

PEACE¹

**Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 3, 1977**

Isaiah 66:10-14a

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

My dear sisters and brothers and those listening to the radio, my esteemed people who reflect upon the Word of God that should always inspire and strengthen the true follower of Jesus Christ.

Each Sunday that we come together to celebrate the Eucharist, this divine Word offers us a new message. No two Sundays are alike. I repeat and continue to say this: throughout the Liturgical Year the Church has a plan: to further deepen in the hearts of the People of God this divine revelation that clarifies all our confusion and places us on the sure road that enables us to know God's divine plan for us. Blessed are those women and men who see this light and make it the center of their lives. Such is today's message that deals with a problem that corresponds to the anguish of our time: peace.

Peace. Seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah described the arrival of the Messianic era and wrote the beautiful passage that you have heard today. He places before us the city of Jerusalem in an idealized state that the Messiah will create, a city of joy and happiness, a city where God is present like an overflowing torrent. I am glad to proclaim this word of Isaiah because it is the same reading that is proclaimed on the feast of Our Lady of Peace, the patroness of El Salvador. Today I call upon this beloved Mother of the people of El Salvador and I ask her to make my words and your minds capable of understanding that which became incarnate in her, the Queen of Peace. God wanted to become present in her and in her soul as a beautiful expression of the Church clothed with all the virtues, like an overflowing torrent of peace. Likewise, God wants to be present in every heart and person and family in the same way --- an overflowing torrent of peace.

When Christ came to fulfill the ancient prophecies, he summed up his redemptive action with this one word: peace. Today, the Gospel presents us with the first scenes of the world's evangelization. This work is not proper to the group of Twelve who are being prepared to inspire the whole People of God. This work of evangelization was given to the group of seventy-two. My sisters and brothers, I see in this group of seventy-two you, the laity, the baptized, mothers and fathers, teachers, professionals and students. You are the seventy-two that Christ has chosen (a) and sent out with a similar mission to the hierarchical mission: *Go out into the world and preach that which sums up my redemption --- peace to this household. If peaceful people live there, my peace will remain there. But if people are arrogant or proud, if they reject God, then this peace will not remain there but return to you.* Then go out into the streets and as a sign of the rejection that you have experienced say: *"the dust of your town that clings to your feet, even that I shake off against you."* You were not

worthy of God's message. Peace, then, will follow me and there will be people who will accept this peace. There will always be, however, people who reject this same peace.

When Saint Paul philosophizes about this peace (b) and the mystery of Christ's redemption, he synthesizes this in one word, peace. He sees Christ's redemption as the source of this peace. He feels that he is an instrument of the peace that flows from the cross: *I am crucified for the world. The world, however does not understand me. I do not want to be comfortable in the world. I am crucified for the world and the world is crucified in me. I carry this treasure of peace in my heart and share it with all those who want to receive it* (an elaboration of Galatians 2:20, 6:14; 1 Corinthians 2:2).

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church. Personified in Saint Paul, we can say this now with great clarity to the Catholics of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and to those who do not want to be Catholic because they have voluntarily rejected Christ and his peace. Everyone who follows the Church can say today, more than every before, the words of Saint Paul: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (c). Therefore I repeat this with great joy, because in my view, we are living in a glorious time for the Church of San Salvador. Blessed are those who understand this and live it. Do not seek your glory in the things of the world. Do not seek glory and power in wealth or the things of this world. For me, all these things have been crucified and have no value. I am also crucified for all these things. Blessed are those who know how to detach themselves and constitute themselves as true instruments of peace.

The Second Vatican Council spoke this famous phrase, *the problems of today's world take on a universal dimension, and yet the ties which unite the faithful are stronger than those that separate them; nevertheless they find themselves in front of an insoluble problem; they want to create a peaceful world* (d). The Word of God, however, remains valid today and is felt as a joyful blessing: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God* (e).

This is the great anguish of our time and we in El Salvador feel this reality: there is no peace. We are very pleased to hear this anguish on the lips of the new president who shouted out peace for the people, peace for the family, peace for every heart². We are happy that the new government has this desire for peace. But we are also concerned, for we do not know if they will follow the true road that leads to peace. Here, then, is the Church, willing to enter into dialogue with all people but primarily those who have political and economic power in their hands. We want to speak with you about peace and talk with you about the great capacity that you have for peace if you only follow the voice of the Gospel.

What is peace?

