

THE CHURCH OF THE ARCHDIOCESE

Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 24, 1977

Genesis 18:20-32
Colossians 2:12-14
Luke 11:1-13

This Mass, transmitted by radio from the cathedral and celebrated by this servant of the People of God, who is charged with being a sign of unity in the whole Archdiocese --- this Mass always seems to be a family gathering. I would like us to feel that way during this time of reflection: a family that is anxious for the weekend to arrive so that they can come here and see how things are going and assist and collaborate in the work that must be done. I also understand that when the family comes together, especially if they are a distinguished or important family, then it becomes easy for them to watch and judge and criticize. Who knows what else the Lord will ask of them in order to be converted? What more can we say to all of you who are listening to us on radio, whose attitude is distinct from that of the Pharisees who sought to entrap Jesus, those who warmly embrace us and want to assist us so that the Kingdom of God might shine forth in our midst so that no evil might fall upon this nation? The more one is Christian, then the better one is as a citizen of this country. My sisters and brothers, it is within this context of family that I hope we can share the joys and hopes, the anxieties and problems that ought to be held in common. All men and women have their own problems. In fact, blessed are those people who have problems, because those who say they have no problem are so poor that they are not even aware of the fact they are alive --- for everyone who lives, has problems. With regard to those intimate problems of each family that you and I have brought here to offer to the Lord, well, we do precisely that -- - we offer to the Lord all the problems of the family of God. They are our problems and as the Council stated when it spoke about the Church, nothing that is human is extraneous to the heart of the Church (a). The Church is so human that it feels as her own all these problems: the stomach ache of the child at home, the debt that cannot be paid, the inability to find work, etc. The Church is touched by all these situations; she is sensitive to them and experiences the pain and anguish of those who bear these problems as a result of injustice.

Life of the Church

This week, however, we have been enriched as Church and as a community. I want to highlight the witness of holiness and serenity that our Jesuit brothers have given to us. It has been a week of tragic threats and yet not one of them has fled the country¹. It is said that a young Jesuit named Luis Gonzaga was involved in a conversation during recreation when the following question was posed: *If the final judgment were to come at this moment, what would you do?* One responded and said: *I would run to the chapel so that I could be found praying.* Another said: *I would go to the studio to be found working.* Luis Gonzaga said: *I would continue playing because this is God's will for me at this time.* This phrase of Father Gonzaga seems to have been the motto of the Jesuit community during this past week: *Where do you want to be found on July 21?* No one has fled and they have responded: *We want to be found in our places.* Many thanks to you, my Jesuit brothers, because in this way

you have shown your love for truth, duty and life. You have shown that this is your vocation. If death should come, we want to be found in our places. If only all Christians would, at this time, live with this same courage, a courage that can only be displayed by those who know they are working for the true good, even though they are assaulted by calumnies that attempt to discredit their noble work.

While speaking about the Jesuits, I want to highlight and thank the Christian people for their many expressions of solidarity. I was especially moved by the thousands of signatures that almost filled a book and that were presented to the President, including the poor helped by *Vivienda Minima*. What a beautiful example! The letter of Father Ibanez is a further testimony of one who feels that not everything is lost, that there is an attitude of gratitude, that our people are noble, that there is no need for the calumnies to continue, that there is a true nobility in the hearts of the poor and the poor are grateful for and appreciative of those who are true friends. I was also moved by the collaboration of the young people and young students, many of whom are from the upper classes. This nobility, when it is found in whatever class, is always manifested in a gratitude for the good that is done and never forgets those who do good, and also gives thanks to those who persecute them. As “father of this family” I also give thanks to the men and women religious who have expressed their solidarity with the Jesuit community. This is a sign that we are living together as sisters and brothers. This week I have experienced a new joy, for I know that the Jesuits are not alone. I am, however, saddened when members of the Christian family speak ignoble words and show a lack of love and solidarity. These Christians, who in the moment of trial, fail to manifest their unity or solidarity because such and such a problem does not touch them personally, are called by the Lord to repent and understand that every Catholic, every priest and every bishop is offended when a sister/brother is attacked even though they might not personally agree with them in everything. But this is my family and therefore whoever offends one of my sisters or brothers, offends me. I want to take advantage of these events to focus more on our unity.

