

RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOD'S KINGDOM

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
June 26, 1977

1 Kings 19:16b-, 19-21
Galatians 4:31b, 5:1, 13-18
Luke 9:51-62

... this sweet name¹, which occurs consistently throughout the gospel. Because Christ wanted to build this Church, therefore, throughout the centuries he has gathered to himself men and women who believe in him, thus making this people a protagonist of his redemptive work. All of us --- laity, men and women religious, brother priests --- all of us are the People of God. Upon our shoulders rests the responsibility for this Kingdom of God. No one can be a spectator. All of us, according to our own vocation, have to be in the arena, struggling to implant this Kingdom of God in the world.

The Christian vocation is detachment

So I begin this reflection today. Elisha is called by the prophet Elijah. As a symbolic gesture, Elijah throws his cloak over Elisha who is thus invited to collaborate in the difficult prophetic mission. Elisha leaves everything, but asks permission to say farewell to his family. He kills the yoke of oxen, burns them and the plough, thus offering a holocaust to God. (a) What a noble response of a prophet who knows that God does not want a divided heart! All or nothing!

The Gospel presents us with three vocations: one asks permission to bury his father, another wants to go with his family. Christ tells him: *let the dead bury their dead* (b). In the Eastern languages, this expression is not so harsh. Certainly if this man's father had died, Jesus would have allowed him to bury his father. Here, however, the man seems to be saying: *I will follow you, but only when I no longer have any family commitments*. This is the type of mediocrity that is repugnant to Jesus. *If you are not able to detach yourself now, you will not be able to do so later*. To the other person Jesus says: *No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks to what has been left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God* (c). This phrase tells us that if we are complacent with the past and content with what has been accomplished by lazy people, then we will not accept the invitation to walk with Christ, to walk detached from all things toward a difficult future.

My sisters and brothers, at this time there are so many needs in the Church and so I am pleased to listen to men and women who, like Elisha, express themselves in simple language in letters that they send to me. They have been converted and they have felt the presence of the Church calling them. Indeed, the Church awaits them to take on their own ministry. I give thanks to the Lord because at this time there are many hearts that are awakening from a state of lethargy. There are, however, many people who, like those whom

Jesus rejected, are mediocre. They prefer to remain with their families and with their possessions. They are not capable of detachment and the Christian vocation demands detachment.

To the one who told Jesus: *I will follow you wherever you go*, Jesus gives a mysterious response. He says: *Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of God has no where to rest his head* (d). This expression reveals the condition that Jesus places on those who want to follow: *I offer you no earthly comforts, not even a nest like the birds of the sky nor a den like the foxes. The Son of Man has detached himself from all these things. The Church that I have founded has no need to support itself*. The bishops in Medellin spoke about the need of the Church to detach itself from all power, economical or political, and detach herself from the different social classes (e). The Church ought to support herself. I have said this often but I repeat it here, this does not mean that the Church hates one or another social class. On the contrary, these words are an expression of the Church's love toward all. Indeed, the Church feels that she must extend herself toward all people in order to save them and not that people have to extend themselves toward the Church in order to support her. The Church does not need earthly supports. Indeed, it is God, who presents himself to every social class so that those who want to be saved can enter the Church unconditionally, enter the Church as people who are willing to commit themselves to God. This is the Church that we want. I am truly pleased to see that the Church is detaching herself from those things that might condition her position. The Church wants to be free.

The Church freed from the things of earth, trusts in God

Here we reflect on the other reading that the Word of God offers us today. No one who speaks of freedom has expressed this idea with such depth and eloquence as Saint Paul does in his letter to the Galatians. This letter of Saint Paul deals with justification. Men and women are not justified by earthly works, but by their faith in Christ. Christ values their work and their daily tasks. And those Jews who believed that the Church founded by Christ had to support herself in the works of Moses and in the things of this world --- they were deceived. Christ came to proclaim a Church totally free from the things of the earth, a Church that trusted only in the power of justification: in God and in grace. This is a transcendent Church; a Church that does not offer paradise here on earth; a Church that, like Christ, does not offer her followers either the nests of the birds or the dens of foxes; a Church that finds her joy and efficacy in her own freedom.