I am going to present, my sisters and brothers, something that I studied during the past week in order to communicate to you --- two precious passages from the documents that enlighten the teaching of the Church. There is a chapter in the Documents of the Vatican Council that deals with peace (f) and in the Medellin Documents, the Latin American bishops addressed the same problem (g). I want to use these documents that enlighten the actual teaching of the Church, as an authorized commentary on today's Scripture readings that are presented to us as a message of true peace.

Both documents say that peace is not the absence of war.(h) (i) This is a very negative idea. We cannot say that there is peace when there is no war. Actually there is no war in many countries, in fact, in almost the whole world there is no war, and yet in no part of the world is there true peace. Therefore it is not enough to say there is no war. Also peace is not a balance between adverse powers. For example, Russia and the United States threaten one another and this does not mean that there is peace between these two great powers. What there is, is fear --- fear about who is the more powerful. This is not peace. Two young boys or two men threaten to fight one another, and even though no fight takes place, there is also no peace. Again there is fear. The Pope stated: *No one can speak of peace with a pistol or a rifle in hand; this is fear.* The Council also stated that there is no peace in despotic hegemony which seeks to force people to submit to their power. This is the peace of death and repression, but not true peace.

What then is peace ? The Council stated that peace can be defined using the words of the prophet Isaiah and Pope Pius XII who used the following motto on his coat of arms: *Opus justitiae pax --- peace is the fruit of justice.*(j) This is peace. There will only be peace when there is justice. We are pleased to hear this concept referred to in the presidential address. When there is justice, there is peace. Peace is the result of the order that God desires. This means that men and women have to struggle for this great good in the midst of society. What is the order that God desires? --- that there be no more repression, no more segregation; that all people be able to enjoy their legitimate rights; that there be freedom and no more fear, no more people threatened and killed with arms, no more dungeons where so many children of God cry out for freedom, no more tortures, no more abuse of human rights. Then there can be peace.

Our country is filled with hope when the government says that there can be no peace without justice. But it is necessary to add words to these words. Medellin described the situation of Latin American and used these words that scandalize many: *Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence* (k). These are not Marxist words, but Catholic words, Gospel words. For wherever there is a power that oppresses the weak and does not allow them to live with their just rights and human dignity, there, then, exists a situation of injustice. Medellin uses this memorable phrase: *If development is the new name for peace, Latin American under-development with its own [particular] characteristics in the different countries, is an unjust situation which promotes tensions that conspire against peace* (l). The Pope has stated that if violence exists, then many times it proceeds from an affliction or anguish. We do not say this to legitimize violence but to explain it. My sisters and brothers, when institutionalized violence becomes institutionalized and a way of life, when this violence does not want to examine ways to change these institutions, then we should not be surprised that violence arises (m). There can be no peace. In fact, people are being provoked to reject peace. (n)

If there is truly a desire for peace and if it is known that justice is the root of peace, then all those who can change this situation of violence are obliged to do so. We have seen the names of many Christians on the list of the new collaborators in the government, some even *Cursillistas*. We hope that they know how to listen to the voice of the Gospel that tells them that this situation of El Salvador is provoked by violence and they are obliged, from their governmental positions, to put forward those structural changes that the country needs in order to create an appropriate environment for peace. Medellin states: *also responsible for injustice are those who remain passive for fear of the sacrifice or personal risk implied by any courageous and effective action* (o). Let us hope that this sin of omission, of which we

accused ourselves at the beginning of the Mass, might touch the conscience of many who are able to do just works, but do not do so, perhaps because they have obtained their position through the good pleasure of others or because of their salary or because they do not want to be seen as failures in politics or lose the good favor of those in power. They would be traitors to the Law of God and sinful by omission, if out of fear of losing their life on earth, they did not do all that they could to give their sisters and brothers and society and the common good, that breath of peace that springs forth from a more equitable justice.

