began the meeting of bishops in Puebla, the three great theologies of Latin American are brought together: the theology about Christ, the theology about the Church and the theology about the human person.

I recommend that you read the pages that refer to the theology about the human person and I recommend this especially to those of you are who concerned about the social and political order. Do not just read these pages but study them because one cannot be a good politician or a good sociologist or a good strategist if one is not mindful of the human person. The Church in Latin American has much to say about humanity. The Church looks at the sad picture portrayed by the Puebla conference (17): faces of landless peasants mistreated and killed by the forces of power, faces of laborers arbitrarily dismissed and without a living wage for their families, faces of the elderly, faces of outcasts, faces of slum dwellers, faces of poor children who from infancy begin to feel the cruel sting of social injustice.* For them, it seems, there is no future --- no school, no high school, no university. By what right have we catalogued persons as first-class persons or second-class persons? In the theology of the human person there is only one class: children of God.*

In today's second reading Saint Paul speaks to us about Christ in whom God offers us the plan of true liberation. He places in opposition the followers of Christ and the enemies of the cross of Christ (18) who only seek worldly benefits, who only aspire to worldly things. Their god is in their stomach and their glory is their shame (19). These harsh words that Saint Paul uses in order to declassify those plans of history that only seek temporal goods and then present the great plan of God who desires to incarnate in the plans of the earth his great divine plan. God is telling us that from the perspective of the resurrection Christians are inhabitants of eternity and thus they journey on this planet and work on this earth because they have to give an accounting to God but their definitive land is where Christ lives forever, where we will be happy with him, the great liberator of freed people. The people who are freed will be those who have made their own that which Saint Paul calls *the power that enables them to use the energy that possess and that enables them to submit everything to God* (20).

My sisters and brothers, we are not weak when we speak as Christians about our faith in Christ. No one has the power of a Christian who has faith in Christ who lives and is the power of God. What leader of humanity is able to tell his/her followers that he/she lives forever? What victorious person in the world can point out to all the world the great victory of his/her death and resurrection? These are not false considerations but the fundamental reality of our Christian faith. Christ has risen and death no longer has dominion over him. The destiny of the risen Lord is to subject all of this to his kingdom so that one day he is able to hand over to God the universal kingdom, the kingdom of women and men, the kingdom of history where even his enemies appear to be chained beneath the power of Christ who has overcome death forever.

Jesus has said that this is our faith that overcomes the world (21) and for this reason the plan of God can rely on the greatest power. God's plan is not an unpopular plan but a plan that receives the applause and the love of all the followers of the gospel. The Council states that the cloud of witnesses and all that was good and holy has not been separated from our history. Indeed, let us not think that our dead have gone away from us. Their heaven, their eternal reward makes them perfect in love. They keep on loving the same causes for which they died. Thus, in El Salvador the power of liberation involves not only those who remain alive, but also all of those whom others have assassinated and who are now more present than ever before in the midst of the people's movement.*

Thus we are truly interested in the liberators of history, the liberators of the history of our people and all the people of America and the world. I have not forgotten that people in Costa Rica are listening to me through the short wave transmission of Radio Noticias del Continente and that my voice is being heard in various countries of the continent and that the silence of YSAX has created this miracle that has enabled my voice to be heard beyond the frontiers of my country*. Sisters and brothers of the Continent receive the applause of the Church that is filled here in San Salvador because this is the greeting that we send to you. I say to all of you that our Christian faith, our faith in Christ, gives true value to all the liberating processes of our Latin American countries*. I rejoice that the intransigency of those who have desired to silence the voice of YSAX have opened wider horizons to this voice of the smallest church in the smallest country of the Continent and from here we are able to speak these words of liberation.*

The transfigured Christ is the anticipated presence of a definitive liberation

For you and for us who are reflecting here, my third point is: the transfigured Christ, the anticipated presence of a true liberation. I have hinted at this but I want to focus on today's gospel. Christ is transfigured a few days before he suffers on Calvary and therefore the event of the transfiguration points out the objective of suffering which he invites the Apostles and all Christians to embrace.