Saint Paul says: *For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery* (f). My sisters and brothers, this is a memorable phrase --- *you were called for freedom* (g). How beautiful is this motto of the Church: freedom. It is a word that is spoken by many today but a word that when analyzed in light of the Gospel and the Word of God possesses a very difficult content. Saint Paul begins to clarify this: *do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh* (h). Freedom is not libertinism. Freedom does not allow me to do whatever I want. Freedom is justification; freedom is the action of those who have begun to free themselves from sin, for sin is the root of all evil. The voice of freedom is framed in the message of justification.

Justification, let us look at today's Gospel. In the last part of Saint Luke's gospel, the evangelist narrates Jesus' movement toward Jerusalem, where he will accomplish the great work on behalf of our freedom. According to the plan of God he marches firmly toward the

sacrifice on the cross; but from the cross, toward the freedom of the resurrection. But there are many tests to pass. Christ will give us freedom because only by dying on the cross can we achieve our true freedom and because the sins of humankind can only be forgiven with the redemption of Christ.

My sisters and brothers, in the first place, the freedom that we ought to desire cannot be separated from Christ. Only Christ is the liberator because his freedom separates us from sin, takes away our sins, and allows to live free from sin. For this reason, the Church, spiritual and religious in her essence, has to preach above all else penance and conversion. If people are not converted from their sin, they are not free themselves nor can they free others. Therefore the Church reaffirms her liberation. She is not communist. Let this be very clear because I have been accused of being a communist. The Church never preaches communism because the Church, if she wants to free men and women, must be rooted in Christ. This is what we have always preached: that the freedom that the Church desires is, above all else, a freedom in justification, a freedom that results from repentance of sin, from detaching oneself from all selfishness and leaving behind all those people, places, and things that can lead one into sin again.

The different social classes, the unjust distribution of goods, the inability to participate in the building of the common good of the Republic which is a right of everyone in El Salvador, the abuse in the dungeons, the tortures and the humiliation of the people --- all of these are the result of sin. If we all lived as justified people, then, there would be no sin in our hearts and no one would dare to take up arms against another. If we lived with a Christian conscience, if we were truly Christian, then, there would be no abuse of power. If there were Christian politicians, sincerely interested in justification, then they would seek the true good of the Kingdom of God that would make all people happy. The Church is in conflict because she preaches this kingdom of love and freedom that begins with freedom from sin.

For unless people are freed from sin--- and here is another aspect of today's Gospel -- violence will arise. As the Pope said: *Violence is neither Christian nor Evangelical*². Why do we live in this environment of violence? An environment of violence that makes people fearful to walk the streets? What right does any organization have --- it is not important whether they are legitimate or not but their message is important --- to threaten with death and expulsion members of the Jesuit community? This is the voice of violence! Violence does not justify Christianity. And now that I have touched upon this point, I want to say, sisters and brothers, that the Jesuit community³ is not a sect that is separated from the Church, nor is it a group of men who have nothing to do with the Catholic Church. Even if it were so, the Church has given sufficient evidence of her concern for human dignity and the right to life. We have advocated for the defense of these rights even in our dealing with people who do not belong to our Church. Remember the case of the kidnapping of the Minister of Foreign Relations: the Church advocated on his behalf not because he was a man of the Church but rather because he was a man, a man like those who are held as prisoners and who demand respect for their rights, a man like all those who suffer. The Church has advocated for these rights and for freedom. So even if the Jesuits were not part of the Church, it is the right of the Church to reject violence and defend them. This, however, is all the more important and so I want to make it clear: *Whoever attacks a Jesuit, attacks the Church!*

The Church is an institution that was founded by Christ and as a result of this following of Christ, diverse vocations arise. Here in this country we have many different religious orders of men: Jesuits, Dominicans, Salesians, etc. The same can be said about the

religious orders of women: we have Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Oblates of the Divine Love, Salesians and a large group of organizations who are doing much good for the Church. Both the men and women religious reveal the face of the Church through their work in the universities, in our primary and secondary schools, in the catechetical programs and in our hospitals. All of this is part of the Church and therefore, whoever attacks the members of one of these congregations, attacks the face of the Church; places their sacrilegious hands on the face of the Church and slaps the face of the Church.