We also do not want to justify violence. The Council and Medellin have spoken the same words as the Pope: *Violence is neither Christian nor evangelical* (p). The Christian is peaceful and is not ashamed of this. We do not say “pacifist” because there is a movement of non-violence that does not proceed from Christianity. Gandhi and other followers of non-violence are part of this movement in the world that has its origins in a philosophy that is centered on fleeing from struggle and forgetting the rights of oppressed men and women. Christians know they can struggle and the Gospel invites them to defend justice. In fact, the Gospel places a great value on this struggle. But the Christian also knows that violence engenders more violence, and that war should be resorted to as a last recourse and only after all other peaceful means have been exhausted. Indeed peaceful means are more fruitful and productive and at the same time we cannot give in to the passion of hatred and resentment. Let us exhaust all peaceful means because they are transcendental for the order of peace. Pacification is necessary. The children of peace, the children of God who work for a better world, should be inspired not by violence or non-Christian non-violence, but by a peace that is fruitful, a peace that demands the fulfillment of rights, that demands respect for human dignity, and that never accepts avoiding problems with those who abuse the great rights of humankind. Here the government can rely on the great instruments of peace as long as they provide the Church with the freedom to preach her Gospel and freedom to preach the promotion of humankind. No government in the world could find a more effective and powerful collaborator than one who proclaims true freedom, justice and peace.

Justice not enough, love also necessary

The other concept that we want to take from these documents is the following: justice is not enough, love is also necessary. My sisters and brothers, we have always preached this. I am pleased to say that many people have followed this teaching of the Church and they have never heard a word of violence from my lips. We have said that the power of the Christian is love and so we repeat it again: the power of the Christian is love.

Love enables us to feel that we are sisters and brothers to all. Saint Paul, who is inspired by the One who loved us even unto death, proclaims in the second reading that he is drawn by this love to feel that he also has been crucified for Christ and for his sisters and brothers. We should feel the same way. Unless we are strengthened by this love, we will not be able to be true peace makers. We cannot be instruments of peace if our hearts are filled with resentment, violence and hatred. We have to know how to love like Jesus, who loved even those who crucified him: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. They are idolaters of money and power. If they knew you, they would love you. Therefore, rather than resentment and hatred, I am saddened by these poor idolaters who do not know the peace of this love that you have given me. Give them love, also, Lord* (q). The powerful would do more good if they truly loved, if they were not selfish or envious. My sisters and brothers, how beautiful the world would be if we all developed this power of love.

Here the Council was careful to define two classes of peace and therefore, it is necessary that we keep this in mind (r). A peace that Christ reserved for those most intimate friends, for those who understood the redemption, and for those who understood that they had to root out sin from themselves. As long as there is sin in the heart, there can be no true peace: divine peace, the peace that Christ achieved when he reconciled us with the Father, dying on the cross, carrying in his body our sins. For us as Christians and Catholics, this is the culmination of peace: peace in the grace of God, peace of one who left sin and no longer feels dominated by his/her passions, peace of the holy saints. This is the peace that Christ referred to when he said: *I leave you peace, my peace I give to you* (s).

Here we distinguish the other peace, the peace that the Church speaks about with the world, the peace that non-Christians can all possess, the peace of people of good will of whom we sing in the *Gloria* of the Mass: *peace to people of good will* (t). What is the meaning of this peace? This peace proceeds from natural love: the peace of those who, even though they do not know God, are able to discover this intimate power that allows them to enter into solidarity with those who suffer. Peace that enables these same people to bring comfort to the grief-stricken and to denounce injustice. This is the peace that all people can possess. Here I call upon all people, even those who do not believe in this faith that has brought us here together this Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. Many people are listening on the radio who are not Catholic and who may give no value to the celebration of the Mass; some may be disturbed by the pious prayers of their spouses or mothers or other devout loved ones who have found this divine peace. But they have still not found this peace. I want to say to you my dear friends, even though you do not believe in this Christ and in the peace of heart, do you not feel the ability to forgive? Do you not feel the power of being able to say “no” to this rancor that you have carried in your heart for so long? Do you not feel the need to believe in Christ in order to be fully developed, in order to enter into solidarity with the poor and with those who do not have, in order to feel the great injustices revealed in the great inequalities of our society? We also appeal to you, for you are also called to be instruments of peace.

When we celebrated the funeral rites of Father Alfonso Navarro in the parish of Miramonte, we called upon all people to sow seeds of peace. We called upon not only those who are Catholic and riddled by slander that almost discredits them, but also we called upon all the vibrant forces in El Salvador: Protestants, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, all the benevolent institutions, so many people of good will, laity, atheists, for all are able to do much good to achieve this peace. This is the desire of today’s Gospel. When Christ tells us to *love one another as I have loved you* (u), he is not telling us that we need to be Christian. It seem to me that this phrase of Christ *love one another as I have loved you* is a point of contact between those who have faith and those who do not. Even though one does not have faith, one can love others and be an instrument of peace.