The theology of the transfiguration is telling us that the path of redemption must first pass through the cross and Calvary but beyond history lies the goal of Christians. This does not mean that we become alienated from history but rather that we give a more profound meaning, a definitive meaning to history. From the time that Christ rose from the dead the torch of eternity remained hidden in the history of time. From the time that Christ rose in history people have retold this story to encourage people and make people aware of the fact that Christ lives and those who work with him will live forever. From the time that Christ rose and was transfigured for all people in history, Christ is saying to all his followers: *whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live* (22). This same Christ had encouraged Saint Paul when he wrote the letter which we read today ... a letter in which he told the Christians community: *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we*

also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all thing into subjection to himself (23).

My dear brothers and sisters, I believe --- and I am happy to say this during the Lenten season -- - that we as Christian are called to offer to the history of the Latin American Continent the new people that the bishops referred to in Medellin when they stated: *We will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new women and men (24).* The new women and men, the renewed women and men are those who with faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ embrace as their own the great theology of the transfiguration. They are not afraid of suffering and they accept the cross but not with an attitude of conformity but rather with the attitude of Mary who, from her poverty and suffering, was able to say: *He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good thing but the rich he has sent away empty (25).**

For this reason in the prayer that we raised up to God at the beginning of this celebration we asked our Lord to purify our sight so that one day we might be filled with joy as we contemplate his glory. My sisters and brothers, let us not lose sight of the transcendence of the Christian message no matter how great our concerns or our responsibilities in the struggles of people. Let us not be content with immanent energy but let us also realize the need for transcendence. I would like to see many politicians and young people and women and men organizing themselves but I would like to see this being done with a profound Christian meaning. May these same people bring this witness of transcendence to the process of our people because more than ever before our people need this Christian witness.

For this reason those involved in the liberating process of our Salvadoran nation can be assured that the Church will not abandon them but will continue to accompany people in this process. The Church will do this with the authentic voice of the gospel, the voice of transcendence and the voice of Jesus. The Church will continue to demand of all liberators that if they want to be strong and effective then they must place their trust in the great liberator Jesus Christ, and must not separate themselves from him for any reason. Be very careful of robbing the people of those Christian sentiments that make our people so noble and vigorous.*

Life of the Church

These reflections on the transfigured Christ and the season of Lent are the realities that we attempt to incarnate in our Church as an Archdiocese. For this reason I want to tell those who are not accustomed to listen to our homilies that here we enter into a chronicle of the events of the past week. We do this to show how we are working together as Church. We do not do this in some sense of vanity but rather to share with all those who believe in the Lord and who form this Church the ideals in which we hope to grow each day so that we might become the true Church of Jesus Christ.*

Today I want to call everyone to live a spirit of generosity especially as we begin this week of voluntary sacrifice whose concepts niña¹ Refugio will explain after the homily.

With the joy of a pastor I want to tell you that this past week I made my retreat. I shared this time of retreat with a group of priests from the vicariate of Chalatenango and this time of spiritual and pastoral reflection has strengthened me. Yesterday when a journalist asked me where I found inspiration for my work and my preaching, I told him: *Your question is very timely, just now I have come from my retreat. If it were not for this prayer and reflection with which I try to stay united*

with God, I would be no more than what Saint Paul calls clanging metal.(26)* Therefore I invite everyone, priests, religious, Sisters and all lay people to not allow this time of Lent to pass without reflecting profoundly on your spiritual life.

I also want to express my profound gratitude for the many, many expressions of solidarity that we have received since our radio station was destroyed. I have already expressed my gratitude to Radio Noticias del Continente who are transmitting our celebration today from Costa Rica.* I am also grateful for the spontaneous manner in which their representative here in El Salvador came forward to lend his assistance while many of our radio stations in El Salvador allowed themselves to be overcome with fear*. I understand and do not fault you because there is great risk in serving the truth especially in our situation where lies receive a greater recompense.* I place a high value on the solidarity of the stations in Venezuela and Colombia that, according to the news I have received, are also transmitting our homilies. The diffusion of our homily through the cassettes that are being recorded here in the church is another beautiful sign of solidarity.* Last Sunday someone counted almost fifty tape recorders that had been placed near the speakers of the basilica.

