

# CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CROSS

**Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**September 4, 1977**

*Wisdom 9:13-19*  
*Philemon 9b-10, 12-17*  
*Luke 14:25-33*

At the altar today you see a group of children and young people. They are members of the Mountain Crusade that was founded ten years ago by Msgr. Alférez in the church of Candelaria. From there, the group has grown and now exists in many other parishes. These young people promote their Christian education through sound recreation. I want to congratulate them and hope they continue to flourish in the parishes. Today every form of pedagogy is necessary in order lead children and young people to embrace the austerity of the gospel which is proclaimed in today's readings.

## **Life of the Church**

This week we have been saddened by the publication of new defamations against the Church.<sup>1</sup> Your bishop has been characterized as one who encourages those who are spreading the guerrilla warfare. This is a vile calumny and from the depths of my heart I forgive those who have done this and I pray to the Lord that they be converted. Without any doubt, I know that they are listening to me because our persecutors have great interest in listening to our message. Therefore, please listen to me, but listen with the good will of honest persons who want to know the truth and not as persons who want to continue to spread evil and confusion. There has been much confusion during these days, but the Church is serene in loving the truth and proclaiming the truth and the people find in the Church that pillar of truth that Christ wants her to be.

Because of our desire to place in every area of the diocese priests who are in communion with their bishop and work to carry on the actual and true mission of the Church, we are establishing new parishes: Father Arturo García Velis will work in the settlement of Costa Rica. The pastor of that church will go to Quezaltepeque. We will continue to study how we can cover those areas where the persecution of the Church has created vacancies. At the present time, we have twenty-five fewer priests as a result of this persecution. Therefore, I beg you to continue to pray and *ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest* (a)

The laity, for their part, are coming to understand their role. My heart is filled with great satisfaction when I see the laity --- university students, professionals, young men and women, *campesinos*, workers --- developing themselves and becoming a more authentic Church that demands that those who have been baptized cooperate with her in this most difficult time. Faith Based Communities are arising everywhere and are true centers for Christ's work. I am very pleased to receive the impressions of these people who, throughout the Archdiocese, are becoming more aware of their responsibility as Church. New

communities of religious women will also begin to work in direct pastoral ministry in those towns and villages where there is no resident priest.

My sisters and brothers, as I said in my First Pastoral Letter,<sup>2</sup> I believe we are living in a time of Easter that is rooted in the cross of suffering, but a suffering that is fruitful. The precious Word of God that is proclaimed today invites us to reflect on these realities. Therefore I want to speak about two ideas that define the position and the nature of this Church that we belong to. I pray, my dear Catholics, that all who are members of this Church that we have come to know and that we have the honor to serve, not because of our own merits but through the grace of God --- this Church is not the invention of human wisdom, but is the realization of God's ideals in this world. We will never fully understand this on earth, but in order to come to some understanding of all of this, we must try, at least, to not oppose this reality, for this is a sin against the Holy Spirit, but rather we must try to enter into this mystery. Each Sunday, in the Word of God, we find more clearly outlined for us God's desires for this Church that is in the world, in the midst of humanity that is loved by God --- a world that God sends his Church to save and enlighten. The two ideas that I want to present here are the following: first: the Church of the Holy Spirit, and second, the Church of the cross and detachment. In light of the readings that we have just heard, I want to highlight these points. The second reading, the letter of Saint Paul to Philemon, presents us with a starting point, for we are presented with the figure of an authentic Christian and an authentic promoter of human liberation and social justice in the Church.

### **The Church of the Holy Spirit**

In the first place, the first reading invites us to lift ourselves up and place ourselves before the Wisdom of God: *For the deliberations of mortals are timid and unsure are our plans. For what man knows God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends? When things are in heaven, who can search them out? Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given Wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?* (b). This is the Church, a focal point for humanity, where the Holy Spirit is poured forth in such a way that all of their situations are illuminated and all people are oriented toward their eternal destiny.

