

RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST, TRUE LIBERATION

Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 16, 1980

Joshua 5:9a, 10-11
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

My dear sisters and brothers.

Lent is a spiritual journey towards the Easter resurrection. Let us remember that we are preparing to celebrate the central mystery of our faith: the Paschal mystery, the mystery of our redemption. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not simply an historical event of the past but is also an event that touches our present life. Christ is going to die and rise. He continues to live and die in this dynamic movement that involves the mystery of redemption that all people need. For this reason, each year Lent is like the springtime of the Church and Easter ought to mean the flowering of virtue and holiness in Christian people.

The elements that we are recommended to inculcate during this season are: baptism and penance. Thanks to God, we are all members of a baptized people and even though we are not going to be baptized we are preparing to renew the lofty dignity of our baptism that configures us to the death and resurrection of Christ. We are going to renew our baptismal commitment on Holy Saturday as we stand beside the empty tomb. Indeed, through baptism we have died with Christ and we want to live the resurrection with Christ and life forever with Christ.

The other element is that of reconciliation or penance. This element is very important because we have not always used our dignity and freedom in a good way but instead have preferred evil things over the goods that God has given us through his redemption. Lent is a time to reflect on the true goods that we must turn to once again. As we reflect on God, the Father of the prodigal son (we have just heard this gospel proclaimed), we see God's love as he waits and waits for the return of his children. When God, who desires to save us, finds repentant individuals, God receives us with a warm embrace that could be called the embrace of reconciliation. This is the theme of today's readings and we call out to all people to be reconciled.

My sisters and brothers, I think that it is providential that the message of Lent is a call to conversion, especially in its call to reconciliation in an environment where this is more necessary than ever before. There is much violence, much hatred and much selfishness. People believe that they possess the truth and fault others whom they see as evil. We are polarized. This word continues to resound as a reality among us and yet we do not recognize that we, each one of us, are polarized, that is, we have placed ourselves at one end of the pole, are intransigent in our thinking, incapable of reconciliation, hating one another unto death. This is not the environment that God desires and is not the environment that allows reconciliation and the love of God to become a reality. My sisters and brothers, as Pastor I invite you to listen to the hoarse and imperfect echo of my words. Do not focus on the instrument but focus on the One who bids me to tell you of God's infinite love. Be converted! Be reconciled! Love one another! Become a family of the baptized, a family of God's children!

Those who think that my preaching is political and incites people to violence and who believe that I am the cause of all the evils in our country have forgotten that the Church's word does not invent the evils of the world. Rather it casts a light on them. The light shows what is there, it does not create it. The great evil is already there and God's Word wants to eliminate those evils. It points them out, as it must, so that people might return to the right path.

Today, as we reflect on the scripture readings, we see that the theme of reconciliation comes through and so I am going to entitle my homily as follows: *the reconciliation of all people in Christ, the true plan of liberation*. I ask you to notice that this is the very heart of preaching. When I inform you about our ecclesial and national reality, this is not primary because we enlighten these realities with the heart of our preaching. Therefore, I ask that you pay attention to that which is central to the preaching of the pastor and central to the gospel and our catechesis, central to our Lenten call and to the plan of God with regard to the life of each and every person. The three thoughts that I am going to use to develop this theme are: First, the history of Israel is a plan of reconciliation; Second, the parable of reconciliation; Third, the reconciliation of all people in Christ continues to be the object of the Church that offers to collaborate in the present crisis in El Salvador. The mission of the Church cannot be different because it is the mission that Christ brought to the world, namely, to reconcile all people in himself.

The history of Israel is a plan of reconciliation

First, the history of Israel is a plan of reconciliation. It is necessary to keep in the mind the first readings that we listen to during the Sundays of Lent. They are passages from the Old Testament, from the sacred history that prepared for the redemption that was carried out by God and given to all people. If we want to understand the mystery of redemption we must know the Old Testament: the voice of the prophets, the promises made by God to the patriarchs, the initiatives of God and the great exploits of the People of God. The whole Old Testament could be reduced to this plan: creation, sin, reconciliation.

Creation is an act of God who creates us to be happy, to love, and to be his children. God creates us as free, in his image and likeness, but people did not know how to use their freedom and broke their relationship with God: they sinned. From the moment that Adam left Paradise in order to earn his living through the sweat of his brow and from the time that Eve was told that she would bring forth children through pain, men and women were exiled and without land and so they have to be returned. The return is painful. The whole history is a path of return for humanity who have broken the privileged relationship with God. The whole book of Exodus, their departure from slavery in Egypt and their march toward the Promised Land, is a symbol of a journey, a return, a search for reconciliation. Then in the fullness of time which Saint Paul speaks to us about today: *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ* (1). Blessed are those who find Christ because they have achieved the goal of their aspirations: reconciliation. One cannot be reconciled to God without Christ in whom were deposited God's love and forgiveness.

The pages of the Old Testament, the foundation of the history of Israel, should be read in the context of creation, sin and reconciliation. We have a history of infidelity and repentance, a history in which God compares himself to the spouse of an unfaithful wife. Yet despite the sins of the people, God is always willing to forgive: the kindness of reconciliation.

As we have seen throughout this Lenten season, the theme of reconciliation has been presented to us through very well known persons. After the sin of Adam and in the history of salvation, a

people begin to take form in the person of the nomad, Abraham. In a seeming impossible situation God gives birth to a people with whom he made a promise which we saw two Sundays ago. God appears in the fire and passes through the sacrificed victims in order to swear to Abraham that the promises that he made will be fulfilled and that he will have a people in whom all other nations will be blessed and from whom will come the redemption that the world awaited. With the patriarchs we see that there was uncertainty and yet they lived and trusted that God would be faithful to his promise to give them land even though they did not know where that land was located. They were not foolish but people of faith: God has promised and so God will fulfill his promise.

The people were enslaved in Egypt and it appeared that the promises had died. But in Egypt, the promise of God takes on new vigor in another famous person: Moses. He will take the people out of captivity and lead them for forty years through the desert where they experience the marvelous deeds of God. This Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent, the liturgy presents us with the scene where the people enter the Promised Land. God is fulfilling his promises. This Sunday we celebrate with the Israelites: God delayed but he arrived. So many centuries passed and here they were. After crossing the River Jordan they arrived in Gilgal and raised up a stone monument and celebrated the first Passover in the Promised Land. They had to be purified and so the bloody rite of circumcision was performed. Thus what God had asked of Abraham was fulfilled, namely, that men be circumcised. Now they are ready to celebrate the first Passover. This Passover will be eaten with the fruits of their land and there is no longer any need for the miraculous bread, manna. People were able to eat from the land that God had given them.

Here, my brothers and sisters, there is a wonderful relationship. At this time, when land in El Salvador is the object of conflict, let us not forget that the land is closely tied to God's blessings and promises. Israel now has its own land. *I will give you all this land*, God tells the patriarchs, and after the captivity, led forth by Moses and Joshua, here was the land and so they celebrated a grand thanksgiving rite, Israel's first Passover in the Promised Land. This celebration is a call to us to celebrate with equal gratitude and adoration and acknowledgement the reality that God has saved us and also brought us out of bondage. The God in whom we trust for our liberation is the God of Israel, the God who today receives the celebration of the first Passover.