I also want to tell you that in *Orientación*, our Catholic weekly newspaper, you can find the complete text of the homilies that are not able to be transmitted by radio YSAX. I also want to thank, in a special way, the technicians from UCA (University of Central America) as well as the technicians from ANTEL (the national telephone company) who this morning offered their assistance in restoring our radio station and making our station even more powerful than before*. Economic assistance, small and large, has arrived from various sectors. We received a large donation from a political group that gave us 5,000.00 colones. I told these gentlemen: *The Church does not sell herself to anyone* and so we accept this donation without any conditions or commitment.* Those who gave me this money said: *We do not pretend to buy you*: with this offering we simply want to express our admiration for the Church because we consider that voice indispensable in the present situation of our country.**

Many letters written in the simple language of the *campesinos* have filled me with great emotion because of the experience of the great good that our radio station is doing and the evil that has been done by the enemies of the Church who have attempted to silence the voice of the Church. Hopefully this repressive action will not be repeated. Lent is a time of conversion and we hope that those individuals will realize that if they are not in accord with something then reasons are combated with reasons*. Brute force should never be used to silence the voice of truth because such force can be, in a physical sense, most weak. Remember the giant Goliath who laughed at the small young man, David who went out to meet him with a slingshot. David said to him: *You laugh because you trust in your great weapons but I come against you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have insulted* (27). In the name of the Lord David took a stone and hurled it with his slingshot and struck the Philistine in the forehead. The great Goliath was conquered by David. These are the acts of God*. The truth may appear to be physically weak, like David, but no matter how great or how well armed the lie might appear, it is nothing more than Goliath who will fall beneath the stone of the truth.*

For those who were unable to experience the event that we celebrated yesterday in the Basilica I want to tell you about the ordination of Father Jaime Paredes who is concelebrating with me this morning. There were elements of yesterday's celebration that deeply moved me and that, I believe, moved everyone who was present. For example, the warm embrace of Jaime's two fathers, the presence of niña Nacha: Nacha is very ill in the Hospital Divina Providencia and had been Father Jaime's nanny. What great joy when she was able to kiss the consecrated hands of Father Jaime*. I was also deeply moved by the tears that I saw coming down from the eyes of one of the young

seminarians: thanks to God we have five seminaries and a house where late vocations are preparing themselves and perhaps have a greater desire than anyone else to become priests. When the seminarians saw Jaime prostrated here before the bishop they trembled and wept, perhaps dreaming of the day when, in a short period of time, they would also prostrate themselves to receive the desired gift of priesthood*

But above all else, and I say this as a testimony of our joy as Church, I was moved by the unity of the priests. Many priests participated in this celebration and we have also seen vocations flourishing in our midst. Five seminaries! Yesterday all these young men were present: though in different stages of formation they all aspire to the priesthood. They are the hope of people of whom Jesus spoke: *The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest* (28). I believe that your prayers are responsible for this miracle: the multiplication of vocations to the point that we have so many that there is not enough room in our seminaries for them. But again I speak to those who were unable to enter our seminary: cultivate your Christian and religious sentiments in your homes and schools because even though you are not in the seminary, yet as you participate in your parish Christian community you are able to prepare yourselves and one day soon you will be ready to receive the gift of priestly ordination after fulfilling some minor requisites. My sisters and brothers, God is blessing us. Someone from Spain viewed our situation and said: *You have to send vocations to Europe because there we lack priests and here you have so many young men desiring to become priests.**

Yesterday, a group of priests, Sisters, and laity left for Brazil. They have been invited to participate in a meeting of the Christian base communities and as you know these communities are flourishing in Brazil. These representatives from El Salvador will undoubtedly have a great experience and receive some helpful lessons which will enable them, upon their return, to continue to plant these seeds of Christianity in our midst.

Tonight at 7:00pm we will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in the parish in the village of Lourdes.

Last Sunday I forgot to mention the request of an honorable Christian who asked that we pray for Sister Marie Pierre Dykmans on the first anniversary of her death. This Sister worked here for a long time in the Colegio Sagrado Corazón.

I also forgot to tell you that the Sisters of Bethany have established a residence for employees, students and professionals as a way of providing spiritual and moral support. This house is called *Ave Maria* and is located on the eastern side of the UCA. If any young woman needs the Church's moral support you can find assistance at the house of the Sisters of Bethany.