When the Second Vatican Council analyzed the complicated and profound nature of the human person, the Council referred to the intelligence of humankind and said: *Man judges right that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind. By relentlessly employing his talents through the ages, he has indeed made progress in the practical sciences, technology, and the liberal arts. In our times he has won superlative victories, especially in his probing of the material world and in subjecting it to himself* (c), but people run the risk of remaining in the phenomena that they have been able to dominate with mathematics, science and technology. What precision, for example, is needed in order to travel in space! What precise technology! Therefore the Council goes on to state: *The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be. Our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. It is, finally, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that man comes by faith to the contemplation and appreciation of the divine plan* (d).

My dear sisters and brothers, I invite you, each one of you, to place your abilities at the service of the Church and society. The more scientific knowledge you have, the more I invite you. I also challenge you to look for an opposition between your science and pride and the humble faith of our God who has revealed to us his eternal plan of salvation. Science is

not authentic as long as it is not harmonized with this humble faith. The truly wise person is the one who, at the altar of science, achieves this wisdom. The humble achieve this with their prayer and simplicity. The wise and the vulgar, if they are people of faith, will have to find themselves in God and will have to be humble in order to reverence these plans of divine Wisdom who wants to save them. Wisdom wants to save them, not through their human science, but through the wisdom of humility, the cross, austerity and sacrifice.

When Pope Paul VI closed the Second Vatican Council, he challenged modern civilization and stated: *The modern mind, accustomed to access everything in terms of usefulness, will readily admit that the council's value is great if only because everything has been referred to human usefulness. Hence no one should ever say that a religion like the Catholic religion is without use, seeing that when it has its greatest self-awareness and effectiveness, as it has in council, it declares itself entirely on the side of man in his service. In this way the Catholic religion and human life reaffirm their alliance with one another, the fact that they converge on one single human reality: the Catholic religion is for mankind.*<sup>3</sup> The Pope referred to a prayer of Saint Catherine of Siena: *In your nature, Eternal God, I shall know my own.* He then went on to say: *The Council has taken place during a time of almost universal atheism, a time which everyone admits is oriented toward the conquest of the kingdom of earth rather than that of heaven. Yet the Council has had the courage to preach a religion that proclaims the fact that God exists, and is intelligent and is Creator and only in God can humankind understand their nature and their mystery. Even when humankind, with all its science, concludes its investigation, humankind continues to remain a mystery*<sup>4</sup>. Why did God make me? What is the reason for my struggles here on earth? Why work so hard when evil people seem to live better than good people? Why should humankind make every effort to live honorably? The Council, like the Psalmist, responds: *happy are those who take refuge in God and serve the Lord with fear* (Psalm 2:11). In the light of God and the infinite wisdom of the Lord, humankind comes to discover the value of struggle and hope, even when the world seems to have lost this value. For this reason the Church of El Salvador can glory in the fact that she has maintained her hope while many people have lost hope. The Church speaks of hope for a better country at a time when everything seems to conspire against the nation and its well-being, at a time when there is so much hypocrisy and insanity that seems to disfigure her appearance.

In this situation the Church has maintained her serenity despite the many slanders against her. She has maintained her doctrine of faith and her hope. She never preaches violence or vengeance. Despite the many offenses committed against her, she always forgives, and calls people to repentance. She does this because she finds her support in the wisdom of God and not in political, social and material things. In his discourse, the Pope stated: *At a time in which forgetfulness of God has become habitual, ... the theocentric and theological concept of man and the universe...has been given a new prominence by the council. ... God will be recognized as Our Creator, our truth, our happiness; so much so that the effort to look on him and to center our heart in Him which we call contemplation, is the highest, the most perfect act of the spirit, the act which even today can and must be at the apex of all human activity.*<sup>5</sup>

Contemplatives are involved in the actual work of the Church. These are people who put aside their worldly tasks in order to contemplate the beauty of God and from their state of contemplation offer the world the beauty that delights humanity. Today, in this era of activism, there are monasteries of men and women contemplatives and religious orders that put aside their daily work and spend hours in profound prayer. As priests, if we want to be

faithful to our mission, we know that we cannot just preach and work, but rather our best time is spent on our knees before the Lord, in prayerful contemplation. From this contemplation, from this experience of joy and profound satisfaction, we discover the words that we must speak. My sisters and brothers, the Church today calls us to this contemplation.