There is a theological meaning in the bond between reconciliation and the land. I want to emphasize this idea because it seems to me very appropriate. Not to have land is a consequence of sin. Adam leaves Paradise as a man without land. It is the effect of sin. Now, with God's forgiveness, Israel returned to the land. They ate ears of grain from their own land, the fruits of their land. God gave his blessing in the sign of the land.

The land contains much that is of God. That is why it groans when the unjust monopolize it and leave no land for others. Land reform is a theological necessity. A country's land cannot stay in the hands of a few people. It must be given to all and all must share in God's blessings on the land. Each country has its own promised land in the territory that geography has allotted them. We must always bear in mind and never forget this theological reality: the land is a sign of justice and reconciliation. There will be no true reconciliation between our people and God as long as there is no just distribution, as long as the goods of the earth in El Salvador do not benefit and bring happiness to all Salvadorans.

We need to recognize that the land is sacred and contains something of God. Chapter two of the book of Hosea contains a precious description of the idea that I am trying to deepen our understanding of. God complains that Israel was unfaithful and this infidelity was manifested in the fact that Israel had forgotten that the land and the fruits of the land had been given to them by God.

He compared the traitorous nation to a spouse who had prostituted herself and walks about with elegance and adornments forgetting that her spouse can take all these things away. The Lord says: *I am your spouse and I have given you the land but you are acting as though I did not exist therefore I am going to take away everything that I have given you. When you feel yourself naked and disordered in your misery, you will realize that I have given you all these things and you shall return. I will receive you with love.* This is the tenderness of God: tireless in forgiving and tireless in love.

God desires that men and women understand that the goods of the earth should be used to draw us closer to him and live as people who have been reconciled with him. This chapter of Hosea appears to be similar to a wonderful chapter in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine when he speaks about the foolishness of sin and his conversion. Saint Augustine says that he was foolish when he sought the beauty that he saw in creatures and forgot that it was God who had given them this beauty. He desired this beauty and saw this beauty as opposed to God and forgot that the God who had given this beauty was the same God that he carried within his being. He lived outside of himself and forgot that he had within himself all that is true and beautiful.¹

What a marvelous description of the sinner. Sinners are people who have gone outside themselves and have not discovered that they carry God within themselves. Thus they prostituted themselves and all creation and forgot that all these things come from God. If they were mindful of the fact that their lands and estates and cattle were gifts that God had given them, they would not use them as instruments of exploitation, they would not use them in a selfish and unjust manner but rather they would use them and celebrate these gifts in a way that is similar to what occurred at Gilgal: they harvested the grain and praised God who had given them the land and the fruits of the land; they shared with their sisters and brothers and celebrated a true Passover feast, a feast of the reconciliation of humankind around the table of the fruits of the earth: reconciliation instead of a quarrel.

The bishops of Brazil have just published a Pastoral Letter. They are more than two hundred bishops and they have given us a beautiful witness of unity and at the same time enlighten the people who have been entrusted to them. The letter is entitled: *The Church and the earth.*² In this letter the bishops analyze the great social injustice that exists in Brazil. They say that the land could be divided into the following categories: land for exploitation and land for work. Land for exploitation is used by people to obtain more money and no importance is given to the human person.³ Land for work is used by people to obtain a living and to provide food for their families⁴. The bishops then analyze this reality in light of the Word of God: God created things for women and men and the land was given to them by God so that all people might be happy.⁵ The bishops then adopt the following pastoral commitments:

First, to review the goods of our Church and their use because as we speak to others we ourselves can be committing social injustice⁶;

Second, to denounce unjust and violent situations that are often provoked by unjust possession of land.⁷

Third, - and very important since it is a pastoral commitment we attempt to live here - to support just initiatives and the organizations of workers.⁸

The bishops state: *Being careful not to impose substitutes on the initiatives of the people, our pastoral action will encourage the conscious and critical participation of workers in labor unions, associations, commissions, and other forms of cooperation so that they might be truly autonomous and free organizations that defend and coordinate the just demands of its members and of its class.*⁹

Like the bishops in Brazil, I support the popular organizations but only in as much as these groups seek just demands and in as much as these demands are true expressions of the will of the people. The Church would be acting in a paternalistic way if we were to tell these groups what they had to do. They are autonomous and they are also the voice of the people. The Church simply tells people: use your critical sense; organize yourselves according to your criteria and know that you are not alone. This position of the Church enables her to say: we are not going to meddle in your initiatives but we cannot cease to denounce your injustices. Thanks to God, this is what we have done. Our desire is to promote these organizations of the people and we do not take sides with any one particular organization. We are not committed to any organization. We maintain our autonomy in order to affirm the just actions of these groups and in order to denounce their violence and unjust actions. For example, we denounce these organizations when they abuse their power or hold up their organization as an idol.

The bishops of Brazil state: *We support the efforts of the people in the rural areas in their attempt to bring about authentic land reform which provides them with the opportunity to obtain access to land which they can cultivate.*¹⁰ My sisters and brothers, the Church is not opposed to but rather supports authentic land reform which will truly benefit our *campesinos*. We have criticized this reform but it is not that we are opposed to it but rather we want this reform to be authentic and effective. We do not want this reform to be contaminated with blood and with the many doubts that are held by people who are suspicious of the government.* But we want to be very clear: the Bible and social doctrine of the Church as well as the very activity of the Church echoes the words of the Brazilian bishops: *We support the efforts of the people in the rural areas in their attempt to bring about authentic land reform which provides them with the opportunity to obtain access to land which they can cultivate.**

The Church also looks kindly on you, my dear workers, and defends your legitimate aspirations. With the words of the bishops of Brazil, the Church commits herself *to defend the legitimate aspirations of urban workers. Many of them are the fruit of the injustice in the rural areas. People have had to abandon their land and now seek to earn their living in the city. The Church is their advocate because the Church cries out on behalf of the worthy existence of the human person, especially when speaking about the right to housing and a just wage.*¹¹

Thus the Church desires to see the promises of the Old Testament become a reality. We want people to be able to possess land, to be able to enjoy the fruit of their land and not to have to eat the manna that comes down from heaven. We want people to be able to work the land with their own hands, to be able to live as free women and men who own their land and are able to eat the fruit of their labor. The God of reconciliation and the whole Old Testament proclaim this reality to us. In other words, we are presented with a plan of integral reconciliation and this is precisely what we want for our country.

The parable of Christian reconciliation

In the second part of my reflection I want to focus on the beautiful passage of the gospel that was proclaimed and that occurs to me should be entitled: the parable of Christian reconciliation. I do not know if there is a more beautiful passage in the gospel. The gospels in themselves are beautiful but when one reads the words that have been proclaimed to us, one is able to exclaim: how beautiful would life be if, despite our sins, we would be mindful of God's plan and become reconciled with him. In this passage we see two sons, the younger son takes his inheritance and

squanders it. But at the same time we see the kindness of the father who is waiting and finally the scene of reconciliation.