In this ecclesial perspective of our Sunday reflection I also want to focus on the teaching of the Pope. My sisters and brothers, the greatest glory of a pastor is to live in communion with the Pope. For me, this communion with the Pope, is the secret of the truth and give efficacy to my preaching. When I find in his teaching ideas and gestures that appear to be needed by our Church, I am filled with joy. For example, at the end of February, the Pope celebrated Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica for Professor Vittorio Basselet who was assassinated in Rome. In his homily he spoke about the sacrifice of the professor being united with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the sacrifice of the early Christian martyrs.² I believe that the words of the Pope authorize us to call the priests and catechists who died for the Christian faith true martyrs of the faith, even though we do this in a popular sense and not in some official manner.*

At the same time the Pope asked a question that I want to pose here: Is not the system that decides the death of innocent persons giving truth to those persons who will ultimately overcome this system and conquer the hearts and minds of people so that the true progress of the human person can be achieved? In other words, violence is the most eloquent gesture which proclaims that those who kill have no reason to do so or, to say the least, their reasons are very weak. Violence does not give honor to any movement.

The Pope also said that the root of the present evils of the world lie within the human person and therefore the solution must begin with the heart. This is precisely what we are preaching during this season of Lent. The Pope, in the presence of the people of Rome, stated: *Humanity is confronting the threat of evil in a way that has never before been experienced.*³ We might be surprised by the fact that we live at a time when good is confronted by evil, but rather than being surprised our response should be that of uniting ourselves more closely to that which is good rather than entering into solidarity with that which is evil.

Another opportune message for us was proclaimed by the Pope when he recommended that we offer pastoral care and guidance to married couples and Christian families. With a very understanding spirit the Pope referred to those persons who have separated from their spouses. The Pope also said: *those homes that have experienced separation and people who have been divorced and remarried in civil services which don't involve sacramental life, should be assisted in their spiritual needs.*⁴ Naturally the Pope is not speaking about blessing adultery but he is calling us to be understanding because pastoral experience has taught us much about the suffering of those homes where people were not faithful to their commitment. They should know that they can rely on God's mercy and that the Church will continue to walk with them so that they might be converted and live.

It is also interesting to hear the news that this October in Rome there will be a dialogue between Christian philosophers and Marxists. For those who are so easily startled by Marxism*, not out of Christian motives but because of selfish interests for we have never seen such anti-communist zeal except when selfish interests are endangered, this gathering is an example that there can be a dialogue in which the principles of faith are not betrayed but rather in such a dialogue the principles of Marxism and the principles of Christianity can be better understood. Many times when people are startled by the great evils of communism these same people have no desire to reflect on the great evils of capitalism which is demanding such great sacrifices from our people.*

Events of the week

From the perspective of our Church we attempt to live these great reflections and we experience the responsibility to enlighten our situation and the life of our nation. Those who are far from our country and are not aware of the situation of El Salvador, I ask you not to be scandalized before learning about our reality. I have received letters from Spain that have criticized me and called me a great communist but I continually invite people to learn about our reality and then people can see that I am simply a Christian who attempts to defend the gospel from ideologies that could make it unfavorable and displeasing to our people.*

The first part of this commentary on the week is concerned with violence. We are alarmed by the news that arrives at the Chancery about the growing repression that the security forces have unleashed against those *campesinos* who are organized. The repression is not only affecting those people who are organized but is having effects on the rural popular in general. Popular organizations are being destroyed and we know why this is occurring. People who are unorganized

are a mass and can be toyed with, but people who are organized and defend their values and justice are people who must be respected. In order to destroy these organizations very cruel, armed military operations are being utilized and many *campesinos* are being unscrupulously assassinated. Here in the capital, though to a lesser degree, the effects of this accelerated repressive wave are being felt. This repression is complimented by the action of paramilitary organizations of the extreme right who, it would seem, act under the protection of the security forces*. I have here a very confidential letter with regard to this matter but I will preserve the confidentiality of the judgments made in this letter because they could compromise the individual who wrote this letter.