Speaking about solidarity, I also want to highlight and thank those who published a wonderful article.² I want to tell the author that he moved me to tears when I read the study he did about the correspondence that comes to my office. Thanks to Father Guevarra, who is an advisor in the area of news and information at the Curia, a profound psychological and pastoral study was prepared. The basis for this study was the thousands of letters that arrive at my office --- the greatest number has been received from *campesinos*. Other people, from the middle and upper classes, have also written because they have understood and live these problems. They have not locked themselves up in selfishness that could, in turn, make them cold-hearted in face of these realities. Rather they have tried to understand the present situation. Other letters have been received from religious men and women, from confederations of priests who labor in other countries, from Episcopal conferences and cardinals, from individual bishops who have read about our situation in the press or read reports about the situation that is occurring here in El Salvador where the Church is being persecuted.

Thanks to God, the Church stands as a gallant figure in this Kingdom of God, undaunted and serene as she confronts persecution that so many want to deny but that the Church lives in the very depths of its being. My sisters and brothers, these letters are testimonies that give me great satisfaction. The majority of this correspondence approves the ministry of the Church. Some, however, have expressed views that are contrary to our ministry and others have leveled harsh accusations against the way the Archbishop and the

Archdiocese carry out their responsibilities. Nevertheless, *Vox populi, vox Dei*. I feel that the voice of God is revealed in the messages contained in the written letters, written in pencil with many spelling errors, as well as in those messages that are beautifully typed on IBM typewriters and that arrive from Europe and the United States. All of these letters are expressions of admiration and solidarity with our Church, our priests, our religious men and women, and our Catholic schools. They approve the position that the Church has taken in this situation. In fact, the Primate of England has written and stated that *the Archdiocese has encouraged the Church throughout the world*.³ My sisters and brothers, these words do not make us proud because we realize that all these things are not of our doing, but rather we must give credit to God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who has found the land of the Archdiocese a most fertile field.

I invite you to continue to live in solidarity. In today's edition of *Orientación*, we have begun to publish the study that I mentioned before.⁴ It speaks about the persons who have written me, people who see in this humble servant the presence of a Church that is the hope of the *campesinos*. It also refers to the government and the economic sector and believes that if they sincerely listened to this dialogue of reflection, then the Church could occupy its rightful place. This is the other part that has come to light this week and that I read about in an article that recounted the events of these tragic days. The article was published in *Estudios Centroamericanos*, a journal of the Universidad José Simeón Cañas. I recommend this article to you for it is a theological analysis of the Church's action during these days. In its conclusion the author states: *The Church wants our nation to move beyond the actual crisis. It wants to establish order and justice. It wants to be allowed to join together with those other forces that are interested in building a more just society. The Church wants to be understood and wants the persecution and the slander to cease. The Church also wants to win its battle, but if it loses, we believe that it has won the fundamental battle, for history will remember that during this time of the nation's greatest crisis, the Church, with all her limitations and mistakes, humanized the country with the purity of her words, the honesty of her actions, her strength in suffering and her option for the dispossessed*.⁵

This wonderful study tells us how we, as Church, have restored confidence and hope to people. It refers to our view of history and our proclamation of the Word. Thanks to God, we, as Catholics, have lived in the intimacy of this Church. We have lived that which is truly noble, true and sincere, while all around us we see nothing but a smoke screen of lies and distortions, calumnies and untruths. Yes, history will record that the Church, thanks to God, has lived with sincerity, even when she has been misunderstood. Yes, my sisters and brothers, you have understood us. So I thank you, and also express my thanks to the priests, the men and women religious, members of the various Catholic movements, base communities and parishioners throughout the Archdiocese. During this time you have lived your lives so wonderfully! Let us continue profiting from it.

I also want to thank you for responding to the question that I posed in a dialogue that was broadcast on radio. I asked: *How would you like the Archdiocese to celebrate its feast on August 6th?* I was pleased to see the sense of faith and true devotion that you have for our Divine Savior. Everyone wants to purify this feast of its secular elements so that it can become a lively celebration that honors the Liberator of our people and a day that enables us to reflect on the meaning of liberation that is proclaimed by the Church --- a liberation that is brought about by the Divine Savior. We are going to collate all these suggestions and on Thursday, those in charge of our programming will begin to preach the novena of the Divine

Savior. The sermons will be based on the themes that you have suggested to us. I invite you to listen to this Novena on Radio YSAX that will be broadcast at 5:00am, 1:00pm and 8:00pm. Let us reflect together on the significance of having the Divine Savior of the world as our patron and let us prepare together for this feast.

