

# THE RIGHT USE OF THE GOODS GOD CREATED

**Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**September 25, 1977**

*Amos 6:1a, 4-7*  
*1 Timothy 6:11-16*  
*Luke 16:19-31*

My dear sisters and brothers.

As was previously announced, I now invite you who are gathered here in the cathedral and in large and small groups in your communities and reflecting with us by radio to offer this Mass and your prayers for the Holy Father. Pope Paul VI will celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday tomorrow. The Holy Spirit has preserved him with a clear mind, with the natural aches and pains of one who is 80 years old, but nonetheless, with a clarity that enables him to be a true instrument of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in these difficult times. Therefore, as a sign of our communion with the Pope and of our faithful allegiance to him --- indeed our people are characterized by this love for the Pope --- let us orient our prayers, our Mass and our communion to the Lord in this way that is customary for the Church, using this ejaculatory prayer that we have learned: *Let us pray for our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI --- and the people respond --- May the Lord preserve his life and make him happy on earth and do not allow him to fall into the hands of his enemies.* This is a beautiful liturgical prayer that throughout the centuries has been used to express the communion of the People of God with the one who has been put in place as the visible head of this same people. I believe that when we refer to the realities of our people, we render homage to the Holy Father and are in harmony with his heart as pastor.

## **Events of the week**

Very unpleasant events have occurred this week. For example, radio stations were taken over, a shoot-out wounded several policemen and demonstrations were held at the university to protest the assassination of the rector.<sup>1</sup> Above all, we are pained by the continued lack of information concerning the disappeared. The kidnapping of Mrs. Chiurato remains a mystery. Again, in the name of charity, we ask those responsible to negotiate and not abuse the freedom of this individual. We also raise our voice on behalf of so many others who are in anguish and want to hear from their children who have disappeared. I have been visited by mothers in tears and anguish, who have gone as beggars from one police station to another, asking for their children. Ridiculing their pain, the police tell them: *He/she is not here, look for him/her in another place.* We have the case of Amadeo Recinos Quintanilla, Salomé Rodríguez Carrero, and Antonio Alvarez Rodríguez. We are criticized because we call them humble catechists while government officials call them criminals. I am not defending their innocence, but I ask that we be given information about them. Are they dead or alive? If they are alive, then bring them before the courts. If they are criminals, let them be punished according to the law, but don't continue to commit this horrible crime of remaining silent, for it causes great anguish to so many mothers. Also, many letters are arriving from Amnesty International supporting the case of Professor Emma Rosales de

Alegría who was taken prisoner on July 17<sup>th</sup> while she accompanied her daughter to the school of Soyapango. Her daughter was beaten because she did not want to be separated from her mother.

Finally, my sisters and brother, I lament the fact of the publication and wide-spread distribution of a flyer, that many of you have seen, that places me at the head of all kinds of subversive activity. The people suspect the source of these flyers and there are indications about who might be informing others about my travels to the different towns and villages. Half-truths are worse than calumny. It is true that I traveled to Jicarón and Salitre and many other villages. I am glad to be in the midst of my people and feel the kindness of all these people who see the Church, through their bishop, as a sign of hope. I have never done, however, what this flyer states. I have never called people to be subversive or asked people to distribute subversive literature. This is calumny. In these villages I have stated: *I know that we are being watched and observed. Whoever you might be, give accurate information about what is occurring here.* There are thousands of people who can testify that the content of this flyer is calumny. What is of great concern to us is the list of priests that also appears on this flyer --- is this a sign that new crimes are being prepared? The people know who is at fault in all of this. The people are not deceived in these matters.