If unfortunately something should happen to one of the members of the Jesuit community, the whole Church feels this offense. Our reaction ought to be very serious. I beg all of you and I call you to use your common sense! This is not a game --- games are for foolish people. This is most serious for there are threats of violence and bloodshed. This situation can easily escalate into an exchange of violence. I want to make it clear that the statements that the Jesuit community has published during these days are the doctrine of the Church⁴. As Catholics we are committed to this teaching that the Jesuits have taken very seriously, and which other Catholics do not want to adopt.

Three types of violence

The teaching of the Church is asking us to reflect on this Gospel passage today. Jesus is walking toward Jerusalem and he has to pass through Samaria (i). Knowing that Jesus is going to the capital of Judea, there arises a passionate political difference. The Samaritans were political enemies of the Jews and since Jesus is a Jew going to Jerusalem, the Samaritans do not want to give him lodging. When they refuse to offer lodging, they abuse their right of private property. This is violence: violence that arises from the abuse of one's rights. The bishops in Medellin (j) stated that this violence is institutionalized violence and from this violence other forms of violence arise --- the violence of *Boanerges*. The Apostles James and John are furious and they tell Jesus: *They do not want to give you or us lodging. Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?* (k). Violence! And Jesus does not approve of this action. The Gospel tells us clearly that Jesus rebuked them. In another Gospel passage Jesus explains his reason: *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost* (l). The only violence that Jesus will allow is the violence that he himself is going to do: he will give his blood; he will allow himself to be violently offered up; he will be killed because only his blood can give life to the world. No other blood can be legitimately shed except the blood of Jesus --- and this Jesus, in love, sheds his blood to save all of us.

According to this, my sisters and brothers, there are three classes of violence: institutionalized violence, the violence of the Samaritans, who as home owners refused to give lodging to the pilgrim; institutionalized violence, those who oppress others by abusing their own rights. I also want to clarify this idea of authority. Authority is a right. It is certain that the Bible tells us that all authority comes from God (m). Pilate spoke to Jesus and said: *Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power [authority] to release you and I have power [authority] to crucify you?* (n). Jesus responded: *You would have no power [authority] over me if it had not been given to you from above* . All power comes from above. Therefore, since all power comes from God, those who exercise authority must use their power according to the plan of God. When authority abuses the rights of God and the commandments of God's law, for example, you shall not kill or torture or do evil (o), then authority has gone beyond its limits. This is exactly why Peter, who learned this doctrine

from Jesus, spoke to the authorities in Jerusalem in the following way: *Whether it is right in the eyes of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges* (p).

Authority comes from God and therefore we have an obligation to obey, but only as long as this authority keeps within its limits. Again, if a priest, with a vile spirit, were to say that all authority comes from God and therefore must be obeyed in every instance, this priest would be manipulating the word *authority*. It is sad to see how convenient phrases are transmitted through the media. They are ingenious in publishing news when the Church falls into error. For this reason we have to be very careful, my dear sisters and brothers, and study the doctrine of the Lord. Though we might like a particular phrase of the Bible, we must not forget the other parts of Divine Revelation. This then is institutionalized violence --- violence that abuses its power or its rights.

From this institutionalized violence arises situations like those we are experiencing here in Latin America. Medellin says: *A deafening cry pours out from the throats of millions of men, asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else* (q). The Church is aware that this desire of the people of Latin American comes from the Holy Spirit, who is inspiring them and making them more conscious of their human dignity, making them aware of the disgraceful situation in which they live. The Church cannot be deaf to the cries of these people. The Church must respond and respond in a way that is non-violent. She must respond this way even though this situation of institutionalized violence creates other liberation movements that are not part of the Church: class struggle, hatred, and armed violence. This is not Christian. The Church must prepare her people --- and she is doing this at the present time --- to live in the true freedom of the children of God and to understand that the root of all the evil that exists on our continent is alive in the heart of each person, in our sinfulness. Therefore, what kind of violence must Christians do to themselves if they want to live according to the Gospel?

