

THE CHURCH IS CHRIST IN OUR HISTORY

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 15, 1977

Acts 15:1-2,22-29

Revelation 21:10-14,22-23

John 14:23-39

My dear sisters and brothers.

As we listen to the readings at this time in the Liturgical Year it feels like a light drizzle, with the sweetness of something that has directly come down from God. These readings seem to coincide with the events that are occurring during this year when we are battered by so many storms. The Liturgical Year refers to that spiritual cycle that the Church develops each year: the waiting for the Redeemer, the Nativity, the preparations for this work of redemption that blossoms into an Easter that is a celebration of the cross and a joy for life. Then, this Easter is prolonged: cross and glory, death and resurrection, tragedy and hope --- there are fifty days between Holy Saturday (when we sing of the triumph of life over death and proclaim the hope of the Church) and Pentecost (which we will celebrate in two weeks). Fifty days and then Pentecost, the fulfillment of the Easter message.

This Thursday we will celebrate the feast of the Ascension --- forty days after being raised to new life, Jesus ascended to the Father. For practical reasons, this feast is transferred to next Sunday; this allows those who are unable to participate in Mass during the week to receive the beautiful message of Christ, who left us temporarily and who ten days later sent his Holy Spirit to us. Perhaps it is better to say that Christ revealed the Spirit to us, because from the moment that Christ is resurrected, from the time that his physical life is no longer of this earth, from that moment, he gives us his mystical life, his Spirit that encourages and nourishes us. He breathes over us, he breathes like the Creator breathed on the bar of clay and thus created intelligent life (a). Jesus, on the day of the resurrection, breathed his new Spirit, his resurrection Spirit, his Easter Spirit on those who would become the Church: *Receive the Holy Spirit* (b). Fifty days later, however, he manifested his presence in the form of a hurricane and in tongues of fire (c), thus revealing the fact that the silent Spirit is always with the Church. The Spirit is the hurricane, the fire and the power that urges the Church to move forward. It is the Spirit that Christ referred to when he was preparing us for his departure.

This, then, is the last Sunday that Jesus is with us, in the stage between heavenly life and early life. But he promised that he would not leave us as orphans and spoke these beautiful words: *Whoever loves me will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him... I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name --- he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you* (d).

The Church of the Holy Trinity

These words, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, indicate the origin of the Church. If Christ had not gone to heaven to be glorified as man and God, then the Father

would have been unable to ratify, with the sending of the Holy Spirit, this work of redemption, this institution that we call the Church. The three Divine Persons have a role in the origins of the Church. The Church is the Trinity and is composed of imperfect and fragile men and women. But the Church has received the breath of Redemption, the breath of the Spirit (e) of the most Blessed Trinity. Jesus says that he will come and dwell in this Church, in the heart of each person who believes in this redemption. How wonderful! How encouraging! At this time many are in panic and afraid: what is going to happen to the Church? Will they kill all the priests? These are really not important questions. The Spirit of God will not allow us, as Church, to perish. We cannot be overcome by firearms, by terrorism, by the psychosis of different individuals. What is this Spirit of God? It is Father, Son and Holy Spirit who pulsate and who, as we are told in the Book of Genesis, in the account of creation, give life and power to the Church wherever it is alive (f). My sisters and brothers, do not be afraid. This is the origin of the Church. Therefore Jesus was able to say to Peter (and this is the human element): *You are Rock; you are a fragile man; I constitute you Peter and you will be called Cephas (Rock) because you are rock. I, God, will build my Church on you and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her* (g). My sisters and brothers, this is a hymn of victory because now the Church is able to confront the situation of the world with divine power and not just human power. Let it be understood then, that when we try to define the Church and despite all her weakness, when we present her with all her beauty, it is a joy to know that this work of the Church is a work of God and it is a joy to be able to say to all men and women that God is in their midst.