### **Life of the Church**

On the other hand, my dear sisters and brothers, we experienced a great joy to see how the Church is becoming more organized as the People of God. I want to congratulate the people of Chalatenango and the entire Department. Yesterday, these people gave a wonderful demonstration of their communion with the Church when I went there to install Father Fabián Amaya as Episcopal Vicar and Father Efaín Lopez as pastor of the church in the city of Chalatenango. Through this action, the authority of the bishop is delegated to an individual so that this Department, so rich in the Christian faith, can be organized with greater attention and better pastoral care. There is an enthusiasm among the religious and the laity to make real in Chalatenango the words that we spoke at the time of the official nomination: *A moral preserve of the Church, a precious source of vocations, a reminder of the Christian faith of so many families who are well organized there.* Therefore, this morning, I greet the beloved people of Chalatenango and the whole Department and ask you to collaborate with these new pastors who, in communion with me, are going to try to give the best life to the Church that you deserve.

Last Sunday, in Santa Tecla, there was a very comforting meeting with the priests, religious and laity who want to coordinate their efforts, not only for the benefit of the city but for the whole Archdiocese. I also want to greet and thank the people of Comasagua who celebrated their patronal feast of Saint Matthew on July 21<sup>st</sup>, and who expressed their warm communion to me and to all the priests. These are experiences that fill me with joy.

Tuesday I was greatly comforted by a group of young men and women, students at the school of San José, who were wonderfully prepared for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. I took advantage of this opportunity to speak with their parents about the age at which one should be confirmed. I told them that Confirmation was a sacrament for youth. It was beautiful to listen to some young people who spoke after the celebration of the sacrament. It was clear that the true spirit of the Church dwells in all the noble hearts of people of whatever social class, as long as they are sincere in listening to the saving message of Christ. These young people said: *We are very happy to have you here with us today when*

*we are most aware of and accept our commitment with the Lord and with his people.* I was very happy to receive a letter from Colonia San Benito. Beside each signature were written words: *I, a humble cook; I, a baby-sitter; I, from the depths of my heart; I, a washerwoman; etc.* All of these persons expressed their communion with the Church and were thankful for the saving mission that the Church is developing.

I also want to greet the people of the community of Zacamil and Colonia del Provenir. I had the joy of meeting with them and celebrating the Eucharist in their communities. I was able to see there, and in other communities where the priests are working with this authentic understanding of the Church, that people are maturing in the faith that we profess.

There were many other events, my dear sisters and brothers, but you know that I always like to illuminate these events of our civil and church life with the Word of God. I find in the sun some concrete objectives for my reflection today. The sun that becomes heat for the flowers and energy for all natural life is like the Word of God that enlightens my life and your life and the life of society. We must be careful that this light that illuminates us every Sunday through the Sacred Scriptures is listened to as a book that has meaning for us today and not as a book that has passed its time of relevance. Look at the prophet Amos who lived seven centuries before Christ. His situation is very similar to ours and so his voice does not simply belong to a people who have long since died. His voice is real for us living here in El Salvador in 1977. Jesus also speaks to us in today's parable about the lot of the rich and the poor in this life and in the afterlife. Jesus did not recount this parable to harden the hearts of his audience twenty centuries ago. Rather this is a serious admonition of a God who tells us why we were created and speaks to us about the way in which we should use material goods.

The theme of today's homily is the right use of the goods that God has created. There is also an evil or incorrect use and we are going to speak about this negative aspect first, but not because it is most important. My sisters and brothers, in the message of God we always look for that which is positive. But along side the positive dimension, which is expressed in the law of God and the loving plan of Lord for us, humankind always experiences the presence of the negative dimension, which is expressed in sin and the struggle against the Kingdom of God. This will continue to be a reality throughout the centuries. Therefore no one should be surprised that the Church is persecuted. She is persecuted by the kingdom of darkness. For while the Church proclaims the will of God, there will always be those who proclaim the contrary, the anti-Christ, the shadows of sin, the mystery of iniquity which also attempts to gain dominance.