When dealing with this parable rather than preach I would prefer that we would sit in silence and remind ourselves that this passage is a summary of our own personal, individual lives. Each one of us, you and I, are able to see in the parable of the prodigal son our own history. When we referred to the Old Testament we said that the teaching contained there could be reduced to the following: God loves us when we are at home with him, but we broke away from this relationship and went off on our own path. We rejoiced in the new found life without God, a life of sin. But God waits, waits for the day when his children will return. When his children have experienced misery and abandonment they will remember that there is no greater love than the love of God and so they will return. This God who could very easily be resentful and turn his back is found running with outstretched arms toward his children, willing to celebrate a feast because his children have returned.

My sisters and brothers, I invite all of you to read this passage in your homes or in a church or in some silent place and reflect on your own life: How many times have we been so foolish as to separate ourselves from God? How many times have we felt that we could find happiness if we moved far away from our parents? We had money and health and friends who seemed to offer us everything (as long as one can be exploited one will always have friends). When our good fortune came to an end, when what we thought was everything (money, power, etc.) no longer existed, when we realized that we were adoring idols, when we woke up to the reality around us, we realized that none of this was God. Money was unable to satisfy us! We were unable to do what we wanted to do with our power. At that moment we were like the prodigal son who wanted to eat the pods that he gave to the swine. He felt that the pigs were happier than he because they were able to eat while he was dying from hunger. (2) What shame to feel that one is worse than swine! So he hides and eats the corn husks and locust beans. Like a shameful pig he feeds on his own misery.

Who has not felt that way after committing sin? Who has not experienced this sense of shame and bitterness and emptiness and abandonment by God and friends?

Then comes the time of reflection: *How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers"* (3). He could never have imagined the kindness of his father. When his father sees him arriving, he does not allow his son to speak, he swallows his own words and embraces him and then prepares a great celebration. The older son, resentful and in need of reconciliation, reproaches his father: *when your son returns (he does not even refer to him as his brother) who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf* (4). His father responds: *My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found* (5).

Here in El Salvador there is a great need to reflect on the parable of the prodigal son. Look at the way in which the left denounces the right! Look at the hatred of the right for the left! And those caught between these two extremes exclaim: *Violence comes from every direction and is equally difficult to bear!* So many people are members of different groups and they are polarized and perhaps members of the same group do not love one another because in reality love cannot exist when there is so much polarization and hatred. We need to tear down the barriers! We need to realize that there is one Father who loves everyone and awaits us all! We need to learn how to pray the *Our Father* and say: *forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone in debt to us* (6)!

This is the reconciliation that Jesus communicates to us in the message of the parable of reconciliation. Jesus, as he taught this parable to his disciples, was a victim of slander because he ate with sinners: *this man welcomes sinners and eats with them* (7). There is nothing more opposed to reconciliation than pride: those who believe they are clean and pure, those who believe they have the right to point to others as the cause of injustice and are unable to look within themselves and see that they also have a role to play in the disorders of the country.

We see that Jesus is the only one who can say that he is spotless and pure and comes in the name of love to save all people. We should not forget the wonderful words that we heard this morning: *For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (8). This is Christianity: we believe in Christ who has not sinned but who took on the form of a sinner and lived in the midst of sinners so that the sins of all might be forgiven. God took into consideration this sacrifice and in Christ the forgiveness of the sins of all people was achieved. I am not able to speak about reconciliation with any other words except by saying that we must be united with Christ. As we heard in today's second reading: *All this is from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation* (9). God is in Christ reconciling all things to himself.

My dear sisters and brothers, Christ is not a thing. Christ is the presence of God's reconciliation. Blessed are those who find Christ because they have encountered the God who forgives. God in Christ dwells near to us. God has given us a guideline: *I was hungry and you gave me to eat* (10). When someone comes to your house to ask for water, it is Christ if you look at this person with faith. In the sick person longing for a visit Jesus tells you: *I was sick and you came to visit me or in prison and you did the same*. How many today are ashamed to testify on behalf of the innocent! What terror has been sown among our people! Friends betray friends when they see them in trouble! If we could see that Christ is the needy one, the tortured victim, the prisoner, the murder victim, if we could see Christ cast aside in each human figure that is so shamefully thrown on the roadsides of our country, then we would pick them up like a gold medal to be kissed lovingly. We would never be ashamed of them.

So many people appear to walk in a trance, especially those who torture and kill and value their investments more than human beings. They do not realize that all the earth's millions are good for nothing, are worthless when compared to a human person. The person is Christ and in the people who are viewed and related to with faith, we see Christ, the Lord.

We find Christ in our churches. My sisters and brothers, this morning Christ is here. In the gospel Jesus tells us: *I am among you as the one who serves* (11). Within a moment Christ will become present in the consecrated host and will offer himself to those who come forward to receive him. Christ is worshiped and listened to and experienced in the coming together of the people.

My dear sisters and brothers, members of the Christian communities and especially my beloved priests, Sisters and catechists, let us accustom ourselves to planting the idea that there can be no reconciliation without Jesus Christ. The plan of God is to reconcile all people in Christ. This is the cornerstone from which the power of the edifice is derived. To try to discover Christ is our great pastoral task. If I speak of earthly matters or political questions it is to guide our reflection on Christ. I would like you to understand me so as not to have an erroneous idea about these Masses. Far from being political gatherings they are meant to draw people toward Christ, toward God. They are viewed this way in the many testimonials that I receive. It gives me great comfort to know that

people come to Church on Sunday to look for Christ. Even in the criminal realities of our land, Christ is present rejecting all crime. That is why we must speak of it here.*

Reconciliation continues to be the service of the Church to the world.

And finally my third point in this reflection whose principal theme is that reconciliation is God's plan to save the world: to tell you that reconciliation continues to be the service that the Church offers the world. I feel very much a part of the Church as I speak about God's reconciliation in Christ.

The second reading is a beautiful expression of the life of the Church during the time of Saint Paul. He speaks with the Corinthians in the same way that I am able to speak here with the saints of El Salvador. Yes, all of you who have been baptized and who form the People of God are saints. With the words that Saint Paul spoke to the Corinthians I address you and say: *God has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation* (12). He has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. For this reason we act as people who have been sent forth by Christ (13): we act in the way that God has exhorted us. Therefore, in the name of Christ we ask you to be reconciled with God. These words of the Bible become real in this homily that is being preached here in the Basilica. This is what we do and therefore just as Paul asked the Christian community to not view him as God so too I ask that you to see me as a poor pastor of God. Saint Paul and I are simply sinful instruments but, through means of us, God exhorts you to be reconciled with him.

For this reason Jesus has said: *whoever listens to you, listens to me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me* (14). I feel more pity than anger when they insult me and slander me. I feel pity for those poor blind people who cannot see beyond the person. Let them know that I hold no animosity, no grudge. Those anonymous letters that arrive at our office do not offend me nor do other words that are spoken about me in the media or other forums or the words that people hold in the depth of their hearts. It is not a pity of superiority but a pity of thankfulness to God and of prayer to God. Lord, open their eyes! Lord, let them be converted! Lord, instead of the bitterness of hate that they have in their hearts, let them live the joy of reconciliation with you!*

I am going to place the ecclesial news of the week within this third point because what we are attempting to do here in our ecclesial ministry, together with other collaborators in the Archdiocese, is nothing more than what we have heard from Saint Paul: *God has given us a ministry of reconciliation* (15). My dear priests, men and women religious, faithful, catechists, and Christian communities: please do not ever separate this ideal from our church, namely, that the Church be an instrument of reconciliation of women and men with God.* As the bishops in Brazil have said: let us never try to supplant the political work of women and men with our pastoral work.¹² Above all, let us be pastors who create a Church of reconciliation in which we can be most effective even when we have to consider political matters which we enter into as if we were politicians in order to beseech politicians to do what they must do. The Church is a missionary of reconciliation and has to speak to everyone, despite their differences of opinion: love one another and be reconciled with God. Do not allow yourself to think that your way of viewing the country is so distinct that you begin to feel that you are the only person who has a solution to our problems or that you are the sole owner of our country. People have a right to hold and express their opinions and these persons should be respected. As Church we attempt to bring the light of the gospel and justice and love and reconciliation to the world and we also attempt to create this Church through means of all our pastoral activity.