What a beautiful description John gives us in the book of Revelation! He speaks of an angel transporting him in spirit to a high mountain and showing him the Holy City, the image of the Church, that came from heaven, sent by God, bringing us the glory of God (h). The Church is Christ who lives among us, who wants to give us his love and peace. The Church is God who redeems us. He becomes man, not to place himself in competition with human organizations, but to give the Spirit of God to the realities of the human person. He sends his Spirit so that the politician, who believes in God and is a member of the Church, might become an instrument of God. He sends his Spirit so that the capitalist, who truly believes in the Church, might be transformed and humanized and thus give a sense of charity, justice, and love to his capital. He gives his Spirit to workers, the poor, and the marginalized so that they might see the Church as the one who transforms their poverty into redemption, so that they will not be led down paths of resentment and class struggle. The Church does not offer then a Paradise on this earth, but wants to gift their situation with the breath of God.

How wonderful it would be if all the people of El Salvador, instead of mistrusting one another, instead of viewing the Church as an emissary of subversion, saw the Church as a messenger of God and the city of God that came down from above to offer holiness to men and women, to free them from resentments and hatred and to remove from their hands the firearms of homicide. We would not have lamented such sad events as those that occurred this past week: the assassination of the chancellor, a priest riddled with bullets in his own house, an innocent child who had his brains blown out by a homicidal bullet; the hatred and the defamation campaign that is being waged because some people blame the Church for all of the problems that they experience. Do not the ones who write these biased pages have more blame? Are they not putting arms in the hands of the people of Escalón when they spread the slogan *Build the country, kill a priest*? This is certainly provocation. Yet no one calls this subversion. Yesterday our radio said that it appeared that we were in the time of Hitler because it is said: *Build the country, kill a priest*. Today it is the priest who disturbs and is the cause of all the evil that surrounds us.

The unity of the Church

But my sisters and brothers, here comes the human element that appears in all its beauty in today's readings. I beg you to reflect on today's first reading. It speaks about a conflict within the Church and let us, who belong to the Church, examine ourselves in light of this reading. There is a struggle among people whom we might call today, traditionalists and progressives. The traditionalists were the Jews who converted to Christianity and they wanted to continue to observe the Law of Moses. If this was not done then the Gentiles could not be saved (i). The progressives, represented by Paul and Barnabas, said: *It is not necessary to observe the Law of Moses. It is sufficient that they have been baptized in Christ and repented of their sins* (j). They brought this conflict from Antioch to Jerusalem. Notice this detail: the magisterium of the Church was located in Jerusalem --- Peter was there. So they consulted Peter and Peter consulted with his priests and elders (k); just like today when we are surrounded by priests and laypersons whom we consult in order to better understand the Word of God.

This was the first council of the Church. It is beautiful to remember this fact, especially today when there are many people who do not want to listen to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, or the teaching of the bishops who gathered in Medellin, a meeting authorized by Paul VI. Nevertheless, just as the Council of Jerusalem involved a consultation about the teaching of the Church, so too, one of the objectives of the Vatican Council and Medellin was to clarify the Church's teaching. At the end of the gathering in Jerusalem, a letter was sent back to Paul and Barnabas (l). This was the first conciliar document, a letter sent to Antioch and brought there by persons who participated in the Council. They told the traditionalists that it was not necessary to observe the Law of Moses but there had to be an agreement in the areas of peace and love, in other words the substantial things had to be preserved. They put in place some norms that they had agreed on; but the principal matter was the preservation of love and peace.

Let us not fight over insignificant matters within the Church when we have to present a united front in love and peace. Let us have no doubts and let us not be radicals of an exaggerated conservative or progressive position. Let us support the teaching of the Church and remove all doubts about the content of the documents of Vatican II and Medellin; they are the Church's documents. Therefore, let us not interpret these documents according to our own whim, because there are some who want to interpret the Bible in this way, each one with his/her own interpretation. It is clear then that the Bible is not sufficient but must be studied and presented according to the living teaching that Christ left to his Church. For this reason, the archbishop together with the priests has stated in a recent communication: *once again we renew our oath of fidelity to the Word of God and the Church's teaching*¹.