Cardinal Pironio, the great promoter of authentic liberation in Latin America, has said that if this longing for liberation among oppressed peoples --- marginalised in their poverty and hunger and illiteracy --- is a cry for a liberation that is theirs by right, then it is the Holy Spirit who is crying out from the depths of these people who hunger. The Church cannot be deaf to the voice of the Spirit who cries out in these people.<sup>6</sup>

Why then is the Church called subversive and so many other slanderous names when she is led by the voice of the Spirit who cries out from the midst of the world's misery, calling for a greater justice and unity among people? It is the voice of the Spirit that cries out. In order to hear the Spirit's voice and respond, the Church must place herself in prayer before this Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Thanks to God, there is much prayer in our Church. The balance between the Spirit that cries out from the midst of the human misery of our people and the voice of the Spirit that cries out from the midst of contemplation and prayer is what makes the Church an authentic liberator of Latin America, a liberator without demagoguery, hatred, class struggle, a liberator who is rooted in the power of God's wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church of the Holy Spirit; this is our Church. As we heard in the first reading, we will never understand this Church if we think about it with human criteria. One will never understand the Church in terms of political language because politics is involved in human intrigue and the Church always distances herself from these intrigues. The Church preaches from the light of the Spirit of truth, not because she is subversive, but because those who provoke subversion with their intrigue and ill-will and pride are tempting the Spirit of God.

The Church wants to proceed with sincerity and with the light of the Spirit. If we want to honor the Church, then I invite all of you, gathered together and reflecting on today's Word of God that speaks about divine Wisdom and the Holy Spirit, to become people of prayer. My sisters and brothers, we have continually inculcated this need for prayer. Once before I spoke about this and said that some people see prayer as an antiquated practice, but I assure you that prayer continues to be a modern and valid practice. I previously said this to you but I repeat my words here --- believe that you are the greatest person you can imagine, everything is nothing for those who are created in the image of God; and you are that image of God and share in the life of the infinite and immeasurable. There is no doubt, you are great and prayer will not diminish your greatness. Prayer asks only one thing: to analyze and sincerely recognize your abilities. The truly humble man or woman does not hide his/her qualities. A humble person is one who, like Mary, says, *the mighty One has done great things for me* (e). Each one of us has an individual greatness. God would not be our Author if we were something worthless. You and I and all of us are worth very much, because we are creatures of God, and God has prodigally given his wonderful gifts to every person.

And so the Church values human beings and contends for their rights, for their freedom, for their dignity. That is an authentic Church endeavor. As long as human rights are violated, as long as there are arbitrary arrests and tortures, then the Church considers herself persecuted. She feels troubled, because she values human beings and cannot tolerate

that the image of God is trampled upon by persons who brutalize others. The Church wants to make that image of God beautiful. So I tell you, the greater your intellectual ability, the better your organizational skills, the more will-power you have, the more beautiful you are, etc., there will come a moment when you realize that all of this will end. At that moment when you recognize your limitation, when you realize that there is something or someone beyond you, then you are at prayer. You recognize that as great as you may be, you are not God. There is a boundary beyond which you begin to feel the need for God. You need God and begin to say: *Lord, in face of my limitations and smallness, I need you!* Then, from the limitations of your greatness, you begin to see the infinite greatness of God. You begin to contemplate, and pray, and ask for forgiveness for having offended God. Above all else, you begin to ask for the grace that you need; *Lord, without you, I am nothing.*

My sisters and brothers, when we live in this way, we are responding to the word of God that tells us today: *Thus were the paths of those on earth made straight, and men learned what was your pleasure and were saved by Wisdom* (f). How easy it is to be pleasing to God. We only have to recognize the infinite Wisdom of God and allow ourselves to be inspired by this Wisdom and in light of this Wisdom develop all our abilities. But in all of this, we must recognize the need for God. This is the service that the Church offers to humankind, for the Church desires to purify this Wisdom of God from all lies and wants to make this Wisdom of God the Wisdom of humankind. Then the Church is persecuted because she calls people to conversion and points out the sins against divine Wisdom and the false idols that people have erected and adored. But the Church is persecuted for a good cause, for the Wisdom of God and because she looks into her own heart and sees that she cannot always please humankind, especially when people are proud and idolaters. Therefore, the Church must be careful of those situations where she runs the risk of losing the simplicity of divine Wisdom.

