

OUR INNER BEING

**Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 10, 1977**

Deuteronomy 30:10-14
Colossians 1:15-20
Luke 10:25-37

My dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

Today the Word of God invites us to our inner being. It is as though Christ were telling all of us who are participating in this reflection: *the kingdom of God is within you* (a). We live outside ourselves. There are very few people who truly enter inside themselves and for this reason there are so many problems. If we were to allow our interior to become visible, if we were to understand the voice of the Lord and the law which sanctifies us, would we not be, as the first reading has explained to us, in the heights of heaven. Then we would ask: *who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out* (b). Or if it were a law on the other side of the sea: *who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?* We are searching for ways to better our Republic. We seek a greater understanding among all people of El Salvador. We search as though we were waiting for something to come to us from the outside. So we blame the government, wealth and other things. But the documents of the Church ask us, *what use is it to change all the social, political and economic structures, if the hearts of those who have to live within and direct these structures do not change* (c).

Be converted from within

There will be no change unless those who are concerned about these problems look within themselves and with their hearts listen to the message of today's divine Word: *Return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul* (d). Or better, let us listen to the words of Jesus as he speaks with a scholar of the Law who asked him what is the greatest commandment: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength and with all your mind* (e).

People are not great unless they look within themselves. The Council, on behalf of the modern world, initiated from the very heart of the Church a new humanism, a Christian humanism that proclaims to us the following: men and women will understand that their highest calling is a calling to intimacy with God (f). In everyone's heart there is, as it were, a small intimate cell where God is able to speak with each one individually. It is there that men and women define and decide their proper destiny and their role in the world. If every one of us who are concerned about so many different problems and situations were to enter this "small cell" and from there listen to the voice of the Lord who speaks to us in our conscience, how much more would we be able to do to better our situation and the situation of our society and family. Today, when the Word of God is a word of love, if all the people of El Salvador

would make a resolution to live the greatest commandment, if we gave our interior life its own reason for being, then I assure you, my sisters and brothers, that this Sunday would mark the beginning of a total change. There would no longer be any need to wait for something to come from outside. All people would contribute from their own hearts that which society needs. We are participants in the construction of history and humankind is actually evolving in this understanding.

Therefore, participation is one of the actual signs of the time. This refers to the right that every person possesses to participate in the construction of the common good. For this reason one of the most dangerous violations is repression which in fact says: only we have the right to govern; everyone else has to be turned aside. Yet every person can contribute something to the common good and in this way trust is achieved. We should not turn aside those who do not get along with us, as though we alone will enrich the common good of the country. Rather we must try to affirm all that is good in every person and attempt to solicit this goodness in an environment of trust. We must furthermore attempt to solicit this support with a force that is not physical --- as though we were dealing with irrational beings. We should use moral force that attracts all people, especially young men and women with all their concerns; moral force that attracts the good so that every one contributes from their heart [interiority], their responsibility and their way of being. In this way we will raise up this beautiful pyramid that is called the common good --- the common good that is achieved with the participation of everyone and that creates the conditions for goodness, trust, freedom and peace. Thus everyone will build that which the Republic and which we all have an obligation to build.

Christ, synthesis of all that exists

What is the essence of the people of El Salvador or people from whatever part of the world? Has God not created all people to make the world happy? The second reading is a beautiful passage. There Saint Paul invites us to view reality from Christ's perspective, from a cosmic perspective: *[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible... he is before all things... all things were created through him and for him (g).*

My sisters and brothers, how beautiful is the Christian perspective. Christ is the God-man. As man we see that he is capable of great love and as God we see that he is the beginning and the end of all things. As God and as man he gives us things, he gives us a synthesis and a summary of things. Only in him can we find happiness, prosperity, love, freedom, and peace. The Council said that if we eliminate God, we commit suicide.¹ This word is directed to the rulers of the world because those who do not value Christ or that which represents Christ in the world, namely, the Church that has Christ as its head, thus all those who do not value this head and body, commit suicide. They have lost a universal vision of reality and lost a vision of humankind --- they view women and men as rivals, as people who are disturbing them, beasts, and therefore they beat them brutally with sticks. At the close of the Council, the Pope stated: this Council has taught us to look to Christ and from Christ to look at each person². Let us look at the face of each person and see it become more transparent and beautiful as it is purified from pain, poverty, anguish and suffering. This face is the face of Christ, the face of one who suffered and was crucified, the face of a poor man and a saint. In the face of every person we learn how to see the face of Christ. Let us love every person with these criteria that Jesus will use to judge us at the end of time: *I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink...* Surprised by these

words, the righteous asked: *Lord, when did we see you on earth and comfort you ?* The response: *Whatever you did for one of these least sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me* (h). My sisters and brothers, it will be a great surprise, for many good Samaritans, people who did not believe in Christ, people who did not call themselves Catholic but people who did not persecute the Church, will find themselves saved at the time of the final judgment while many Christians will be cast aside because they did not fulfill this commandment of love and mercy.

What makes the face and the situation of women and men great? It is precisely this vision of faith: to see in every person the face of Christ, for then the Lord can tell us the parable of the Good Samaritan (i). For me, as a priest, this parable contains a tremendous call. I who am fulfilling the Word of God and denouncing all that is not in accord with the Word of God, I see myself in the priest and the Levite who passed by the wounded man and did nothing.

One who denounces must also be prepared to be denounced. And my dear sisters and brothers, I have told you a thousand times that when a priest takes on an attitude that is not in accord with this love that ought to inspire a preacher of God's Word, then this priest must be denounced, but this must be done with love and charity. Do not commit the same sin that you denounce: don't tell the priest that he is Marxist, a scandal, etc. If one corrects another with charity then a soul has been won for God. Christians have a duty to act in this way. But if they do this in a cruel manner, like those who write for these paid campaigns of slander and threaten others with death, then it is obvious that their actions neither defend the truth nor love. This is crass selfishness and is a serious sin because while they can find fault in us as preachers of the Word of God --- we are human and will therefore commit errors --- yet we should not be corrected with cruelty and even less with this criminal spirit of death threats.

Let us change our hearts. We priests must also change. The parable of the Good Samaritan is Jesus' direct warning to people of the Church, not only priests. Let us reflect then, beloved men and women religious, members of Christian movements, married men and women and all you who come to Mass every Sunday, and let us examine our conscience in light of this parable of the Good Samaritan. Let us not be content in denouncing the sins and the defects of the sinful world. We have to begin, as we begin the Mass, beating our breasts and recognizing our own faults. For from this burst of sincerity and love flows love for the neighbor and knowledge of ourselves.

The immense capacity to love

What do men and women possess that demands respect? I call upon all of you to reflect on the passage of Saint Paul and as you reflect, think of yourself. It is said that all things were created through the eternal Word of God and were created for him. I, and every one of you, have been created through and for God. We have been created through God and what God did not do for other creatures, he did for you and me. Men and women are the intimate sanctuaries of creation. No other created being received so much of God as the heart of each man and woman.

What is the uniqueness of the human person in the midst of creation? The uniqueness lies in the capacity of the human person to be free and intelligent and above all, the capacity to love. The law of God is love. Thus the Old Testament writer tells us: *it is not up in the sky... nor is it across the sea* (j), it is in our own hearts. The Kingdom of God is in our

hearts. We are called to love, but not to love in whatever way we like. We must love in the way that made the saints saints.

What joy we would feel if one of the fruits of this word that I am communicating on the part of God, were that of awakening the interior, the heart of each one who is listening and thus awaken the desire to truly live this capacity for love that results in a respect for one's own dignity. From the perspective of one's own dignity and love flows a respect and love for others. Yet we must recognize that we have received this love from God. The Bible speaks of this gift of family and the gift of intimate friends, joyfully sharing a meal, as a gift of oneself. God gifts us with this *agape* and gives us his love so that we, from the depths of our heart, can in turn give this love to God and neighbor. We are invited to share this love like an invitation to dine, an invitation to *agape*, in which we feel happy because we are sharing with God and others, making no exceptions to this tremendous ability to love.