Many told us that August 5th, the evening before the feast, should be a time of prayer and that our prayer should be intensified. Therefore, I invite all the pastors to organize the 5th of August as a day of preparation for our feast day celebration --- make it a day of prayer and penance. I also ask that the sacrament of Reconciliation be made available to as many men and women and young people as possible, so that all those who come to participate in the celebration of August 6th can receive the Eucharist. We invite everyone in San Salvador to come and pray with us on August 5th in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, which houses the statue that will be carried in the traditional procession. Thanks to God, the prayer groups will gather in the Basilica to intensify their prayer for our nation. The procession that involves the participation of so many people from throughout the republic is most beautiful and we pray that it will become a manifestation of hope for this nation. We also pray that this time of suffering and pain might be transformed into a great trust in the Transfigured Lord.

On August 6th, we will celebrate the Mass outdoors, on the steps in front of the cathedral's plaza. We ask that all the parishes bring their banners so that at the time of communion their pastors can give them the Eucharist. I ask all the priests to concelebrate this Mass. The absence of even one priest will be seen as a lack of unity with the faith of the people, with the hierarchy and with the Divine Savior. Let us all come together to celebrate this feast of the divine Savior of our nation. We want this to be a feast of the people of the Divine Savior, and a concelebration where everyone and every action manifests the piety and devotion of our nation.

The obligation to denounce sin

Because of the events that occurred last week and the activities planned for this week, I want to focus on the Word of God that was read today. It is very easy to say: *there is no persecution*. But when the Church's mission is analyzed in light of God's Word, it is clear that there is persecution. In light of today's readings, it appears that the Church has the obligation to denounce sin. The first reading speaks about social sin and the other readings refer to the Church's mission to elevate the hearts and minds of humankind in prayer so that they can attain their true development. The Pope has said that the height of humankind's development is seen in their relationship with God. The truly free man is Abraham who spoke with God, or Moses, the leader of the people. Look at the first reading where God speaks to Abraham: *The outcry... is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see (b) with my own eyes*. This is a beautiful anthropomorphic image of God who appears to become man. This is a rhetorical, biblical image that represents God as a man who comes to earth to find out, investigate and see for himself the sins of his people.

In this reading, reference is made to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but we are not told the nature of these sins. An authentic interpretation, however, states that these sins were grave disorders of lustfulness, sins of the flesh. Social sin changes over time, but its essence remains the same. The bishops gathered together in Medellin in 1968 spoke about social sin in Latin America and stated: *we are in a sinful situation (c)*. At first sight, these words appear to be very harsh but ask the question: *what is sin?* Sin is the death of God. Sin led God to die on the cross because it was the only way to obtain the forgiveness of sin. Sin is an

offense against the law of God because God's plan is trampled upon. In other words, sin ignores that which God desires and leads humankind to search for happiness apart from God and against God. Men and women begin to find their happiness in other persons, money, political power, the flesh, lustfulness and adulterous love. Thus one turns away from God in favor of other realities, be it money, politics, lustfulness or any other earthly pleasure. Therefore, this scorned and offended God cries out to the people: *the sins of this people are so great that I must come down and see and punishment already afflicts a sinful people.*

Medellin stated that this was a sinful situation *of institutionalized injustice that cries out to heaven* (d). I believe that we all feel that this reality cries out to heaven. My sisters and brothers, Bishop Pironio, perfect of one of the Vatican Congregations and a trusted confidant of the Pope stated that he studied liberation theology and read the words of these sound theologians. He analyzed social sin in Latin America and said: *the offense against God that results in social inequality, in which so many nations of Latin America live, can be explained first of all because people do not understand or develop their dignity. They live in a state of conformity that has become the opium of the people.*⁶ My sisters and brothers, this is a very real situation. Rich people do not see themselves responsible for this social sin. There are lazy people and also people who live on the margins of society who do not engage in the struggle to become aware of their dignity or work to become better persons. Others are calmly asleep, believing that someone else will mark out their destiny for them --- all these people are sinning.

In this situation, then, the Church must promote these men and women who are asleep. Thus the Church has established centers for the promotion of *campesinos*, Bible reflection groups, etc. All of these groups promote the development of people. Thanks to God, we are witnessing many workers, *campesinos*, and people, who have lived on the margins of society, come to an awareness of their dignity. As people become aware of their dignity, they also become conscious of the injustice that has marginalized them for so long. If I am a child of God and must awake from my sleep, then I must participate in the politics that seeks my country's common good and I have a right to share in the goods that God has created for everyone. This, however, is not done through class struggle or violence. I repeat once more that the Church does not preach communism, but we struggle, elbow to elbow, with all those who seek their just social, economic and political demands. The Church carries in her heart a distinct spirit that sets her apart from other liberators. Because one afternoon, the Church participates in a gathering of teachers, we are called collaborators of ANDES⁷(National Association of Salvadorian Teachers). The Church agrees with the teachers' just demands but the Church could never be sympathetic with a movement that rejects God and fails to develop her sons and daughters. Keep this in mind: the position of the Church with regard to the promotion of the human person does not follow communist lines but rather the lines of the Gospel.