My trip to Rome², which some have interpreted negatively, had the same objective as the apostle Paul who traveled to Jerusalem to confront Peter and to meet with the Pope. I met with the successor of Peter to see if my teachings and my way of acting were correct. I returned from Rome, like Paul returned from Antioch, assured that we are on the right path. My dear sisters and brothers, do not doubt or distort my word. Many people say that I am being pressured and as a result, preaching things that I do not believe. I speak with conviction and know that I am speaking the Word of God. I have confronted the Word with the magisterium and in my conscience, I believe that I am doing the right thing. I want to invite everyone to dialogue with me. I have told you this from the beginning --- I do not

listen to just one group of people. I listen to everyone and I accept the good that each person offers. Indeed the great mission of the church and the difficult role of the bishop is to discern, sort out and distance oneself from evil and remain with what is good.

As we have just heard, the Holy Spirit that was promised by Christ, assists the Church in her teaching mission: The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name -- he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you (m). I believe that this is the reality of this present time: I want to proclaim my belief in this fact and give praise and thanks to God, for I believe that the words of today's Gospel have been my own experience: the Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of all that you have told us (n). One of the things that causes me great joy during these days is the many letters that I have received from so many different parts of the country. These letters contain the testimony of countless persons who have told me that they are praying for me, that they ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate me. My sisters and brothers, I thank all of you. I know I am unable to answer all of these letters, but I pray to the Lord that you might continue to receive this grace and continue to be inspired in your prayer. During the Mass, when I pray these beautiful words: Lord, look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church, I think of the humble hands that have written these letters, the many infirm Catholics, elderly women, so many anonymous men and women, --- all of them praying and yet no one is aware of the fact that they are praying. This is the faith of the Church. This is the Church that prays and the head of this local church that speaks is the Bishop, the Bishop who breathes the Church's holiness upon the people. How then can God and God's instruments be mistaken? Help me so that I can always proclaim the Word of God faithfully as I want.

For this reason, we, you and I, are Church. In unity with the teaching of the Church, I want to say this to you: in this defamation campaign, they are utilizing a tactic that is well known: separate and divide. Some priests, yes; others no. The archbishop, yes; the auxiliary, no. That parish, that community, yes; but those other parishes, no. We are Catholic, we are all united by the Church's teaching. This teaching of the Church is not arrived at by pressure from the Jesuits, or pressure from the leftist priests or pressure from the extreme right. There is neither left nor right in the Church. There is only one magisterium and we must all be converted to this teaching. Those who want to preserve their traditions, like the Jews who wanted to preserve circumcision, have to be converted to Peter, who tells them: circumcision is not necessary (o). Those who want to take the work of the Church in a different direction and who do not affirm their belief in Christ are held accountable to the teaching of the Church. Those who want to preach liberation but are unwilling to take any action --- these people are upset with the Church. Others are angered because the Church's teaching touches their personal interests, while still others, who profess a firm belief in this false theory of "state security", are disturbed by the Church's demands for respect for the rights of those who suffer the abuse of those in power. On the other hand, those who want to subvert the Church's authority and preach a liberation divorced from God, and those who look for power in the class struggle and hatred are upset that the Church reminds them that there is no solution in communism, that subversion is not the way, that hatred only result is the murder of important people, such as priests, and that those who assassinate the priests have committed a horrendous sacrilege, because they have played a game with human life and this is not the solution. In fact, it is a criminal act. These people are also upset with the Church where there is neither right nor left. The Church, however, is in the heart of God, under the Word of God and the teaching of the Lord.

I want to state publicly to all those who can hear my voice: the Archbishop and his auxiliary are not divided in proclaiming the Church's teaching, rather we are one in our teaching. I also want to say that all the priests who are working are in communion with the Bishop. I repeat here what I said in a solemn meeting: those who attack a priest who is in communion with the bishop, attack the bishop. Therefore I am greatly afflicted that one of the priests who works in full communion with the bishop has become the victim of a criminal act. I feel as though I have lost an arm.