### **The abuse of private property**

The prophet Amos describes this kingdom of darkness as a desire for a luxurious life. Amos, who was a shepherd in the desert of Judea, was sent by God, against his will, to the Kingdom of the North. This took place during the reign of King Jeroboam II, a time that was characterized by prosperity and peace. But the people did not know how to take advantage of this situation and rather than adore and be thankful to God, they sought a life of luxury. *Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock and calves from the stall (a).* These were calves that were nourished on milk alone and so their meat was very tender and this was a delight for the people of Samaria. *Improvising to the music of the harp, like David, they devise their own accompaniment. They drink from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the*

*collapse of Joseph!* (b). Christ, our Lord, in his parable, gives echo to this soft life: *there was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day* (c).

Could not these same words have been written in 1977? Does not this same reality exist in our present time? The rich man and those like him, who rejoice in a soft life, condone their behavior by saying: *what sin is there in that?* There appears to be nothing sinful in their behavior. Yet their first sin is that they have undermined the meaning of property. Like the pagans they say: *jus utendi et abutendi* the right to use and abuse. If this is mine, then I can do with it as I like. This is not true, for the right of private property has limits that are pointed out to us in the second reading of the letter that Saint Paul wrote to Timothy. (d) God gives life to the material things of the world and we have to recognize why God created these goods.

While private property is a right, yet as our constitution states, it has a social function. A social interest that is not simply limited to greater production as stated when the interests of the people were defended against the dangerous law of ISTA<sup>2</sup>. Again, the social function of private property is not greater production. It can be greater production if this production is directed toward the common good. The goods that God has created must be channeled through structures that are for the benefit and happiness of everyone. We must avoid this terrible contrast that is pointed out in today's reading: *the poor man was not even able to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.*

### **Insensitivity towards the poor and God**

Here we see the terrible consequences and errors of a luxurious life. Besides this false concept of private property, what is worse is that the rich become hardened and insensitive to others. What is Jesus denouncing when he says that while the rich man ate, Lazarus was *lying at his door covered with sores, [and] would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores* (e)? In this situation the dogs seemed to have a greater privilege than Lazarus for they were able to eat the scraps that the rich man tossed on the floor, scraps that were left on his plate that the poor man desired but were not given to him. Or as we heard in the first reading after the description of the orgies: *yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph* (f). The tribe of Joseph was considered the poorest and most needy. In fact they could be seen as living in an extreme state of poverty: misery. Thus while others had an abundance, they were insensitive to the state of the people of the tribe of Joseph.

Insensitivity is a grave sin. Here I am not only speaking about those who have great wealth, but I am referring to all of us. When we have something to eat, even a water ice some crumbs or a tortilla, while we are eating, we can be insensitive to those who do have even these. As the prophets tells us, why not, in these situations, share from our poverty? To do otherwise, according to the prophet Amos, is to betray God's covenant. For God has established a covenant with his people: *I will take you as my own people, and you have me as your God* (g). But the covenant is conditioned by the fact that all must live as this People of God; we must live together as sisters and brothers. We read in the Bible: *The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants* (h).

This was the concept of the rich in Israel --- they were renting from God and God had rented them his property. The light of God's Word enlightened their concept of private property. The poor were God's representatives and the rent had to be paid to them. Therefore, the rich and poor had to sit down together and share the goods of this earth like two equal beggars. God gives alms to the rich and he wants the rich to give alms to the poor.

How beautiful is this biblical concept of poverty and wealth! It is not evil to possess things. In fact it would be nice if we were all rich. Insensitivity, however, is evil. What is right is when those who *have* share as a sister and brother and companion of the poor beggar. You are a beggar. I am also a beggar because what God possesses, he has lent me --- I repeat --- lent me. At the hour of my death, I must return it all to God. Let us share, then, that which God gives as a gift to everyone. Let us praise the Lord and pray that the violence and hatred and class struggle cease. My sisters and brothers, in my position as pastor, as one who is enlightened by theology (which thanks to God I continue to study), I have never preached class struggle. I find these calumnies even more offensive because they insinuate that I am ignorant of my sublime mission of preaching love and never subversion.