My call today, springs from the heart of the Gospel and the heart of the Church. My arms are also extended to those who do not have faith and I call upon you to sincerely cooperate in the establishment of a true peace. This is the dialogue that the Church offers. The new president asked us to place our confidence in him and demonstrate our trust. Here then is the Church waiting for this dialogue. The Church has never broken off dialogue with anyone. Yes, others have done this and others have mistreated the government. Many words come out of the mouth but works are also needed to demonstrate the sincerity of this search for peace for our country. For example, the Church needs the return of priests that have been expelled. Many families need the return of their loved ones who have “disappeared” and no

one seems to know where they are. Many works are needed to gain this trust and enable us to work together for the peace that our country so desperately needs. My sisters and brothers, we need to trust one another and this is justice. If there is no justice, then El Salvador will continue to long for that peace that we sing about in our National Anthem, but that we have not been able to preserve. Our Lord has given us this insight into peace and through his Church, pointed out the ways to achieve this peace. We are all called to be instruments of peace.

We are instruments of peace

I am going to conclude with the statement of Christ that appears at the beginning of today's Gospel: *The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest* (w). The problem of peace is immense and we need many instruments of peace: priests, men and women religious, laity who are involved in the political and economic structures --- all are called now. The harvest is abundant and El Salvador needs strength and exuberance. How beautiful our country would be if all the people of El Salvador cultivated an environment of peace, justice, love and freedom! Let each one of us, according to our means, cultivate this ability to become instruments of peace. Jesus Christ in the Gospel and Saint Paul in his letter describes the conditions for those who want to be instruments of peace. It would be well to review this passage of the Gospel where Jesus preaches to us about the indispensable condition of poverty in spirit, detachment: *Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals --- go as pilgrims* (x). This is the great adventure that people today are invited to undertake. Those who seek comfort, who do not want to take the risk of poverty and detachment from their calm situation, those who cannot do this from the heart will not be able to collaborate with God.

Exterior poverty is not enough. Therefore I say to those who preach about poverty and a Church of the poor and preach in this way for honor but their hearts are not firm: in this position --- your words are useless. The poverty that is revealed to us in the Gospel and the reading from Saint Paul's letter is the following: *I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world* (y). This is a poverty that flows from the love of Jesus Christ. It is a poverty that looks on Christ, naked on the cross, and says: *I will follow you wherever you go; I will follow the roads of poverty because this is what you want. I also want to be holy*. This form of poverty allows me to feel that the riches of the world are crucified for me and I am crucified to all the criteria of the world --- this is true poverty. Blessed are the poor of heart, those who feel the need for God; those who encounter the joy of life in the cross and sacrifice; those who have learned the secret of peace in the crucified One; those who have discovered that this secret consists of loving God, even dying for him and loving the neighbor, even allowing myself to be crucified for the neighbor. This is the love of the modern redeemers, the love of Christ and the love that endures forever. Only these are the true instruments of peace, those of whom Jesus said: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God* (z). Let us promise the Lord that we will be peacemakers as we proclaim our faith in him.

¹ Two days before this homily, 1 July 1977, General Carlos Humberto Romero, the new President of El Salvador, was inaugurated. Monsignor Romero did not take part in the official ceremony, in accordance with his decision on 15 March 1977 after the assassination of Fr Rutilio Grande.: a decision he referred to in an interview after the formal ceremony: "Faithful to my promise of not taking part in official acts until the situation between the archdiocese and the government is made clear, I could not be present at the official ceremony; but this does not mean a declaration of war or a definitive rupture." See "Boletín informativo del arzobispado n° 6, ECA 341 (1977) p. 257 and "El arzobispo solo pone una condición para el diálogo: la sinceridad", *Orientación*, 17 July 1977.

² Reference to the speech of General Carlos Humberto Romero in his inauguration as President of El Salvador on the 1 July 1977. See *Documentos, ECA 345* (1977), pp. 515-519.

Margin References (a) Lk 10,5-11: (b) Ga 6,14-16: (c) Ga 6,14: (d) GS 77: (e) Mt 5,9: (f) GS V: (g) M 2: (h) GS 78: (i) M 2,14: (j) Is 32,17: (k) M 2,16: (l) M 2,1: (m) PP 30: (n) M 2,16: (o) M 2,18: (p) M 2,15: (q) Lk 23,34: (r) GS 78: (s) Jn 14,27: (t) Lk 2,14: (u) Jn 15,12: (v) Mt 5,9: (w) Lk 10,2: (x) Lk 10,4: (y) Ga 6,14: (z) Mt 5,9.