I also have a report from Legal Aid that tells me that this week of violence has increased in intensity in the rural areas. The situation is becoming more serious. Truly horrible things have occurred in the rural areas. On February 26th, military operations were undertaken in Rosario, Ojo de Agua, el Terrero, and Dulce Nombre de Maria. As a result, nine ranches were burned, homes were vandalized and pillaged, five *campesinos* were killed and what is most sad about all of this is that two small children were among the five persons who were assassinated. These military operations instill terror in people and during this week these operation have also occurred in other districts: Aguilares, Suchitoto, Sonsonate, Chalatenango, Sensuntepeque, and villages in La Unión. When I entered the Church this morning I was given a letter from the people in La Unión who lament the death of a beloved catechist, Rubén Benítez. These military operations are not only inhuman but also unconstitutional because they have no legal foundation and are undertaken as the result of rumors and supposed actions. The security forces occupy these areas for three or more days and create military zones or occupied zones. The fundamental rights of the Salvadoran *campesinos* are suppressed in the same way that occurs during a state of siege. What right do the armed forces have then to complain about the occupation of other lands by other forces?

I want to denounce the threats made by the National Guard and ORDEN (Democratic Nationalist Organization) to the *campesinos* in the villages of Zapote and Suchitoto. They people have been told that if they do not leave this area they will be cruelly repressed. A great exodus has occurred in this area and yet this is inconceivable. There is no reason for the *campesinos* to have to leave their humble homes. I formally ask the government to respect the sacred rights of these *campesinos*: their right to life and home.*

Between January and February, some six hundred people have lost their life for political reasons. The attack against the *campesinos* is disproportionate. But other sectors of the people are also suffering. There are fourteen people captured and, later, disappeared for political reasons during these two months. These have all been registered and nobody is making it up, as was suggested on television.

During this past week forty-five people from popular organizations have been assassinated for political reasons. Among those assassinated are three more professors. Thirteen professors have been assassinated during the past two months: one in Atiquizaya, one in Morazán, one in Chalatenango. At least thirteen *campesinos* have been assassinated in the area of Aguilares and Suchitoto, eight in the area of Chalatenango, and fifteen in Sonsonate.

The *campesinos*, Encarnación López López and José Cecilio Hernández Alfaro and a student, Oscar Ernesto Chacón Melgar were arrested. None of these individuals have been brought before the courts. Legal Aid intervened in the case of Juan Chacón⁵ at his mother's request. I have been informed that he and two members of Las Ligas Populares were set free yesterday.*

We were informed that yesterday at noon, a university student, Oscar Edmundo Bonilla was arrested. I hope that he has been set free and if not, than I ask that he and the others be brought before the courts. If there is not reason for their detention then they should be set free.

I am concerned about so much violence in our country but my, sisters and brothers, I am even more concerned that the reaction and condemnation and protest from people in general has notably decreased. This reality has allowed the repression to continue with greater boldness and freedom. Perhaps more than before the denunciations of affected organizations who condemn these actions are published but the elevated number of victims is given less attention in public opinion and provoke less of a reaction in calling for guarantees of human rights.

As I attempt to analyze the causes of this phenomenon it seems to me that, in great part, this is due to the fact that people are more afraid to speak and act and what is even worse is that there is a greater skepticism concerning the efficacy of denunciations and protest and dialogue. More and more sectors of society no longer believe in the efficacy of laws or the justice of the state. The security forces are demonstrating that the only thing they believe in is the power of their weapons. The silence of the government Junta and the Judicial branch of the government in light of such violence gives the impression that they have no control over the security forces and their silence can even be a symbol of their complicity in these systematic violations. This silence is very dangerous because it contributes to people believing that they have a right to seek vengeance which is very evil but can be explained if there is no firm reaction by those concerned with implementing justice in the country.*

Another chapter that I want to speak about refers to land reform. It is rumored that this week land reform and other social-economic reforms are to be decreed. All of these, if they are not accompanied with a firm decision to end the repression, will be interpreted as way of distracting international and national attention and covering up the blood that is being shed in our country.*

When I insist on the fact that the repression is greater and that the reaction to this violence is decreasing I want people to understand me, my sisters and brothers, I am not inciting people to violence. Those who have interpreted my words that way simply slander me. I am greatly concerned about asking those responsible for this repressive wave to put an end to the use of violence in order to continue to maintain people in an oppressed state. I also want to encourage people not to lose their moral sensitivity and critical conscience. I say these things but I also insist that it is impossible for an true government --- a government that also calls itself revolutionary --- to promote plans and processes of reform and social change and at the same time maintain a climate of repression among the people.

The foundation of our structural changes is land reform. It is not I, the pastor of the Church, who is an expert and therefore who should point out the best formula for this reform to be accomplished. But as pastor I want to state these four conditions:

First, this change is urgent and if this change is not accomplished soon then the opposition, the right, is being given time to reinforce their position and the credibility of the government among the people becomes lost*.