Life of the Church

Next Wednesday, March 19th, is the feast of Saint Joseph. Let us not forget that he is the patron of the universal Church and today we are in great need of his kind protection. I send my greetings to the parishioners at San José Villanueva and San José Cortés and to the religious communities that have such great devotion to him or who have named him as their patron, especially the men and women of the Josephite community who minister in our diocese.

As Church I thank you for the testimonials of solidarity which many people have sent to me on the occasion of receiving the Peace Prize which was awarded to me last Sunday. I have received expressions of solidarity from the government Junta, the University, many individuals and several friends. I have received telegrams and letters which give me great honor and so I offer up in prayer to God all of these greetings.¹³

We experience as a work of the Church, and indeed a very fruitful work, all that is being done to repair YSAX. We send our greetings of admiration to Father Pick even though he does not want us to mention him by name but we want to recognize the silent work of this radio technician. He has told me: *Very soon we will have the pleasure of transmitting and being heard once again.** The attack on our radio station has resulted in many expressions of solidarity and once again I express my gratitude to all of you. I believe that our radio station will transmit its programs with new voices of support and though we hope such an attack does not reoccur, but if it does we know that this voice cannot be destroyed once and for all.*

From the many letters of solidarity I am going to select one from the musical group Nahautal. They have informed me that they are going to send financial assistance and their first donation has arrived: *Our assistance for YSAX began on Sunday, February 24th, during a presentation which we gave to celebrate the installation of the members of the Junta Directiva Sindical de Foremost (the members of the Foremost union leadership team). The members of this union support the idea and are willing to take up collections for our radio station. This same support was also given to us by members of FENASTRAS (National Trade Union Federation of Salvadoran Workers) and was communicated to us by the leaders of this union who told us that they were in agreement to take up similar collections. I was very pleased by a group of railroad workers who sent us economic assistance and enclosed a wonderful letter in which they say: We want to tell you that we are with you and you can count on our support in your just preaching. The integral liberation of the human person is fundamentally rooted in God and therefore such liberation will be achieved when we break the chains of sin. The voice of the Church is the voice of faith and hope and the gospel illuminates the path of life. Bishop, your harvest is great because you have not sown on sterile ground but rather the seed is good because you have sown the seed of God.^{14*}*

Making our Church an instrument of reconciliation we have renewed the vicars in their position. The vicars are those priests who are entrusted with a group of parishes. There are ten vicariates in the Archdiocese and the following priests have been named as vicars: the vicar of Mejicanos, Father Juan Macho Merino; the vicar of La Resurrección, Father Victoriano González (a Redemptorist); the vicar of El Calvario, Father Federico Sanggiana; the vicar of La Asunción, Father Carlos Mejía; the vicar of Soyapango, Father José Luis Bourguet; the vicar of Quezaltepeque, Father Octavio Cruz and Father Trinidad Nieto; the vicar and pro-vicar of Cuscatlán, Father Edmunco Brizuela and Father Jorge Benavides, the vicars of La Libertad, Father Benito Tobar and Father Javier Aguillar, the vicars of La Merced, Father Roberto Torruella and Father Teodoro Alvarenga. Thus we have the whole diocese represented through these vicars. I did

not mention Chalatenango which has an Episcopal vicar, Father Fabián Amaya. We have organized the diocese in vicariates in order to facilitate the ministry of the diocese.

New members to the Priests Senate were named this week. The Senate is composed of a group of priests, the majority of whom are elected by the priests to represent the priests and engage in dialogue with the bishop. The bishop names a lesser number of priests to the Senate. Those who were elected by the priests are: Father Sigfredo Salazar, Father Salvador Interiano, Father Ricardo Ayala, Father Octavio Cruz, Father Oscar Martel, Father Juan Macho Merino, Father Francisco Estrada, Father Carlos Mejía, Father Roberto Turruella, and Father Luis Bourguet. Those named by the bishop are: Father Jesús Delgado, Father Luis Van Davelde, Father Benito Tobar, and Father Jorge Benavides. This information has already been communicated to these individuals but it is also possible that they are hearing this news for the first time as we broadcast their names over the radio. I am happy with this process and I want to congratulate the priests and I hope that as they take up their position in the Priests Senate in the Archdiocese they will give new momentum to our ministry which needs priests who, as Saint Paul says, are committed to the ministry of reconciliation.

The Pastoral Commission is composed of all the vicars and those in charge of other pastoral commissions. This Commission was very well represented in the Congress of Ecclesial Base Communities which was held in Brazil. Father Fabián Amaya and Father Octavio Cruz led the group in this encounter and have returned very satisfied with the meeting. We will soon receive reports from them.

Father Juan Martinez, a Vincentian, has been named the new pastor of Lourdes. He, together with the Vincentian theology students, will care for the area of Lourdes. Father Mateo Quijada, who ministered there as pastor, has been assigned to the parish of Cristo Redentor where he will begin a special work in El Carmen.

Activities of Cáritas and the Ecumenical Commission of Humanitarian assistance. Cáritas is a charitable and beneficent organization and at the present time they have much to do. Because of the emergency that has arisen they are assisting the many refugees who are coming from different areas where people are no longer able to live (many of the refugees have communicated this news to us). It is for this reason that our Vicar General has spoken with the government Junta to denounce this anomaly. One hundred eighty-nine persons, which includes fifty-six children under the age of ten, are sheltered in the parish center of San José de la Montaña and Domus Marie. The refugees have come from Cinquera, Chalatenango, Cojutepeque, Monte San Juan, the villages of El Carmen and San Antonio, the town of El Carmen, Suchitoto, and the village of La Bermuda. These individuals have had to abandon their homes after members of the Guardia and ORDEN (Democratic Nationalist Organization) burned their houses and crops and (according to their testimony) after many of their children were killed in cold blood in front of their parents. The situation is so serious that even in the shelter located here in the capital we cannot safeguard their lives. As you can see our country is passing through some very critical and violent moments.

We are alarmed by the fact that the killings and persecution and disappearances and violation of human rights have not ceased but rather have greatly increased, especially during recent weeks. For this reason in the name of Jesus Christ we ask, we beg that the repression come to an end and that our *campesinos* be guaranteed security. The Ecumenical Commission of Humanitarian Assistance has also asked for the same guarantees as they carry out their work.

My sisters and brothers, I ask you to help us with this charitable work because we do not know how long this need will exist, especially if the repression is not halted. People have told us that whole villages are now uninhabited. So many people have experienced bloodshed and terror and desolation.