This is what the Church preaches: God has given these goods to everyone so that everyone makes this world, which was created by God for the happiness of everyone, a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. I stated in my pastoral letter:<sup>3</sup> *[The Church] knows that, in this world, it will never be possible fully to achieve the kingdom of God. But none of that exempts it from the pressing duty of publicizing and promoting the means that seem best able to help toward the partial realization of the kingdom.* As Christians, we live with a hope for this heaven; we live with a hope in a life hereafter. Let us gain that life by acting with justice and love in this world. The Vatican Council stated, and I have repeated here many times when speaking against the slanderous accusations, that we are not Marxists and the Church is not the opium of the people. We have not forgotten our worldly obligations when we speak about a life hereafter. They are simply lies that are uttered against us. The Church speaks about the afterlife and states: *The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation* (i). Thus, there is a direct relationship between the hoped-for salvation after death and our present work here in this world. No one who is unjust here in this world will have a share in the Kingdom of Heaven where love and justice reign supreme.

These two passages from the book of Amos and the parable of Jesus tell us that the voice of the prophets, that is, the voice of God, has come to announce this hope and to make people more just, more human and more understanding. My sisters and brothers ---and this is even more serious --- another result of this luxury and the abuse of private property and the desire to have more and live comfortably and not provide for the neighbor is this other more tragic and horrendous insensitivity: an insensitivity to God.

Look at the conclusion of the parable when the rich man in hell asks Abraham to send a prophet so that his brothers might repent and not have to dwell in the same place where he finds himself. Abraham responds, *they have Moses and the prophets* (j). They have the Catholic Church that preaches. They have those who preach about social justice and the Kingdom of God. *Let them listen to them* (k). But from hell the voice continues, *Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.* Then comes a tremendous response: *If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some should rise from the dead* (l). What a terrible sentence!

I do not know if you have meditated at some time on the encounter of Jesus with Herod, the sensual adulterer and rich king who wanted to hear Jesus speak so that he could laugh at him. How does Christ react? Silence. Not a word! (m) Woe to those hearts where Jesus is silent! Woe to those homes where Jesus' presence is not felt! Woe to those criminals and sinners who feel no remorse in their consciences! They will not be persuaded even if someone should rise from the dead. They are hardened of heart. What a terrible sentence, my sisters and brothers. I would hope that we would take this to heart so that we never become insensitive to charity and love --- for that would also make our consciences insensitive and incapable of remorse before God.

How I wish that my humble words, instead of being distorted by individual self-interest and by those who use flattery to gain the favor of others, were taken seriously and listened to as the Word of God. The flyers that I referred to before are not simply a personal rejection directed at the priests and me. For Jesus says: *Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me* (n). At this moment as I speak, it is the voice of God that is speaking. If I were not here and if one of those who has been tortured and disappeared, if one of those who had recently been assassinated were to stand up in the cathedral and speak, I do not think the situation would change. I do not believe those whose hearts have been hardened would listen to someone from the dead say to them: *We are in an evil situation here in El Salvador.*

*This ugly face of our nation does not need to be painted on the outside; it needs to be painted inside, for only in that way will it appear beautiful on the outside.* As long as mothers weep over the disappearance of their children, as long as torture continues in our security centers, as long as private property continues to be abused, as long as this disorder continues, my sisters and brothers, it is impossible to have peace and so violence and bloodshed will continue. Repression accomplishes nothing. We must begin to reflect on and listen to the voice of God and organize a more just society that conforms to the heart of God. Anything else is simply patchwork. Anything else is more repression. The names of those assassinated will change but there will always be assassinations. Those who suffer the affects of violence will change, but there will always be violence as long as we do not change the roots that cause this violence and so many other horrible things that occur daily in our nation.

### **The good use of wealth**

What then is the right way to use wealth and material goods? Ah, my sisters and brothers, we would have paradise if we allowed the Word of God that enlightens society, people and families to also enlighten the way we use material goods. In today's second readings, we are given some precious norms that, if used to bring about structural change in El Salvador, would result in the disappearance of those realities that we do not want to see continue. In the first place, Paul speaks to Timothy, his disciple, and calls him a *man of God* (o). We have to see ourselves in the same way. God is Lord, says Saint Paul, and everything was created by God who, through Jesus Christ, gives life to the world. This Jesus will return to see how people lived in this world created by God. For Jesus *alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, and whom no human being has seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal power* (p).