Therefore during the past week there have been some very sad events but also some very fruitful activities have taken place. We had a meeting of the bishops and we will continue our meeting on Tuesday. We are meeting precisely to support this teaching and unity of the Church. We repudiate the violence and the slander and we call upon people to collaborate in these efforts. We call upon not only Catholics but, as I said in my homily during the funeral services for Father Navarro, all those active elements of the community. If, on that afternoon, Father Navarro was a sign of a persecuted Church who was unable to speak then what are the other organizations doing, these organizations that criticize the Church? What are these other organizations, that sarcastically call themselves "catholic", what are they doing? ³ Do not show your power by simply criticizing the Church; do something to take the firearms from the criminals and those who kill. Do not give these firearms more power with your campaign of slander. What is noble in these individuals? My sisters and brothers, I believe in the noble power of so many hearts, of many organizations, Red Cross, protestant organizations, Boy Scouts, and so many other organisations that it would be impossible to list them all here, but I note here that much good work comes from these noble hearts.

I say to you, do not be spectators of the Church looking to see who can do more good: the Church or the government. In other words, don't act like that group of children who are looking at two individuals fight. We are not fighting. The government and the Church, from their distinct competencies, want to look for peace, have to look for peace, in fact, have an obligation to look for peace and true progress. I remember that when the Second Vatican Council concluded, a message was directed to the rulers of the world. The Church said: *Allow Christ to exercise His purifying action on society. Do not crucify Him anew. This would be a sacrilege for He is the Son of God. This would be suicide for He is the Son of man. And we, His humble ministers, allow us to spread everywhere without hindrance the Gospel of peace on which we have meditated during this council. Of it, your peoples will be the first beneficiaries, since the Church forms for you loyal citizens, friends of social peace and progress.*⁴

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church. Therefore, please, stop this repugnant campaign of slander. Luckily no one believes the things that are being said even though some details seem to have a life of their own. Yes, our priests have defects and not all of them speak with the gentleness that some would like. In that case one can use fraternal correction rather make all these things public and part of a slanderous campaign. Go and speak with the individual priest; ask him: *What were you trying to say, Father? I did not like what you said...* Correct him, but be aware of the fact that as long as he is in communion with the bishop, his doctrine is true. If there is an error in some detail, then yes, fraternal correction and understanding are appropriate. Dialogue clarifies many misunderstandings. How many times has someone come to me and said, *Father so and so preached against the government.* But when the case is examined more closely, it is seen this is another case of slander. Perhaps there was an imprudent phrase, and if he had reflected some more, if he had

some understanding of what he was saying, he would have corrected it. Believe me, my sisters and brothers, the Church wants to sow peace and harmony. I also believe --- I have great faith in prayer --- that we will understand one another because violence can not long endure. Let us live and act in good faith.

With all the power that my sacred ministry gives me, as a sacred trustee of the Word of God and the Church's teaching, I appeal to all Catholics, men and women religious, laypersons, Christian communities, and priests, let us consolidate ourselves as Church under the light of this authentic doctrine. Let us try to understand this doctrine as was done in Antioch --- where mistrust was sown, peace was restored because they were docile to Peter's teaching and the teaching of the first council. Vatican II, like the Council of Jerusalem, is responding to the needs of our time. Many people criticize the documents of the Vatican Council and Medellin and yet have not read these documents. Study them and see the richness of their spirituality, the richness of their messages concerning peace, for example, look at the way the Council spoke to the rulers of the world: do not fear the Church, understand she is making people more loyal citizens who know how to live in this spirit of faith. Brothers, don't be mistrustful.

The Church's goal

I want to conclude by reminding you of the goal toward which the Church journeys. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Church proclaims a very original message, a message that renews. The book of Revelation presents us with a very beautiful description and tells us that we journey among the trials of this world. We are not afraid of these trials, however, because the Spirit of God is with us. Saint John tell us that our goal is the Lamb. A very beautiful thought and he goes on to say: *I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb... for the glory of God gave it light and its lamp was the Lamb* (p). My sisters and brothers, this is a very appropriate text for times like this. Everything is desacralized, and this has its reason. We have lived in an overly sacred world. We give an exaggerated importance to the material temple and to technology and we can easily forget that which is primary: God, Christ, the Lamb.