In the city there are also many needs. The Coordinating Committee of Merchants in the Markets of San Miguelito has asked for our assistance. I ask you to help us so that our efforts might be effective in tending to the urgent needs of our people.

I am happy to communicate to you that our Catholic parochial schools and high schools are considering a pastoral ministry that is in accord with the needs of the Diocese and with the guidelines that we have attempted to implement.

The lives of our seminarians also give me great joy. There was a gathering in the Minor Seminary in which the seminarians expressed the motives that encourage them as they have begun their preparations for the priesthood. Other young men, not exactly seminarians, gathered together last Sunday and once again they are a great hope for the life of the Church. I was with them and they are young people who want to live their faith commitment and serve the people.

I, together with other priests, celebrated the funeral rites for members of FENASTRAS who had been assassinated and who were laid out in the Cathedral.

Today in Aguilares we will celebrate the anniversary of the death of Father Grande. At 11:00am we will have a solemn concelebration.

Yesterday in Tejutla, the people began a vigil which will conclude with the celebration of the Eucharist at 3:00pm.

The religious life of our Archdiocese is a source of reconciliation in our Church. In the midst of the Good Shepherd Sisters, Mother María Margarita Jonnieux, an exemplary and committed woman, is dying. She did not want to leave her residence which is in the prison. She felt that she should die there since her whole life had been spent ministering to women who were deprived of their freedom. What a wonderful example of the life of the Church!

I visited and admire the work that the Belgian Sisters are doing in Mejicanos. Mother María, who is lovingly called Madre Mariche, is involved in a wonderful work of promoting children and parents. She has formed an incredible education community around the Kindergarten. She is also very responsible in the daily administration of Domus Marie and all its equipment.

In Santiago Texacuangos, another group of Belgian Sisters are providing medical assistance to that area. The convent has become a consulting room where the members of this community can be helped.

Some very pleasing news: the Missionaries of Charity are ministering in our Archdiocese and have received the permission from the Ministry of Justice to work in the prisons and so they will begin to minister in the prison in Santa Tecla. I want to thank the members of this community and the Ministry of Justice and you can be assured that the ministry of these priests will always be, as we have said here, one of reconciliation, one of drawing women and men closer to God.

Our Church has also suffered persecution during the week: the house of the priests in Zacamil was searched. As a result, the following letter was sent to the Minister of Defense by our Vicar General:

*On March 12th at 1:00am two trucks of the armed forces drove up to the house of the Belgian priests who minister in the parish in Zacamil. Uniformed members of the Guardia Nacional and others who appeared to be soldiers, approximately forty in number, approached. Through megaphones the priests were given thirty seconds to open the door. Since no one was inside the house the soldiers broke the lock and entered the house in order to search it. When our legal advisers inspected the house the following day they found the house in complete disorder. According to witnesses photographs of the interior of the house were taken. The search continued for about an hour and various papers were removed from the house. The soldiers left the house at approximately 2:15am. In light of this action and with instructions from the Archbishop we present this letter to denounce this action which violates the freedom of worship and inviolability of one's lodging. This action is another proof that the ministers of the Church continue to be persecuted. We believe that even during a state of siege there are other more civilized ways to treat the Catholic Church of which the majority of the people of El Salvador are members.**

Since a very distorted version of the events was published in *El Mundo*¹⁵ we want to say the following:

The religious of the Church of El Rosario, San Salvador, want to clarify the statement that was written by the armed forces and published on March 10th in El Mundo:

First, we are the first ones to repudiate the occupation of buildings and churches which has frequently occurred in our parishes. We believe that such actions are not useful and in these cases we are the ones who are directly affected in a negative way by these actions. These actions are imposed on us in the same way that occurs when embassies, government offices, schools, factories and vehicles are taken over. We suppose that the owners or administrators of these buildings are obliged to relinquish the normal use of these properties in order to avoid greater danger.

Second, as a result of our reflection we can truthfully state that never has anyone from this Church physically attacked members of the armed forces.

Third, with regard to the events of March 9th our version from eye witnesses is the following: At about 11:10pm the front of the church was attacked by individuals in a taxi and other vehicles. This action took the watchmen in the area by surprise and believing that they were being attacked, they repelled the aggression. Then at 11:30pm well equipped members of the military arrived and pretended to dislodge the occupants of the Church. The shooting lasted for about twenty minutes and then the military withdrew.

Fourth, this Church, and all the churches, have an essential objective, namely, they are places of prayer and spiritual reflection. Throughout the history of the Church, and more recently here in our country, the churches have provided refuge for those persons whose lives are in danger. For this reason we condemn the repeated attacks on our churches --- some of which have resulted in death --- and we hope that this will not reoccur. We also hope the solution of conflicts will be sought through dialogue and negotiation.

Finally, we want to state that we make this clarification not to enter into polemics or to defend the occupation of any building but we are motivated by our love for the people of El Salvador and by the truth which was taught to us by Christ, the Master, whom we attempt to imitate.¹⁶

We could also call persecution that which occurred here in the Basilica. The events that occurred here were described in the following manner: *On Monday, March 10th at about 6:00am a*

suitcase was found between the altar of Saint Martha and one of the columns that supports the copula of the Basilica. There are well founded reasons to believe that the suitcase was placed there on Sunday afternoon because the locks to the Basilica were broken and the Basilica remained open until two o'clock in the afternoon. The National Police were advised concerning the danger and told that the suitcase might contain a bomb. Bomb experts arrived and removed the suitcase which was then opened. Inside the suitcase were seventy-two sticks of dynamite, enough explosive material to destroy not only the Basilica but the whole block. This is an attack that every citizen, regardless of their race or religious beliefs, ought to strongly condemn and repudiate. What was the intention of the authors of this attack? Did they want to destroy a work of art? Did they want to deprive the people of El Salvador of one of their treasured sanctuaries? Did they want to cause the death of many innocent women and men, causing even greater sorrow and mourning among the members of the Salvadoran family? This vicious attack can only come from sick minds and hearts that have lost the most elementary human sentiments. The previous day, Sunday, a Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Romero for the eternal rest of Dr. Mario Zamora Rivas. That same day the Christian Democratic Party celebrated its national assembly in which leaders from throughout the country participated. It is supposed that all of these participants would also be present for the Eucharist since Dr. Zamora was one of the primary leaders in the Christian Democratic Party. We ought to thank God that the mechanism that was to have activated the dynamite did not function thus frustrating this criminal attack I simply want to state that instead of experiencing fear we are even more confident that God is watching over us.* Those who trust in God cannot be overcome by evil.**

In a similar way Father Samuel Orellana, the pastor in Mejicanos, is being persecuted by a popular political group which is accusing him and threatening him as if he were collaborating in the repression. I want to speak to all the members of political groups and say that the priests are serving the ministry of reconciliation and therefore I ask you to respect their work and not expose them to threats and accusations that cannot be proven.