When John XXIII was the representative of the Holy See to the Middle East, he wrote this prayer: *Lord, grant me the grace to preserve this simplicity that I learned in my home. May I never lose this simplicity, because many times it is lost in these diplomatic and political environments. O Lord, preserve in me the simplicity of your wisdom.*\*\* Yes, we should pray to the Lord, *O Lord, preserve me in the simplicity of your wisdom.* Let us never lose this simplicity or begin to plot how we can win political and social favor in order to advance here on earth. Jesus says: *Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it* (g). There are many in our Archdiocese, men and women, who are losing their lives, and even though they lose their lives and continue to lose them, like many of our beloved priests and catechists, yet because they have remained faithful to their mission and God's wisdom, they make themselves unpleasant and are persecuted by human wisdom and die, as we have seen during these last few days, in such cruel ways.

My brothers and sisters, this is the Church of the Holy Spirit. This is the Church that, as the Council says, cries out: *Come to Jesus, your divine spouse, who is waiting for you and watching you struggle.*(h) He wants to give you a definitive embrace of eternal happiness in that place where wisdom overflows with every one of her successful developments. This is why it is worthwhile to live. We catch a glimpse of this eternity here on earth and therefore, we walk in the light of this wisdom without giving any importance to human intrigue and persecution. May we be Christians whose daily lives are enlightened by the wisdom of God,

the Holy Spirit. May we be a Church that is devoted to the Holy Spirit and may we, my sisters and brothers, lift up our voices to the Spirit in prayer.

I want to take advantage of this moment and thank you for the many letters that say: *We pray that the Holy Spirit might give you wisdom, peace and strength.* I want to note here the many beautiful letters from the children of Escuela San Luis, who have entered their letters in a competition. There is no doubt that God speaks through these children. These young children have written beautiful letters that truly encourage me as pastor --- an encouragement that I often do not receive from those who occupy high positions, yet I receive it from children and humble and simple people. Many thanks to you, children of Escuela San Luis and my dear sisters and brothers, who remember me in your prayers. Let us pray for one another, so that all of us, bishops, priests, religious and faithful, might form the authentic Church of the Holy Spirit, a circle that illuminates the Republic. May this Church enlighten the paths of our country and the beautiful face of this country that we sincerely love and that we want to see happy and illuminated with the light of God.

### **The Church of the Cross and detachment**

Today's Gospel, in which Jesus invites us to follow him, appears to be a foolish passage. The original language says: *if anyone comes to me without hating...* (i). A more friendly translation proposes: *if anyone comes to me without subordinating.* Yet in its original language, Jesus understood and spoke these words from an eastern perspective. *If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* Jesus then places before us two comparisons, a person who wants to build a tower, but does not consider the cost and another who wants to go war, but does not calculate if victory can be won. (j) Jesus invites us to follow him. Look at the beginning of the passage: *great crowds were traveling with him* (Luke 14:25). In this section of the gospel, Saint Luke describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and we know how this journey ended. Many people followed. But Jesus does not want to deceive anyone and so he speaks clearly, *You can follow me, but you must ask yourself if you are willing to accept my conditions.* One who builds a tower must first ask: *is there enough for its completion,* and a king who is planning to go to war must also ask: *Is my army able to achieve victory?* Otherwise, they will be laughed at when they fail. So Jesus speaks to us: Reflect on your ability to detach yourself from the things of this world and accept the cross. I am not offering you a crown of roses with social and political privileges. I only offer you the cross. Those who follow me have to be so detached from worldly goods that their love for their mother or wife and even themselves will not be an obstacle in following me.

So I ask you: How many times have I preached to you about the fact that love is the Church's power? And here Jesus preaches hatred for one's father and mother and spouse. I tell you this must be understood in the way that Jesus spoke these words and perhaps using the word *subordinate* enables us to better understand his message. The love of Jesus is so absolute and the light of the divine Wisdom that Jesus brought to the world is so clear that if we want to follow Jesus, then we cannot measure the cost. Yes, we can love mother and spouse and children and country and all things of the earth. But we must place these realities in a hierarchy and all of these then must be placed beneath that love of the Absolute. When Jesus says: *everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple,* he is inviting us to hand over all that we have to the Absolute.