Let us speak, and I want to thank you very much for the attention that you have given to the homily that I preached last week about the means of communication --- our radio station and newspaper. Last Sunday, hardly had I left here for Suchitoto, between the sacrisrty and my car, we collected one hundred colones. People spontaneously gave me money --- in Suchitoto where people heard my message, they donated two hundred colones and throughout the week people donated money that now totals five thousand colones. Next Sunday is dedicated to the theme of the Church's means of communication: the radio and the newspaper. Our radio station has received threats and conditions have been imposed on it. The responsible commission is going to respond to all of this in order to clarify this situation. If, however, because of a lack of understanding they silence our radio station and take away our newspaper, we will not be lacking anything. For today's reading assures us that the temple is not necessary, nor are the instruments that the Church utilizes to proclaim her message. The book of Revelation presents us with the definitive phase of this kingdom that we ought to live here, below, on earth, namely, our faith in God --- God is our temple, the Word of God is our radio station, Christ is our printing press, and the Christian community is a bright torch in the world and is preaching more powerfully than the radio and the newspaper. These instruments of social communication would be useless if we could not rely

on these communities of love, these Christians who believe in the true God and in Christ. This is what is so great about our world.

Today, the Church is present in the world but not supported by earthly realities. Rather the Church is supported by the community of love, by their hope and faith in God and the Kingdom. In this way the Church is built up. My sisters and brothers, I am happy to be your bishop at this time when the Church is authentically defended, when the Church defends herself by pardoning those who slander her and kill us, when the Church does this without utilizing violence and hatred. The Church is a Church of love and as a result of this love is supported by God and therefore is superior to all the miserable onslaughts that people utilize to attack her. My sisters and brothers, let us live this faith. This is the Church that I desire to continue to build, a Church of love and hope that is fully supported by our God.

This afternoon, in the scenic heights of Planes de Renderos, there will be a beautiful, spectacular event. I invite you to participate in this event and I have the pleasure of presiding at this family oriented, folkloric and pious act of homage to the most holy Virgin: the procession of palms. Friday in the archdiocese we celebrated a day of prayer and asked the Virgin to intercede on our behalf. This afternoon we will offer special prayers and ask the Virgin, the true Mother of the Church, to intercede for us once again and illuminate this time of misunderstanding and remove all fear from our midst.

Jesus said: *Peace I leave with you* (q). Thus I conclude my sisters and brothers --- I give you peace, the peace of Christ that should not be confused with the peace of the world. Christ's peace is dynamic and active because it flows from faith and hope. Christ's peace does not remain silent but loves and lives, it is a peace that moves us toward that eternal peace where God is all things for all people.

¹ "Declaration of the Archbishop and Clergy of the Archdiocese of San Salvador on recent events", *Orientación*, 8 May 1977.

² Archbishop Romero left for Rome on 26 March 1977 and was received by Paul VI in the general audience of March 30.

³ In the Salvadoran newspapers there are often paid advertisements against the Archbishop, signed, for example, by the Catholic Salvadoran Association (ACS), the Association of Catholic Women (AMC), the Association of the Followers of Christ the King (ASCR).

⁴ Second Vatican Council, Messages of the Council to the World (8 December 1965), *To Heads of State*

Margin References (a) Gn 2,7: (b) Jn 20,22: (c) Ac 2,2-3: (d) Jn 14,23-26: (e) Jn 20,22: (f) Gn 1,2: (g) Mt 16,18: (h) Rv 21,10-11: (i) Ac 15,1: (j) Ac 15,11: (k) Ac 15,26: (l) Ac 15,23-29: (m) Jn 14,26: (n) Jn 14,26: (o) Ac 15,7-11: (p) Rv 21,22-23: (q) Jn 14,27.