We are in a sinful situation and the Church must struggle. If the Church, through her promotion of *campesinos* and those who are marginalized, is seen as subversive and her priests expelled and persecuted, let it be clear then, that the Church is being persecuted. The Church, however, must continue to promote the development of the human person. She must continue to say: *Do not fall asleep! You are children of God! Work to reclaim your dignity! You are the creator of your own destiny! Work to establish the common good!* The Church cannot lay aside or renounce her mission of promoting the human person. The Gospel obliges her to preach this reality. Thus the Catholic schools and youth centers must awaken the

consciences of men and women who have been marginalized and accomplices in creating this situation of social sin.

Bishop Pironio says there is another source of sin and that is the personal sin of those who monopolize the things that God has created for the happiness of all people.⁸ Don't let it be said now all these things must be divided up. This is a stupid objection that has many times been thrown in the Church's face. That everything will be divided equally and then tomorrow everyone will have done away with and used everything. No, we are not referring to this at all. Rather we are speaking about a transformation of private property that while respecting the right to private property also knows how to give this right its true significance which consists in not only producing more, but producing more for the common good of everyone. Thus we are dealing with God-created goods of the earth that can bear an abundance of fruit in our land and bring happiness to so many people who do not have even the basic necessities of life. Yes, this is a source of social sin, and like the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, cries out to heaven and makes God come to investigate how things are going. Political marginalization is also a social sin crying out to heaven: all people have received from God the capacity to contribute to the common good. Not to allow a person to contribute to the country's good what they can give is also an abuse of power. It is also like hoarding the goods God has given to all.

The Church cannot keep silent before these economic, political and social injustices. If the Church didn't speak it would be an accomplice of marginalization, of an unhealthy and sinful conformity, or of those who profit from this to abuse and oppress economically and politically the vast majority of the people. Brothers and sisters, this is the voice of the Church, and while it is given no freedom to proclaim these gospel truths, there is persecution. And these are substantial issues, not ones of little importance. It is a question of life and death for God's kingdom which Christ wishes to establish in this country. Thus sin is institutionalized and becomes part of the environment.

And we know that sin depends on the heart of each, but from the heart of each is organized a society with unjust structures that prevent a person developing in the image of God. Therefore all those influential in politics, in economics, social leaders, professionals, skilled people, and the Church as well, we must contribute to what God wants, that God's plans are not frustrated by human sin. What happened in Sodom and Gomorrah is precisely that people were searching for fulfillment outside God, just as Latin America today is seeking for fulfillment outside God, against God, destroying the human person, God's image on the earth.

The Church teaches us to pray

Another role of the Church is revealed in the Gospel passage: *Lord, teach us to pray* (e). Jesus taught them: *Father*, the precious word that can resolve everything if we could only learn how to say *Father* to the creator of all things and understand that as a result of this proclamation we are all sisters and brothers. We would then ask: *your Kingdom come*, the deepest desire of everyone's heart because when his Kingdom comes on earth there will be greater justice, love, and a greater sense of community. Forgive us because we are sinners. My sisters and brothers, this is beautiful because prayer is the height of human development. The human person is valued not for what he/she has, but for what he/she is. The human person is most fulfilled when he/she comes face to face with God and understands the

marvelous things that God has done for him/her. God has created an intelligent being, free and capable of love.

If someone of those who are following this development of my thought does not pray and says there is no need for prayer, then I invite you to undertake this intellectual exercise. Develop your personal abilities, affirm your gifts and qualities, and allow people to shower you with praise and applause. Look at how great you are. In fact, you are almost a god. You believe you are God and therefore, have no reason to pray. Yet, if you continue to develop your abilities and feel that there is some mysterious being beyond you, if you feel that your own immensity is taken in and embraced by this other greater and mysterious immensity, then at that moment you are praying. Prayer does not mean that people must lose their greatness, but rather that they embrace their greatness. Prayer also does not mean that we wait for God to do what we can do. Rather we must do our part, use our technology, invent irrigation systems for our fields, fertilize the ground, feed the cattle, do all that we can do. After we have done everything possible, then pray. Don't wait for God to do everything but after you have done everything possible, then leave the rest in God's hands. Do like those whom we have spoken about here before --- those who are preparing for a lunar flight. A Christian technician said: *Technology has done all that is possible and we hope that this will be successful. Now we must pray and ask God to bless our work.* My sisters and brothers, this is prayer. No, this does not make us less as human beings. But when we pray, expecting God to do everything while we stand idle, with our arms folded --- then at that moment we are praying to a false god. On the other hand, when we work and develop our mind and our ability to organize, and then lift up our voice to God and say: *Lord, despite the mystery of my own greatness, I understand that you are greater, you embrace me, you understand me and you are my fulfillment,* then we become fully human.