I believe that with this invitation the large crowd that was following Jesus was reduced to a small group. Then Jesus asked this group: *Do you also want to leave? Simon Peter answered him, "Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (k). Then the crowd dispersed and sought their security and protection here in this world. How easy it is to seek protection here on earth and how foolish it seems to trust in the Cross. Nevertheless, our faith asks us to be detached, for the Cross of Christ is the key to true liberation. Today there is much talk of liberation and there are many false liberators. The Christian liberator is one who is convinced, in theory and in practice, of the Cross of Christ. The Council speaks beautifully of this reality: *The Church, like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes* (l). Therefore, when the Cross becomes Easter, when the Good Friday Cross of Jesus becomes the resurrection, we are given an idea about the meaning of life: cross and martyrdom, but then resurrection and eternal life. Only the friends of the Cross, only those who embrace the Cross without any fear of losing material possessions and loved ones, only those who commit themselves to following the Absolute, only these will be the courageous ones whom Christ relies upon.

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church that we attempt to shape, and therefore I say to you once again: I am happy to be part of this Church that does not find its support in the powers of the earth. These powers must be converted to the Church in order to be saved. The Church does not love to enter into conflict, but accepts conflict when the powers of the earth despise her and do not trust in her. When the world returns to the Cross, and becomes that reality that Christ spoke about: *When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself* (m), then the Church will accept all those, even the greatest sinner, if they have embraced the Cross. The Cross is salvation. The Cross, however, does not need approval from the world, for it brings the world Wisdom and the power of God. The Cross offers protection and does not ask for or need protection on earth. The Cross offers protection to those who are willing to accept it, a protection that is eternal and absolute. When the Church proclaims this witness of the Cross that is despised and persecuted, but loved by God, when the Church no longer seeks security in worldly possessions that give her less credibility, then, as the Council says, she must be willing to renounce all her earthly privileges, and walk totally exposed and open, for this is the meaning of the authentic Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (n).

My brothers and sisters, this is the Cross that the Gospel offers us today. Our divine Redeemer and Savior invites us to follow the way of this Cross. This is the Wisdom that ought to enlighten the minds of all those who want to be truly happy and loyal to God. As we heard in the first reading from the Book of Wisdom, this is the language that people of the world are unable to understand, but is only understood by faith and the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist that we are going to celebrate today, our Lord will reveal to us that, on this Sunday in September of 1977, his love and Cross and Wisdom are once again offered to the world. Each Sunday, from the Calvary of every altar, the Lord continues to tell us: *This is my Body which will be given up for you. This is the cup of my Blood... that will be shed for you and for all*. It is only through the forgiveness of the Cross that we can hope for the liberation of Latin America and all people. Who will collaborate with me? Who will embrace this Cross and bring it to the world and plant it as a sign of salvation? My sisters and brothers, I hope that each one of you, who is reflecting on this message, will, from the depths of your heart, tell the Lord that you will embrace forever this Cross. Tell the Lord that you will live as Church and be a true sign and a sacrament of salvation for our country and for our time.

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<sup>1</sup> Extreme right organizations accused Monsignor Romero, through paid adverts and articles in the newspapers, of organizing terrorist acts. For example, in *La Opinión* of April 1978 carries the following headline:

“Monsignor Romero prepares acts of terrorism”.

<sup>2</sup> See *La Iglesia de la Pascua*, first pastoral letter of Monsignor Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador (10 April 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, *The religious value of the Council*, Allocution on the closure of Vatican II (7 December 1965).

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> See E. Pironio, *Escritos pastorals*, Madrid, 1973, p. 71.

*Margin References* (a) Lk 10,2: (b) Ws 9,13-14: (c) GS 15: (d) GS 15: (e) Lk 1,49: (f) Ws 9,18: (g) Lk 9,24: (h) LG 4: (i) Lk 14,26-27: (j) Lk 14,25: (k) Jn 6,67-68: (l) LG 8: (m) Jn 12,32: (n) LG 8: