

PATHS OF THE BEATITUDES

All Saints Day
November 1, 1977
El Paisnal

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

With great love and devotion I have wanted to come here to this celebration that is now taking place in the church of El Paisnal. This invitation was extended to me through the initiative of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who in collaboration with some courageous catechists and some pastoral advisers of the Archdiocese have maintained the flame of faith alive in this difficult area of Aguilares, El Paisnal and the neighboring villages.

My presence here is meant to be an expression of my pastoral support to those who at this heroic time are not ashamed of the Church during these hours of trial --- or as we have just read in the book of Revelation, this *time of great distress* (a).

I come here as a pastor and join together with the women religious and you, my beloved catechists. I come here like Father Grande who died beside two *campesinos*: Manuel and Nelson Rutilio. They have completed their work here on earth and they are now united with this multitude of saints in heaven where we are able to contemplate them. We, pastors and faithful, from the perspective of these graves, lift up our eyes to our deceased brothers and sisters, not only on All Souls Day (which we celebrate tomorrow), but also today on this feast of All Saints Day. For they are united with the great multitude of persons who have survived the time of great tribulation and they have walked the paths of the Beatitudes, which were proclaimed in today's gospel. It is worth the effort to follow these paths that do not terminate in the grave but open up to the horizon of heaven.

My sisters and brothers, I come here to speak to you in this situation of persecution and abuse and rudeness where we find people fighting one against another, bloodshed and humiliation. I come to speak to you the very clear language of the Church. Do not confuse this language and message of hope and faith with the subversive and political language of unjust laws or with the language of those who quarrel over political power or debate the distribution of the earth's wealth. Do not confuse our language with that of those who speak of liberation, but a liberation that is just of this world and has no hope in heaven. Do not confuse our language with that of those who have placed their trust in land and assets and capital and power. I come here to tell you, my sisters and brothers, that the language of the Church should not be confused with these idolatries. The idolaters who worship these idols have no reason to fear the sharply defined language or the pure heart or the clarity of the Church's teaching.

There is no better day to speak to you with this clear language of the Church than today, November 1st, the feast of All Saints and the vigil of the feast of All Souls. I want to remind you about the end of life --- everything will come to an end, The only thing that will remain is the happiness of having been faithful to God's law, of having loved our neighbor, of having shared generously and lovingly with our neighbor and served them in their time of need and not taken advantage of their situation to abuse their dignity and rights. Yes, the

only thing that will remain is the joy that will be ours at the hour of our death when we present ourselves before the tribunal of God and we hear the precious words spoken by those divine lips: *Come in! Come blessed of my Father and take possession of the Kingdom of Heaven for you were charitable and were not rude. Therefore what you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. When they tortured other people, they beat me; when they committed the crime of assassination, they killed me. You, however, served me when you defended me and allowed others to strike you on the face, when you taught catechism to the children and cared for the sick and shared your love with those in need. People were confused by you and took you for someone else! But you served me!* (b).

This is the clear language of the Church. Please do not confuse this language. On this feast of All Souls, I want to speak to you, my sisters and brothers, the sublime language that is spoken to us from the graves of Father Grande, Don Manuel Solózano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus. What are they saying to us? They are telling us that everything comes to an end. The earthly things end with the grave. But after the temporal comes eternity. The eternal, however, has already entered into the temporal realities, that is, the eternal has entered into the realities of the earth because here on earth the Kingdom of Heaven has already begun. Therefore, on this feast of All Saints, I incorporate these three individuals, as well as our beloved sisters and brothers who have died in this wave of persecution, into the graves of the blessed in heaven. I want to remember here our beloved brother, Father Alfonso Navarro, and our dear catechists --- it is impossible to name all of them --- but we remember, for example, Miguel Martinez and Filomena Puertas and so many other women and men who have ministered and died. At the time of their suffering and painful agony, when they were flogged and tortured and riddled with bullets, when they offered their lives in sacrifice, then were they received in heaven. There they live in victory. Who has conquered? In the words of Scripture, we can ask our martyrs in heaven and those who killed them and continue to persecute the Christians: *Where, O death, is your victory?* (c). The victory is in faith. Those who have been killed for the cause of justice are victorious.

Those who have been conquered and humiliated and shamed are those who have killed our sisters and brothers. We do not hate them. From the altar we pray: *Lord, give them repentance. Let them walk once again on the paths of virtue. Make them aware of the horror of their crimes so that they too might be saints like the blessed in heaven.* A Christian does not hate. I imagine Father Grande and the martyrs of this persecution in heaven praying to the Lord for the conversion of their executioners, so that they can one day share the joy that is given to those who have been faithful to the Lord. As I said at the funeral celebration in the cathedral, we cannot imagine Father Grande hating, asking for vengeance or inciting violence. These words were the slanderous words of his assassins. Those who knew him know that it was impossible for him to have feelings of hatred in his heart even though his assassins were able to and continue to imagine such a reality. I place these persons among the blessed, not only so that we might pray for them and their eternal rest, but also so that on this holy day we might pray with them the words I have just said here at the altar: *Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, today we rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place.* In other words, we pray to be united with all our priests, with all Christians, and with our martyred catechists who have suffered pain and persecution and those who have the joy of celebrating with this great multitude in heaven.