I have been assured that the armed forces have been informed that there are arms in the Seminary San José de la Montaña and other churches and that the army is going to search these places. I hope that this is not true because I can say with complete confidence that there are no arms there. If you do not believe me then you can go there immediately and search all the churches and you will not find any arms.*

I want to place here among these denunciations and persecutions the surprise firing of Demetrio Olasiregui, a young man whom all of you know is connected with Radio Noticias del Continente in Costa Rica. It was inevitable that all of this would happen. First, he was threatened and told not to transmit news outside the country and if he did do this he would have to pay the consequences. Soon thereafter he was called to the Immigration Office and expelled from the country. Thanks to God, he is safe in Costa Rica and undoubtedly he is listening to us. We want to tell you that we remember you here and we are grateful to you for all that you have done ... may your radio station continue to function.*

We also want to express our solidarity with the Priests Cooperative that during this wave of persecution was bombed and as a result has suffered considerable damage.

Events of the week

From the perspective of the Church of reconciliation we attempt to build up our society by means of these activities and persecutions. We direct our eyes toward the world that surrounds us

but we do not do this as a way of becoming involved in politics. Naturally we touch upon political matters but we do so from a Christian point of view

The predominant element is the continued repression. Once again the Lord asks Cain: *Where is your brother Abel?* (16). Even though Cain responds and states that he is not his brother's keeper the Lord replies: *Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! Therefore you shall be banned from the soil that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth.* These words continue to be the primary concern of the Church. These words oblige us to unceasingly and tirelessly raise our voice week after week as the voice of one who cries out in the desert. Nothing is more important to the Church than human life and the human person, especially those people who are poor and oppressed. Besides being human beings they are also divine beings, since Jesus said that whatever is done to them he considers as done to himself. (17) The bloodshed and the assassinations move beyond the realm of politics because they touch the very heart of God. Land reform and the nationalization of banks and other promised reforms cannot produce fruit if the bloodshed continues.* Let us not forget the words that God spoke to Cain: *the blood soaked land cannot produce fruit* (18). The blood soaked reforms can never produce fruit. I have already said that no one can be opposed to the reforms because the just distribution of land is part of God's revelation in regard to divine reconciliation and justice. We are not against these reforms.

During this past week some people have criticized me as if I had spoken last Sunday in a negative way about the reforms. One must know how to measure things not by the number of words but by the depth of the reason. I said that reforms were necessary and that we are in agreement with these reforms. Yes, I criticized those aspects that appeared to me to be negative but I did this in order to save and make these reforms authentic and true and in accord with the needs of the people. We are only opposed to the bloodshed that accompanies these reforms even though this blood is not desired by true reformers and even though this bloodshed was caused by the enemies of reform. This is the fundamental thought of my preaching. Nothing is more important to me than human life*. It is more serious and more profound than the violation of any other human right because here we are speaking about the life of the children of God and the present bloodshed is a denial of love, creates greater hatred and makes peace and reconciliation impossible. What is most needed today is a halt to the repression!

I want to inform you about the publication of a document concerning this matter by the National University and the University Simeón Cañas, UCA, to which other impartial entities in the country will doubtless subscribe.¹⁷ It is a document that is a profound and calm reflection on what is occurring here. I recommend that everyone study this document. In the conclusions of this document we read: *The systematic and savage crushing of people who are seeking freedom is not the path that will enable democracy to be established on the continent. The path is also not that which involves the destruction of union headquarters or the attack on radio stations and universities and churches with bombs and dynamite. The path cannot be that which involves the assassination of union and political leaders, the massacre of hundreds of campesinos, the terrorization of towns and villages by searches and burning and permanent hostage taking. The path is not that which produces ideological misinformation and instills in people fear of the communist phantom. These are not the paths on which El Salvador will find less violent means for salvation*. [...] If we have not yet seen the ghastly effects of foreign intervention¹⁸ it is because the popular organizations have not responded with desperation to the constant provocations which they have been submitted to. In light of all of this, we can but make an urgent call to halt to the repression. If people want true reform they cannot, at the same time, desire the annihilation of those who struggle on behalf of these reforms and who would be the greatest beneficiaries of these same reforms. This repression was present before the reforms were promulgated and has*

accompanied the reforms. For some people the reality of repression is more important than the reforms themselves. These reforms are born from blood, blood maliciously spilled by assassins that appear to be above the law. It is most urgent for El Salvador to put an end to this bloodshed. This is the first and fundamental responsibility of our government.

Speaking about repression I have an in depth report from Legal Aid. From March 6th, the day when the reforms and the state of siege were decreed, until Monday, March 10th we have received documented proof of the repression. I say this because someone said that I invented these things and so I want to state that it has never been proven that I have ever lied here during the length of time that I have spoken with you.* What occurs is that the facts appear to be lies. For example, in the past four days forty-three *campesinos* have been assassinated in different areas, eleven workers have also been assassinated as well as twenty-two students, ten of whom were from the Instituto de San Miguel and four from San Vicente. Two professionals have been assassinated and five unidentified persons: all from popular sectors of society¹⁹.

At the same time the sector of our society that is not organized has also been victimized: two detectives and a member of ORDEN (Democratic Nationalist Organization) were assassinated last weekend. I repudiate these crimes and I am not going to be partial and as a result become stained with blood.

The result of all of this is horrible because the popular organizations that are characterized by their opposition to the government are being annihilated in a violent manner. We can state here that at least five hundred persons are housed in some charitable shelters where they have been offered protection. They have fled their towns or villages and very often have carried their children and elder members of their families over long distances. They have had very little to eat during their journey and have had to sleep on the side of the road. According to the eye witness reports that have been well documented there are villages where there are no *campesinos*. This is very sad and a letter has arrived from these areas: *I beg you to ask the individuals who govern our country to please cease the persecution that we have endured. I and my family have been threatened on many occasions and the only reason for this is that we were friends of Father Rutilio Grande. The authorities threaten us and tell us that we are guerrillas and again all of this has occurred because we have known Father Rutilio. I want you to do me a favor and through all the means at your disposal let people know that there are nights when they will not allow us to sleep and other times we are unable to eat calmly, in other words, we are sick as a result of our affliction. This is the voice of some poor people and their voice must be listened to.*

On March 11th in Las Vueltas, Chalatenango, the *campesinos*, Teófilo Guardado, Felipe Alvarenga and the mayor of that place (who according to the *campesinos*, protected them and acted on their behalf) were assassinated. On the same day La Imprenta Ungo (a printing shop) in El Salvador was destroyed. On March 12th, also in the area of Las Vueltas, the *campesinos*, José Aristides Rivera, Orestes Rivera and their mother were assassinated.

The body of José Efraín Arévalo Cuéllar, who had been arrested on March 9th in San Miguel, was found. There were signs of torture on his body and he is the son of Professor Efraín Arévalo Ibarra who disappeared two years ago. I have here a letter from his mother, the widow of Professor Ibarra, who is well-known. With great sadness she writes: *As I wept before for my husband so now I weep for my son. On Saturday, March 9th, he was arrested by the Guardia Nacional at 4:45pm behind the Church of Calvario in San Miguel and was led to the police station where he remained in their custody until Wednesday, March 13th, when his body was discovered and it was clear that*

he had been assassinated. With the hope that you make my suffering your own I send you my gratitude. My sisters and brothers, the pain of those who suffer is our pain.

On the same day the young men, Osmin Landaverde, Manuel Sánchez, Javier Mejía and Carlos García from Quezaltepeque, were arrested.

On March 13th, in the early hours of the morning, the offices of the newspaper, *El Independiente*, and the Commission on Human Rights and the local office of the Committee of Mothers and Families of Those Who Have Disappeared were destroyed by bombs. I want to express my solidarity to all of these groups. I have some very interesting letters with regard to this matter but because of a lack of time I am not going to read them. I want to state, however, that I admire the courage of the director of *El Independiente* who has said: *through censure they can silence my voice, but with dynamite they energize my voice.*²⁰

I have received a very courageous letter from the Human Rights Commission. I thank them for having sent me this letter as an expression of their affection and integrity as they share with me words that also give me much strength and encouragement: *We believe that these incidents are not isolated events but are connected to all the repressive actions against people, institutions and buildings. This repressive violence has increased in our country since the declaration of a state of siege and has as its primary objective the destabilization, neutralization and the isolation of popular movements that struggle for integral liberation from exploitation, misery and repression which are expressed in structural and permanent violation of the most elementary human rights of the people of El Salvador.* This letter expresses the courage of the members of this committee who continue their struggle and we can see that not even dynamite can detain their struggle on behalf of human rights.*

I express my gratitude and my solidarity to the Mothers of Those Who Have Disappeared because they have sent me a wonderful letter that encourages me: *We ask for your indulgence and that of all Catholics who are listening to us but we can do nothing but express our indignation for the cowardly attack on our office where we were able to weep and comfort one another as we mourn the loss of our loved ones.*

We have received information about forty victims of repression that has taken place in Aguilares. But because we want to be serious and careful with all of our information we will wait for confirmation of these facts: we do this as is our custom when dealing with events as serious as human life.

Four members of ORDEN have been assassinated, at least an agronomist and an aviator.²¹

There have been difficulties in the implementation of the land reform and it appears that arms have been found in places where people were surprised by the reform and the seizure of the land.

I want to intercede on behalf of José Guillermo Castro²². He is a very good friend of mine. Much time has passed since he was arrested by the police in La Unión as he returned from a meeting in Panama. Nothing is known concerning his whereabouts. A note that was given to me reads: *Initially the National Police confirmed his arrest to Guillermo's father but later they said they had not seen him.*

I have also received a complaint from the young people at the Instituto Centro Americano in Santa Tecla which states that they were celebrating their feast on March 6th at 11:00am *when we*

were surprised by members of a strongly armed military contingent who entered the Instituto with no previous warning and this resulted in panic, distress, and anxiety in all those who were inside the Institute. These feelings increased in intensity as we observed how this contingent acted and as some of the students were arrested. In the afternoon the military returned to the Instituto with more military equipment and terrorized and physically and psychologically mistreated the people who worked there. These young women and men protest: One, the illegal entrance and abuse of the military; Two, the legal complaints with regard to anomalies in this situation were not processed; Three, no member of the Ministry of Education has denounced this action; Four, the anxiety and the lack of security in which they find themselves; Five, the biased manner in which the afternoon newspapers of the country reported this event.

As we speak about the violence, I wish to express my joy about the freeing of Jaime Hill²³ for whom we have often expressed our solidarity. I continue to be concerned about the fate of Mr. Dunn and others who have been abducted²⁴. Hopefully Lent will be a time in which our call is heard and these individuals will be granted their freedom.

On March 14th, in Reubicación, Chalatenango, the *campesino*, Denis Alfredo Rivas Arteaga, was arrested. He was handed over to the Guardia and we fear for his life.

I want to make some further remarks regarding these situations. The state of siege certainly presents us with some advantages with regard to repressing the opposition which can come from the right and can also move against the process of the people. Events have shown that some sectors are opposed to the state of siege but in general this situation has been accepted. I believe that this is a good step so that all can become involved in moving this process toward social justice. Nevertheless, the state of siege has its disadvantages. It has not led to a decrease in the violence that has resulted from actions by the security forces and paramilitary groups and guerrilla groups. It is has, however, led to limiting the right of free expression, especially in regard to the repression that has been inflicted on people living in the rural areas.

I refer to the members of the Christian Democratic Party who justified their withdrawal for the following reasons that need to be known by the people so that they can form their opinions and conclusions. Members of the Christian Democratic Party stated that they resigned because of the repression and the violation of human rights. Their own words state: *The exacerbated repression which is being inflicted in ever increasing degrees against popular organizations and the people in general.*²⁵ Another reason for their resignation is the danger of the intervention of the United States in what has been called *a special anti-subversive war.*²⁶ Another reason is that they are appalled by the repression that has followed the reforms that have not included popular participation.²⁷ A very valid reason is seen in the fact that they do not believe that they have any real power. Their participation in power is a veiled appearance but, in reality, there is no sharing of power.²⁸ The letter of resignation was signed by Dr. Roberto Lara Velado, Alberto Arene, Dr. Rubén Zamora Rivas, Dr. Héctor Silva, Jr., Dr. Héctor Dada Hirezi, Francisco Díaz Rodríguez and Dr. Francisco Paniagua Osegueda.*

I also want to inform you that the new ambassador from the United States visited me and brought me President Carter's response.²⁹ Since his response is very lengthy I will only give you a summary here.

He expressed that he follows the letter of the law with regard to human rights.³⁰ Naturally we believe him but we have always said the politics of human rights does not coincide with the Church's vision of human rights which is not a political vision but a religious conviction.*

The President's letter expresses his support for the Junta. He states: *It offers the best perspectives*³¹. I would say that this is a political judgment that admits discussion.

The letter also states: *the greater part of the economic assistance will benefit those most in need. And then, regarding military aid : the United States is not unaware of past unfortunate actions of the military.* It is enough that these actions are known and so there should be a real fear in lending unconditional assistance. The letter says that *we are concerned like you that this assistance should not be used in a repressive way and that order should be maintained with a minimal use of lethal force.*

He also speaks about the need for a *less belligerent atmosphere and less confrontation. If a program of reform is going to be carried out then moral authority should be used to pacify people*

He also states in his letter that the United States will not intervene in the internal affairs of El Salvador. As we have always said, we hope that actions will verify the truthfulness of these words.*

Finally, I am concerned when the letter mentions *the threat of civil war* and speaks about this as an alternative to the reforms of the government. I believe that there are other alternatives and I want to say to all my sisters and brothers that we are not pleased to hear this talk about an impending civil war. There are tendencies that want to maintain this psychosis and this letter contributes to this state of anxiety but I also believe that there are rational solutions that we must sincerely seek.*

Tomorrow a work stoppage will be announced.³² I am not going to make a political judgment on this matter nor am I going to support the position of the Revolutionary Coordinator or any other political group. What I want to say is the following: the objective of calling attention to the repression and an attempt to halt these violent acts is a legitimate and important objective. So we are shouting out to the government: cease the repression if you want to eliminate the great uneasiness that exists in our society. In the name of the Church and the gospel I plead with both sides to not turn tomorrow's events into a bloody or violent confrontation that will inflict on us even more tears of mourning.

My sisters and brothers, what can we ask for in this situation? In this homily we have attempted to keep before our eyes the reality of reconciliation. I am a minister of this Church of reconciliation. In this regard I am very pleased with the suggestion that has been offered to me: the Church should not only denounce but should also proclaim the reality of hope. Certainly one of my hopes is that opposing positions could be harmonized and also harmonized with the opinion of the Church. For this reason it is necessary that people who hold opposing positions enter into a sincere dialogue and so I invite people to realize that violence is not the only solution. I call upon people to enter into a sincere dialogue and seek, as Saint Paul stated, to be reconciled with one another in the name of God.