Second, the reform must be such that it is supported by the people. This plan should not be one that is imposed from above or from outside. Millions of dollars for a reform that is desired by the people is not enough:* public opinion and the consensus of the majority of people is more valuable than any monetary assistance in this matter. Without the consensus of the people there is nothing.*

Third, a condition for this reform should be the following: the reform should be just and provide for the establishment of justice. There is the danger of bribes and there is the added danger that the armed forces will support the oligarchy rather than the people*. If we cannot rely on the armed forces supporting the people in the matter of land reform then such a reform will be ineffective. Here also property should also be distributed according to its proper social function.

And the fourth condition which is very important for the Church: when referring to the transformation of the country there must be respect for the Christian sentiments of the people. The social doctrine of the Catholic Church, to which the majority of our people belong, should be listened to.*

The third chapter of my commentary is the programmatic platform of the Democratic Revolutionary Government.⁶ The series of proposals that has been made known this week has been called the programmatic platform of the Democratic Revolutionary Government. The Coordinator of the Popular Organizations has taken a further step in the process of unification by proposing to the democratic sectors and the people a general plan, a platform for a government. I hope that the different political groups and organizations will react responsibly to this invitation, declaring their viewpoints and working together to create a popular majority alliance that will be the legitimate expression of the people's will*.

I want to remind people that this call to enter into solidarity with the true common good of the people is an invitation to rise above the criteria of any one group and was actually stated by me when I spoke about the statement that was pronounced on October 15th.⁷ At that time certain groups were pressured to say NO to this statement and offered no constructive criticism. I said the same thing when the plan of land reform was put forward by the Minister of Agriculture⁸ who has since resigned. I stated: land reform should not be a gift that the government offers to people but rather should be a process which finds support in the government. If the government wants to win the support of the people then it must unite itself to the process of the people and not disturb or upset this process.*

These same criteria guide me today as I speak about the new platform of the popular organizations. Now as then, I do not say they should join this process in an uncritical way but should give their critical, constructive contribution to make viable a democratic solution for the country. It is a declaration that we can understand one another and that the people can find their way and should not wait for some solution to be imposed by force. It is not for the Church to identify herself with any program. The Church does not have the technical competence to offer opinions from the perspective of the social sciences how in practice to make viable this program. Its mission is to encourage those processes that tend toward unity and that seek greater justice and respect the most fundamental human rights. The Church also claims, at this moment in the process, the power to intervene from the standpoint of its own competence as defender of Christian and human values. On this level the Church offers her concept of the human person and human rights and the promotion of the human persons. I remember when Pope Paul VI spoke at the United Nations and defined the Church as unarmed, with no political or diplomatic power but nevertheless a great expert in humanity⁹. Yes, this is the Church, *an expert in humanity**. For this reason the people can be sure of relying on this expert in humanity at the time in which they plan their own destiny. The Church zealously rejects any vision that distorts the truth concerning the human person. As I have said, the document of Puebla outlines this marvelous doctrine and it would good for people to study this, indeed it would be most opportune to do so at this time.

Another point in my commentary is that the Church calls upon people to be mindful of the fact that they are the architects of their own destiny. The Church has as her mission the responsibility to denounce with the same freedom popular groups that abuse these human rights. Therefore my denunciation this morning of the repression of the military and para-military groups would not be complete unless I spoke about this repression that we said offends not only people who are not organized but also the people who are organized and who on certain occasion are culpable of certain imprudent actions. There are complaints from the *campesinos* that individuals who belong to organized groups have provoked military operations and while these individuals have the means to defend themselves those who are poor and not organized suffer the consequences of these confrontations. As I speak about the maturing process of these groups I beg you to not expose to unnecessary danger the very people whom you ought to be helping. As I have stated: the terror that the *campesinos* experience is provoked at times by the popular organizations.