When we live our lives in this way, that is, centered on God, when we allow God to enlighten our relationships with our neighbor and the way we use the material goods created

by God, when we allow God to enlighten our ethical practices, then we will be honorable and honest. We will not speak lies or distort the news or utter slanderous words, because we will realize that God holds us accountable for our actions. When God is the center of our lives, then, as Saint Paul says: *[we will] pursue righteousness, devotion, love, faith, patience and gentleness; [we will] compete well for the faith* (q). My sisters and brothers, we are engaged in this struggle, a struggle of faith and not of arms and violence, but of ideas and convictions. Through the inspiration of faith, we must first of all do violence to ourselves. Then, in light of the demands of faith we are told *to keep the commandments without stain or reproach* (r). The commandment is the whole body of truths that God has revealed and transmitted to us. We, as servants of God, have an obligation to obey. When we ignore God's demands and no longer hear God speaking in our conscience, then we have the situation where each person wants to be God. The result of this is upheaval, as if the sun and the planets that revolve around the sun had lost their center of gravity and crash into one another. The sun is like God and as long as humankind revolves around God and derives their ethical principles from God then men and women will live together as sisters and brothers.

Therefore we say that religion, when it preaches this divine parenthood, fulfills its religious mission, namely, it orients humankind toward God and thus contributes a great good to society. For there are no persons more honest, noble, and worthy of faith than those who trust God and place at the center of their life an ethic that is based on the gospel demands without stain or reproach. Thanks to God, we have people like this among us. I do not want you to be pessimistic. In one of those meetings that I referred to earlier, a priest said: *It is sad that people do not believe in love. I say: Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world. Let us not tire of preaching love. Though we see the waves of violence succeed in drowning the fire of Christian love, love must win out; it is the only thing that can.*

My sisters and brothers, let each one of us take to heart the exhortation that Saint Paul gave to Timothy. Let us make our life a solar system and place God in the center of our life. Let us make our lives God-centered and give our lives a profound eschatological meaning. What am I saying here? We have spoken before about this. Eschatology speaks about the final things, the hope that we have for an afterlife that is spoken about in today's readings. In fact the Scripture readings enlighten this concept of the afterlife. At the conclusion of the first reading, Amos speaks of a hell on earth rather than a hell hereafter. A few years after the denunciations of Amos, the Assyrian empire invaded and fulfilled the last verse of today's reading: *now they shall be the first to go into exile and their wanton revelry shall be done away with* (s). If we do not decide to put an end to these abuses, then God will do so and many times he uses the kingdoms of this earth to accomplish his goals. The anti-communist propaganda that many use to defend the right of private property is not, in reality, an anti-communism of love of God, but an anti-communism of love of their riches. God can use this campaign in the same way that he used the Assyrian empire to punish the disorders of the people of Israel. May God deliver our people from this frightening scourge, more frightening than our actual situation, for we would then become a nation without God and without laws but would recover those rights that we did not know how to respect, those rights that were God-given. Even more powerful are the words of Jesus when he speaks about the punishment of people after death: the poor man and the rich man died. One was buried in hell while the other was brought to rest in Abraham's bosom, that is, lived in communion with the Father of faith (t). We have already heard in today's gospel what follows after this.