I call upon the oligarchy to collaborate with the process of the people. You, members of the oligarchy, are the principal protagonists in this hour of change. On you depends in great part the end of violence. The reconciliation that we have spoken about is closely related to the land and so if you realize that you possess the land that belongs to all Salvadorans, be reconciled with God and with human beings, and yield with pleasure that which will bring greater peace to people and peace to your own consciences*.

To government officials. I see two sectors: those who have good will but cannot do what they want and those stubborn and powerful individuals who are responsible for the repression. To the first I say: make your power felt or confess that you cannot command and unmask those who are doing the country great harm under your protection.* To those who are in power and do not want to cooperate with reform and instead are hindering it by the repression that they foment, I say: do not be obstructionists because in such an historic moment for the nation you are performing a sad role of betrayal. It is necessary that, in the name of honesty and love of the people, you know better how to free the hands of those who genuinely want to lead the destiny of our people.*

To the revolutionary coordinator of the masses, I want to say to you that you are our hope if you continue to mature by opening up and dialoging. In this regard I was greatly satisfied this week when I received a presentation from the Movement of Progressive Professionals and Technicians. This organization is a group of persons who say that they are pleased because as professionals and technicians they have found their place in the process of the people. They want to place their abilities at the service of the common good of the country and have proposed these objectives: First, to struggle for the establishment of a democratic government that enjoys wide popular support; Second, to contribute to strengthening the unity among the popular and democratic and revolutionary forces; Third, to contribute to the political clarification of other individuals in the professional and technical sector of society; Fourth, to organize and incorporate into the process of liberation honest members from the professional and technical sectors of society; Fifth, to present technical opinions that are elaborated within the framework of political guidelines that would benefit the majority of people in our country. Such guidelines should point out the rationale for a democratic and Salvadoran solution that is opposed to elitist and demagogic solutions that are supported by foreign elements and that could very easily be imposed on our society. Sixth, to denounce, on a national and international level, the very difficult situation that our people are experiencing and also to denounce the causes and the irresponsible and anti-popular manner in which some sectors are attempting to resolve this situation; and Seventh, to denounce before competent organizations (both national and international) the continual violation of human rights and to defend the said rights.³³ We extend our greetings to this movement of independent professionals and technicians and we are happy that you offer this platform as a source of dialogue which the different sectors of society need as they mature and unite and together attempt to save our people.

Finally a call to the guerrilla groups. Someone criticized me as if I wanted to group together in one sector the popular forces and the guerrilla groups. The difference is always very clear in my mind. To the latter, and to those who advocate violent solutions, I appeal to you and ask you to understand that nothing violent can be lasting. There are still prospects, even human ones, for reasonable solutions. Above all else there is God's Word, which has cried out to us today: reconciliation! God desires that we be reconciled and so let us be reconciled and we shall make El Salvador a land of sisters and brothers, all children of one Father who waits for us with outstretched arms. So be it*.

¹ Mons. Romero is quoting from memory the famous passage of St Augustine: "Too late have I loved thee...". See *Confessions*, X,27; PL. 32, 795.

² "Laq Iglesia y los proble3mas de la tierra", XVIII Assembly of the NATIONAL Conference of Brazilian Bishops, Itaici, 14 February 1980.

³ *Ibid*, 83.

⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

⁵ *Ibid*, 91.

⁶ *Ibid*, 95.

⁷ *Ibid*, 96.

⁸ *Ibid*, 97.

⁹ *Ibid*, 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 99.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 110.

¹² See “La Iglesia y los problemas de la tierra”, 98.

¹³ See “Testimonios de solidaridad al señor arzobispo”, *Orientación*, 23 March 1980.

¹⁴ “Testimonios de solidaridad al señor arzobispo”, *Orientación*, 30 March 1980.

¹⁵ See “Reportan ataque a la Policia Nacional”, *El Mundo*, 10 March 1980. This note in the paper started literally as follows: “Desde la iglesia de El Rosario fue dirigido ataque anoche contra la Policia Nacional...”.

¹⁶ “Aclaración de los religiosos de la Iglesia de El Rosario de San Salvador” (12 March 1980), *Orientación*, 16 March 1980.

¹⁷ “Alto a la repression”. Manifiesto conjunto de la Universidad de El Salvador, de la UCA y del MIPTES (March 1980), *ECA*, 377-378 (1980), pp. 399-402.

¹⁸ The original text says: “Y si todavía no se han visto los efectos nefastos de ese repaldo y de esa intervención...”.

This is a referente to the intervention of the Government of the United States, mentioned in the previous paragraph of the document and which Mons. Romero omits. See “Alto a la repression”, p. 402.

¹⁹ The Commission for Human Rights of El Salvador, the Office of Socorro Jurídico of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and the Secretariat for Social Communication of the Archdiocese jointly published a report entitled *Se incrementa la repression* in which they document and denounce that, from January 1 to March 13 of 1980, 689 people were assassinated, victims of oppression from the forces of security, extreme rightwing paramilitary groups and the army. Almost half of those assassinated were campesinos. See *ECA* 377-378, (1980), pp. 402-403.

²⁰ Editorial of *El Independiente*, 14 March 1980.

²¹ An official of ORDEN was assassinated in San Miguel. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 12 March 1980.

²² See Informe de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador, *Orientación*, 16 March 1980.

²³ Jaime Hill Argüello was freed by the ERP on 14 March 1980 after being held captive since 31 October 1979. See *El Mundo*, 15 March 1980.

²⁴ Archibald Garner Dunn, ex-Ambassador of South Africa in El Salvador, was kidnapped by the FPL on 28 November 1979; and Mr Adolfo McEntee on 3 December 1979.

²⁵ “Renuncian del PDC”, *Orientación*, 16 March 1980.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ The new Ambassador of the United States in El Salvador was Robert E. White who handed over the letter addressed to Mons. Romero, written and signed by the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, in the name of President Carter.

³⁰ See “Cyrus Vance contesta en nombre de Carter a monseñor Romero”, *El Mundo*, 15 March 1980.

³¹ This and the texts in italics are quotations from the original letter.

³² The Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas declared for Monday March 17 a general strike for 24 hours at national level to denounce and condemn repression against the people and the intervention of the Northamerican Government in the internal affairs of the country. See *El Independiente*, 15 March 1980.

³³ Manifiesto del Movimiento Independiente de Profesionales y Técnicos Salvadoreños (6 March 1980), *ECA* 377-378 (1980), p.359.

Marginal References (1) 2Cor 5,19a; (2) Lk 15,16; (3) Lk 15,17-19; (4) Lk 15,29-30; (5) Lk 15,31; (6) Lk 11,4; (7) Lk 5,29-30; (8) 2Cor 5,21; (9) 2Cor 5,18a.19b; (10) Mt 25,35-36; (11) Mt 28,20; (12) 2Cor 5,18b; (13) 2Cor 5,19c-20; (14) Lk 10,16; (15) 2Cor 5,18b; (16) Gn 4,9-12; (17) Mt 25,40; (18) Gn 4,11-12a.