When we recognize our limitations, then we have reached the height of our development. On the other hand, when we do not pray and place all our trust in money and material goods, then listen to the word of Pope Paul VI who wrote in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio: one of the sure indexes of moral underdevelopment is the avaricious man* (f). This is seen in people who want to have more, who trust in themselves, who believe they are capable of doing everything, who believe that money and the things of this world are everything and thus God is seen as a left-over --- yes this is moral underdevelopment. When people pray and trust in God, they are fully developed and have found their true vocation.

Thus it can be said, my sisters and brothers, that the Church exists to teach people how to pray. To teach people to pray, as they ought to pray and not as a people who have fallen asleep or live in conformity with things as they are. We cannot continue to close our eyes to all that happens and believe that at the hour of death God will give us heaven. This is not Christianity. In fact, it was for this reason that Christians were seen as giving opium to others. From this perspective, communism was right to level this charge against us --- they were working while Christians were praying and did nothing. But it is precisely in this regard that Christianity can show its uniqueness if people work like communists and hope in God like Christians. See the difference my sisters and brothers? The Church must work twice as hard for human development and to awaken people to develop their abilities and to bring people to hope in God, the transcendent One without whom --- as we have said in today's prayer: *without you nothing is holy, nothing has value*).

This is freedom and if only we, as Church, would be granted this same freedom. It is for this reason that we told the government that dialogue is necessary so that we learn how to

speak the same language. We need a reflection group representing the government and another representing the Church so that evangelical and Christian development cease to be called subversive and political and so that priests who teach others to work and pray in this true modern sense of evangelization are not expelled from the country. When the government reflects and creates an atmosphere of trust for the Church which works to achieve this human development, then the Church is most willing to collaborate in this humanization of people and capital and work. This is what the Church desires. I believe that this message is sufficiently clear and today's word is proven by the example of the people of Sodom, who sought happiness while turning their backs on God, by the example of Abraham who looked for ten just men in a sinful environment, and by the example of Jesus, who teaches us how to pray.

My sisters and brothers, let us conclude by reflecting on the second reading in which Saint Paul tells us that Christ is like this great document on whom is written all the sins of humankind. By being nailed to the cross *he obliterated the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst* (g). I see no more beautiful fire than that described by Saint Paul as he describes Christ on the cross: *despoiling the principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them*, for God, through the sacrifice of his Son, takes away the sin of the world. Sin has no dominion over humankind and the devil need not rule the world. Rather it must be the Kingdom of God that Christ has won with his cross and blood. Thus, Christians must work with Christ and, if necessary, die on the same cross. Let us step forward to embrace the challenge! My sisters and brothers, let us work for the Kingdom of God so that this Church of the Archdiocese might be a Church that is faithful to the Gospel, a Church that knows how to work and to pray and to develop men and women who know how to build a better world with God.

¹ On the 20 June 1977 the ultimatum given by the paramilitary organisation Union of White Warriors (UGB) that all Jesuits should leave the country expired.

² See "Leyendo las cartas enviadas a Monseñor Romero", *Orientación*, 24 July 1977.

³ A reference to the letter sent by Basil Hume, archbishop of Westminster, in which he writes: "The position which you personally have adopted, supported by your companions in the diocese, is an inspiration for the Church in the whole world". See "Solidaridad universal con la Iglesia salvadoreña", *Orientación*, 24, 17 July, 1977.

⁴ See "Leyendo las cartas enviadas a Monseñor Romero", *Orientación*, 24, 31 July & 14 August 1977.

⁵ "Entre la persecución y la esperanza. Crónica de otras seis semanas en la Arquidiócesis de San Salvador", ECA 342-343 (1977), pp. 313-316.

⁶ See E. Pironio, *Escritos pastorales*, Madrid, 1973, p. 91.

⁷ National Association of Salvadoran Teachers (ANDES).

⁸ See E. Pironio, *op. cit.*, p. 92

Margin References (a) GS 1: (b) Gn 18,21: (c) Mt 2,1: (d) M 1,1: (e) Lk 11,12: (f) PP 19: (g) Col 2,14.