My sisters and brothers, the outcome of these disorders is terrible. No one laughs at God. His law endures forever. This God, who for us is a God of love, becomes a God of justice when we do not accept his invitation to love. Dante, in the *Divine Comedy*, when he speaks about the gates of hell, wrote *amor me fecce que mi fa* [love moved me, which compelleth me to speak].<sup>4</sup> Is it possible that God's love has made hell? In today's reading we hear about the love of an individual that is not valued. I believe I can appeal to your own experience, for many of you have been in love and then been rejected by the object of your love. You are despised and no longer loved. Does your heart not feel as though it has been cut into pieces? Does it not feel like hell? What do you want to do to the individual who has scorned your kindness? This is God, who loves us while we live and awaits our repentance and conversion. As we have previously said, God even waits for the greatest sinner to repent and convert. But when the patience of God's love ends, his justice begins. Then, one will not even be provided with a finger dipped in water to refresh and cool one's burning tongue in hell. According to Biblical commentators, this indicates that there is no comfort or consolation in hell. My sisters and brothers, we are not returning to the Middle Ages when we talk about hell. Rather we speak this way so that we can keep before our eyes the infinite justice of God before which no one should laugh. Let us restructure our nation in time! Let us organize the material goods that God has given us, so that all the people of El Salvador can be happy! Let us make our nation, so rich in natural gifts, a foretaste of the Lord's paradise! In this way, we can have the pleasure of being received like the poor man, Lazarus.

My sisters and brothers, when we speak about poverty, we are speaking about an internal attitude of the heart. Pay special attention to this idea because the poor person is not one who is lacking material goods. According to the Bible, wealth and poverty refer to internal attitudes of the heart. The leading character of the gospel parable is the only person who is given a name in all of Jesus' parables. Lazarus, which in Hebrew means *one who trusts in God*. Thus, the poor person trusts in God. The rich, on the other hand, to whom Jesus directs this parable, had reacted to the parable of the unjust administrator. A few verses before today's passage we read: *The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things and sneered at him. And he said to them, "you justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts; for what is of human esteem is an abomination in the sight of God (u)*. Here Jesus defines wealth in Biblical terminology. The rich, who are despised by Christ, are not those who possess material goods, but rather those who love their possessions so much that they sneer at God: *if God does not help me, then my God is money*. The rich are those who create an idol of money and in their hearts worship money. Jesus says: *you cannot serve God and mammon (v)*. But the attitude of Lazarus, who places his trust in God rather than material goods, reveals the biblical attitude of poverty. There are many poor persons who do not have material goods and do not trust in God --- therefore, they are not poor. We want to call attention to these persons because they are losing the opportunity to become poor in the Biblical sense. Thus the Church calls them to change their attitude. Trust in God! But do not live in conformity with your situation --- struggle to change it! We all must develop ourselves. God does not bless laziness or idleness, rather God blesses the efforts of those who place their trust in him.

My dear sisters and brothers, let us chose, this morning, to be the poor of Yahweh. I do not know who is listening to me here and outside the cathedral, but whoever you are, whether you have many or few material possessions, I invite you to turn your heart over to God. Do not place your trust in these worldly goods nor be resentful of the fact that others have more possessions than you. Place your trust in God. Do not think that because your house is luxurious that your house is therefore eternal. Everything will eventually be



destroyed. Therefore, the only thing that is of value is to place your trust in God, who alone is immortal and in whom we now profess our faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Dr Carlos Alfaro Castillo, assassinated 16 September 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Instituto Salvadoreño de Transformación Agraria.

<sup>3</sup> See *La Iglesia, cuerpo de Cristo en la historia*. Second Pastoral Letter of Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador (6 August 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Comedia*, Canto II.

*Margin References* (a) Am 6,4: (b) Am 6,5-6: (c) Lk 16,19a: (d) 1 Tm 6,13: (e) Lk 16,20-21: (f) Am 6,6: (g) Jr 31,33: (h) Lk 25,23: (i) GS 43: (j) Lk 16,29: (k) Lk 16,30: (l) Lk 16,31: (m) Lk 23,8-11: (n) Lk 10,16: (o) 1 Tm 6,11: (p) 1 Tm 6,16: (q) 1 Tm 6,11-12: (r) 1Tm 6,14: (s) Am 6,7: (t) Lk 16,22: (u) Lk 16,14-15: (v) Lk 16,13.