When Jesus speaks to the man who wanted to say farewell to his family, he calls us to do violence to do ourselves: *Let the dead bury the dead* (r). To do violence to ourselves is to be detached from everything. We see this again when Jesus says: *No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is worthy of the Kingdom of God* (s). This is the violence that one must do in order to become a better person and move forward in life and not become complacent with mediocrity. The Church does not propose economical or political freedom so that people can “have” more. This is secondary for the Church. Yes, the Church is concerned about the well-being of people on earth but views this from the perspective of a hope in heaven. Thus Jesus taught the Church to say that we cannot serve two masters (t). All those who create idols of the things of this world and adore these idols have turned their backs on God. We should kneel before our God and turn our backs to the things of this world that are not of God. We should, however, value the things of this world --- money, power, and wealth --- and guarantee that these realities are used for the common good and for the betterment of others. In all of this we must always be looking toward God, the one whom we are called to serve. Idolatry is so evil because it makes us turn away from God, even though we might still call ourselves Christians.

My dear sisters and brothers, at this time when the Church is recovering her identity, it is necessary for us to examine ourselves. We must ask ourselves if we have understood what it means to belong to this poor, pilgrim, and detached Church. We must ask ourselves if we understand what it means to depend on Christ who placed his hope in God and not on the powers of the world. We must ask ourselves if we understand that we must build a better

world because the Kingdom of God must begin here on earth, but we cannot use violence --- the violence that is invented by human persons, institutionalized; the violence that wants to achieve its goals by force. No we cannot build in this way! Christ calls us to love. Therefore Saint Paul, in the same letter, concludes with a phrase that I would like all of us to remember during these days. My sisters and brothers, Saint Paul writes: *If you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another* (u). This is the suicide of our country: we are biting one another and destroying one another. So what is the remedy? Saint Paul says: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. He then adds: *Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law* (v). In other words, love is the power of the Church.

Let us make an effort, my sisters and brother, to forgive and to love. Let us begin by loving God and not offending God and loving our neighbor even though our neighbor may have offended us. This kind of effort will create a better world. The Pope has called us to build a civilization of love⁵. Let us proclaim this civilization of love and make every effort to build it. Is it possible that El Salvador is not civilized! Does civilized mean publishing and communicating by radio brutal threats, like the ones we have recently read and heard! This is a very underdeveloped state of civilization! Is it so impossible to see the light of certain writers! Reason should be combated with reason! Why threaten with arms and death those who with reason communicate the message of the Church? The only way is by conversion. We must confront those who say that the Jesuits do not teach the Church's doctrine and tell them that the Jesuits teach what they have learned from the Church and the Church teaches what she has learned from God.

This then, is the only road that will lead us out of this uncivilized situation in which we now live and in which we are destroying one another. Saint Paul invites us to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. He sums this all up in the brief phrase: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (w). Let us make this effort, my sisters and brothers, for in this way we will make our Church a true torch of freedom --- freedom that was proclaimed today in the Word of God and freedom that with one Christian faith we now proclaim.

¹ The greeting and initial words were not recorded on the homily tape.

² Paul VI, Allocution in the Mass for the Day of Development in Bogotá (23 August 1968).

³ On 21 June 1977, the White Warriors' Union (UGB) published a document (n° 6) which said literally: "All Jesuits without exception should leave the country for good within the period of thirty days from today. The shameful instigators of the FPL assassinations Have no right to continue poisoning our people... If they refuse our order in the period indicated, the systematic and immediate execution of all the Jesuits remaining in the country will be carried out until all of them have been done away with." See "El Salvador. Venció ultimatum de muerte a los jesuitas", *Ecclesia*, 13 August 1977.

⁴ See "Los jesuitas ante el pueblo salvadoreño", *ECA* 344 (1977), pp. 434-450.

⁵ Paul VI, "If you want peace, defend life", Message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 1977).

Margin References (a) 1K 19,19-21: (b) Lk 9,60: (c) Lk 9,62: (d) Lk 9,57-58: (e) Mt 14,18: (f) Ga 5,1: (g) Ga 5,13a: (h) Ga 13b: (i) Lk 9, 52-53: (j) Mt 2,16: (k) Lk 9,54: (l) Lk 19,10: (m) Rm 13,1: (n) Jn 19,10-11: (o) Ex 20,13: (p) Ac 5,29: (q) M introd.4: (r) Lk 9,60: (s) Lk 9,62: (t) Mt 6,24: (u) Ga 5,15: (v) Ga 5,14b, 18: (w) Ga 5,14b.