Let us love because we are the heart of creation. Neither the stars nor the flowers, neither the birds nor the rainbow, neither the sea nor the landscape possess what the human person possesses: the capacity to love. Humankind gives meaning to the rainbow and the birds and the flowers because men and women have the capacity to love. For example, a man can cut a flower and give it a meaning of love as he presents it to his beloved. Humankind gives meaning to the concert of the birds and the rainbows and thus elevates this creation to God and says: How beautiful are your works, Lord, how worthy you are of praise. Therefore when people do not love, when they do not use this ability of the heart that God has given to them in creation, then they are rebuked. Hell begins when people begin to hate. One of the many letters that arrived in recent days came from a person who told me: *I give thanks to God, because my heart was a hell of hatred. I saw evil everywhere and trusted no one. But when I began to reflect on the things you tell us, on God's goodness and on the need to forgive, I felt that I was being transformed and I now feel very happy.*

I know that this word is touching many hearts that are like hell, hearts that hate. Those who wrote the threatening letter against the Jesuits wrote with pens of hell. Those who have killed our beloved priests have hearts of hell as long as they continue to hate and kill. Those who are unable to see the Church without resentment and rancor are hearts that Satan has won --- because Satan is hatred, envy and evil. There are many hearts like this and I am saddened because they still have the opportunity to fill themselves with love. They can repent and return to God and put aside their arms and war-like attitude, but they continue to walk in their evil ways. Those who torture others have hearts of hell. All those persons who do not respect the dignity of others, all those who are cruel are inspired by Satan and this is not love.

Love is the only reality that can transform the world. Therefore, as we said last Sunday, if the government is sincere and desires peace, then it has to go to the roots of peace: justice and love. A love that leads to forgiveness and a love that makes our weapons explode with embraces for their sisters and brothers. A love that enables them to lift up their voices to God and say: *Thank you, God, because you gave me this ability to love; I do not want to lose this in an eternity of hell and so I put aside my hatred and evil will.* Then as Pope Paul VI said: when we look at people with love, then we have arrived at the Kingdom of God, for men and women are made in the image of God. Then it will no longer cost us to fulfill the greatest commandment: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your being* (k). My sisters and brothers, it is most true that our

primary occupation in eternity will be this: to love and glorify and be happy with God, our Lord.

For this reason there is no greater joy on earth and no occupation more noble than that of the saints who worked with their hearts set on God. By this I do not mean that they possessed an insufferable piety or that they only thought of God and not of their duties on earth. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we have a condemnation of those who simply honor God and forget their neighbor (1). Neither the priest nor the Levite nor the one who goes to Mass to adore God, even though they are thinking about God, they can never forget the needs of their neighbor. This is one of the movements that the actual Church is focused on, for there are many who, when they speak about the human person, believe that the Church has separated herself from her eternal destiny. The Pope, at the time of the Council's conclusion belied this accusation³. If we reach out to those in need and anguish, to those in poverty and misery, it is because our hearts are set on God.

As we fulfill our obligations, we earn a living. However, let us not do these things for a salary or to remain in someone's good favor. Let us do this for the love of God. One of the most beautiful expressions that reveals the essence of the human person is heard from the beggar, who with an outstretched hand says: *Please, for the love of God, an alms*. This beggar gives us a touch of sanctity. When we do things for the love of God, then the action is holy. The intention of the individual determines this person's way of being. If a man gives alms to a young woman to seduce her and sin with her, this man is perverse. But if the man places the alms in the hands of this young woman in need, and does so for the love of God, then his action is a holy action. Therefore, the perverse eyes of people cannot look at the good intentions of those who act for the love of God because this is holiness. My sisters and brothers, this is holiness, and to obtain this holiness you don't have to go to the other side of the sea nor up into the sky, it is within your own heart. When you do what you do for the love of God, all that you do is holy.