For example, the Church denounces the occupation of her worship places especially when our pastors who are ministering on behalf of the people are slandered by organized groups who have taken over the parish church. The Church also denounces the situation in which innocent people are falsely pointed out as members of one or another repressive group. I have a letter from a postman in San Vicente who says that people have accused him and that he has heard on the radio that he belongs to the repressive forces of the people. He states that he is innocent: *I live with my wife, my mother and my children in the village of Calderas in Apastepeque and I am working in the Post Office of San Vicente. I have no connection with these people with whom I am supposed to be involved.* It is very serious when individuals are pointed out in this way because this can result in fatal consequences. I also believe that the new occupation of the Cathedral by the BRP (Popular Revolutionary Bloc) during this time of Lent is an abuse of the sentiments of the Christian people. I am not in accord with this and I thought that this situation had been resolved. Therefore, I ask the leadership of this group to use your authority and put some discipline into your organization. These actions cause you to lose prestige.

I find the confidential information that I have gathered together this past week to be most scandalous. Someone was concerned about inquiring about the price of advertisement in the media and took the initiative to find out the amount of money that the BRP had spent for their television advertising campaign. Once or twice during the week their campaign appears on television at the cost of 100.00 colones a minute and their programs last for thirty minutes. This cost must be added to the price of radio advertising and taking out whole page ads in all the newspapers. The price of advertising this past week amounted to 90,000.00 colones. One could easily ask: could not something more beneficial for people be done with this money? So many people who are without housing, women who work in the market, so many people with so many necessities. The most sarcastic point is that this large amount of money is being paid to the media of the oligarchy*. I believe that in this matter our Church is providing an example because she relies on her own voice and does not want to collaborate with those instruments that so often place themselves at the service of lies and injustice. It would be good for the popular organizations to reflect on this matter and be more mature in their criteria in this regard.

Here I also want to call upon those who have abducted Mr. Dunn and others¹⁰: enough time has passed and these persons should be given their freedom.

At the beginning I spoke about a gesture of solidarity to the workers of ANTEL that we have offered them the opportunity to work in the organization of radio station. I want to tell them that even though the Minister of Labor has called both sides of their conflict to enter into dialogue, this conversation has not yet begun because management has refused to sit down at the table and discuss

this matter. The employees of ANTEL have petitioned for the following: rehiring of the four union leaders who were unjustly fired, recognition of the legitimate right to freely organize, fulfillment of the negotiated work contract, the immediate removal of the military blockade from the workplace, guarantee that no reprisals will be taken against those who have participated in this movement. I believe that these demands are just and it would be good for the members of management of the phone company to enter into this dialogue.*

I want to express my gratitude for an initiative that Christian communities and other grassroots organizations, the Ecumenical Committee, the Humanitarian Aid Committee, and Popular Committees have undertaken. They are promoting a press meeting in order to defend the doctrine of our diocese and its pastor whose life has been threatened. I am grateful for this gesture of support and solidarity.*

Finally, in the name of his mother I want to offer a prayer for David Augustín Cristales Elías who disappeared on March 7, 1977. Nothing more has been heard about him. Is he alive or dead? This is the question that so many mothers are asking and like the mother of David, they have decided to invite people to participate in Masses for the eternal rest of their loved ones.

My sisters and brothers, let us pray for the difficult situation that our country confronts and realize that the person of the transfigured Christ, who is presented to us during this season of Lent, is not far from us but is pointing out the path that we ought to follow. The path for the transformation of our people is not some far off distant path but is a path that the Word of God points out to us today: the path of the cross, the path of sacrifice, and blood and sorrow. But as we walk this path our sight is also focused on the glory of Christ who is the chosen Son of the Father, the One chosen to save the world. Let us listen to him!*

¹ In El Salvador *niña* is a respectful greeting equivalent to Miss or Mrs.

² See Homily of John Paul II in the Mass for Vittorio Bachelet (23 February 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 16 March 1980.

³ Sunday Allocation of John Paul II (24 February 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 2 March 1980.

⁴ Discourse of John Paul II in closing the preparation for the Fifth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Christian family (23 February 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 9 March 1980.

⁵ Secretary General of the Bloque Popular Revolucionario.

⁶ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 28 February 1980.

⁷ Proclama de la Fuerza Armada de El Salvador in the coup d'état of 15 October 1979.

⁸ Enrique Álvarez Córdova.

⁹ See *Message to Humanity*, Discourse of Paul V before the Assembly of the United Nations (4 October 1965), 1 [11].

¹⁰ Jaime Hill Argüello, kidnapped on 31 October 1979; and Adolfo McEntee, kidnapped on 3 December 1979.