Some men were watching workers build a cathedral and these observers asked the workers who were breaking rocks for this beautiful Gothic cathedral: *you, why do you do this work?* The materialist answered: *If I do not work I cannot eat. Breaking these rocks enables me to earn a living and eat and pay my bills*. They asked another: *and you, why do you work?* The response: *There is nothing more beautiful than a Gothic cathedral and with each rock that I break I believe that this action is a collaboration with art*. This is the response of one who is more spiritual but he has not arrived at the full awareness of his spirituality. Another humble worker is asked the same question: *you, why do you break these rocks? Are you not bored doing this work all day?* The worker responded: *I do this work because it is for a cathedral and there many people will offer prayers to God. In my work I anticipate those prayers. I break these rocks and pray*. This is holiness. Three men doing the same work, but one is losing the merits of this work while the others are doing everything for God.

My dear sisters and brothers, this reflection should make us think about the work that we do. I am pastor of a diocese and my beloved priests collaborate in this pastoral work, the religious sanctify their lives as do also parents, professionals, and students. We could all be asked: *why do you work? Why do you preach at this moment?* If I did this to obtain the applause of people I would lose everything. But my sisters and brothers, if I do this with all sincerity, if I preach in order to communicate the Word of God and touch the hearts of people so that they might lift up their hearts to God, so that all of us can put aside our hatred, rancor and ill-will and build a world in accord with the heart of God, [then I am gaining everything

for God]. If each one of us, according to our vocation, were to work for the love of God --- whatever that work might be, even the most humble work, for example, selling brooms, sweeping the streets or heating the ovens --- then that work would be noble work and we would have a country of saints and there would not be so many criminals. Our hearts would put aside hatred and there would be more love. God will hold the people of El Salvador more accountable because this God has given us so many beautiful things and made our hearts more heroic. Yet we are so often placing ourselves at the service of hatred, division, repression, discord, and torture. How much more will we be held accountable, for we could have loved, but we hated.

A beautiful poem of Saint John of the Cross states that: *in the evening of our life, we will be asked to give an account.*⁴ Let us not forget this: in the evening of our life, when our life is declining like the sun that sets in the West, God is going to ask us to give an account of our lives. He is not going to ask us what we did or inquire about our exterior actions --- which many times are inclined toward vanity --- he is going to ask us about the love that we put into all the things we did. This is today's message. For this reason we have always stated and repeat once again: violence is neither evangelical nor Christian. The power of the Church is love.

Yesterday I shared an unforgettable afternoon with more than a thousand teachers of the primary and secondary schools. Most unforgettable was the phrase of one of the professors --- this phrase is still vibrating in my heart. He told me: *Because you have planted love among the teachers, you are harvesting love.* I have not done anything extraordinary, but if I have planted a little bit of love, then yes I have the joy of gathering up so many, many expressions of this love. I want to tell you the same thing. What is not planted cannot be harvested. How are we going to harvest love in this Republic if we only plant hatred? Let us plant love! Let us take advantage of every situation --- the very ordinary and small things that we do, as well as the difficult things, for example, forgiveness of our enemies --- and use these situations to plant love. Let us allow our lives to be inspired by love and we will see the world transformed without any need for things from outside because the Kingdom of God is not on the other side of the sea or in the heights of heaven, but in the intimacy of your own heart.

¹ See 2nd Vatican Council, Messages of the Council to Humanity, (8 December 1965), *To Heads of State*, 5.

² See Paul VI, *The religious value of the Council*, Allocution on the closing of Vatican II (7 December 1965), 16.

³ See *ibid*, 6.

⁴ The original expression of St John of the Cross is: "In the evening they will examine you in love, learn to love as God wants to be loved".

Margin References (a) Lk 17,21: (b) Dt 30,12-14: (c) M 1,3: (d) Dt 30,10: (e) Lk 10,27: (f) GS 14: (g) Col 1,15-16: (h) Mt 25,35-40: (i) Lk 10,29-37: (j) Dt 30,12-14: (k) Lk 10,27: (l) Lk 10,29-37.