My sisters and brothers, in this reflection which we are sharing here in the beloved Church of El Paisnal, a Church that has been converted into a beautiful resting place of our beloved Father Grande, our thoughts are focused on the gospel that has just been read: the Beatitudes. These are the paths along which true Christians travel. In this environment of confusion in Aguilares and El Paisnal, in this environment of spies and espionage and misinformation, I have promised to speak to you and enable you to understand the very clear language of the Church. You are very aware of the fact that I am not inciting anyone to violence or hatred or revenge. You have listened to the reading that I have just proclaimed with a clear voice, a reading that places before us the paths we must travel here on earth, in El Paisnal and Aguilares: the path of the Beatitudes.

These are the paths that I preach and the roads on which the Church wishes to lead her children. This is what we teach in our reflection groups. This is what the catechists teach in the celebration of the Word and in the classes with our children: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (d). If we preached something other than the path of the Beatitudes, then we would not be Catholic and our gatherings would not be Catholic. My sisters and brothers, you are aware of the paths along which the Church wants to lead her children, yet you are free, in your personal options, to join any group that you wish. But if you want to bring the Christian name to these organizations, then in the depths of your heart, you must be convinced of the Beatitudes.

This is the way that Father Grande and his companions worked in this area. They taught in the way that has been pointed out by the Holy Father and many bishops from Latin America who are gathered in Rome to discuss the theme of catechetics. They have said that when the catechism is taught today, the catechist should be aware of the great social problems that the Christian community confronts, that is, aware of the commitments of Christians who live today here, in these troubled lands. True catechists, like the Jesuits who ministered here in Aguilares, have to teach this language of faith commitment, so that as Christians people can make options in their own lives. As Christians, however, we must never opt for violence or hatred or those things that the gospel rejects as it points out the paths on which the saints traveled. There are saints among those people who struggle for the liberation of our people. Not everyone, of course, is a saint. There are many who preach hatred and violence. There are many who do not believe in the paths of love. If any of those persons are listening to me, I want to invite you to change your ways and walk on the paths of the Christians.

During the funeral services for Father Grande, I referred to the exhortation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and said that Father Grande was an example of those persons whom the Church offers to work in collaboration with others for the liberation of the world (e). Indeed, the Church must struggle for this liberation from slavery and sin,. Therefore this liberation that the Church preaches has three characteristics that I saw manifested in Father Grande and other liberators who, like Father Grande, have joined this struggle for the liberation of our people: (1) a liberation inspired by faith; (2) a liberation inspired by love; (3) a liberation that forms part of the Church's social doctrine and informs her action. These three realities enable Christians today to be true liberators of their people.

An inspiration of faith

Their struggle is enlightened by faith. What other meaning could we give to the celebration of the feast of All Saints. This faith opens horizons for these liberators and enables them to struggle with pure hearts, enlightened by faith. In this way they are able to

restore people's dignity and free people from the slavery of hunger, illiteracy and the misery in which the great majority of our people are presently living. The Church cannot be indifferent to so much suffering and injustice. The Church struggles but has her eyes focused on her faith. This perspective of the Beatitudes and hope for a heaven that is enlightened by faith enables the true Christian liberator to collaborate in this process of liberation with the true language of the Church.

My sisters and brothers, do not let this struggle be confused with other ideologies or atheism or some other struggle that is focused on the acquisition of political power. Ours is a struggle that places all its hope in the great reward that Jesus has spoken about today: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied* (f). Blessed are those who are poor, hungry, living in misery and on the margins of society, *for they shall be shown mercy* (g).

Blessed are those liberators who do not put their trust in arms or abduction or violence or money, but who know that liberation has to come from God and that this liberation will result from the wonderful liberating power of God, as well as the efforts of Christian men and women. Repent and be converted! Do not adore the idols of wealth and political power, for to maintain these idols one becomes capable of every kind of abuse. Repent and be converted so that laborers, rich and poor, factory workers and factory owners, *campesinos* and those who own large tracts of land --- all of us --- yes, may all of us work together to create this new world, this new heaven that Christians long for.

An inspiration of love

My sisters and brothers, our struggle for liberation is not only inspired by faith but is also inspired by love. The Christian liberators, those who will one day rejoice in the Kingdom of Heaven, are those who struggle on earth with the power of justice that is inspired by love. They do not hate or kill or do evil. They love and place their hope in this God who is a God of love and who listens to the cries of his people and in his own time will come and give the world this love that it lacks. My sisters and brothers, let us continue to long for this love.

From the grave of Father Grande, let us lift up our hearts in prayer: *Lord, send your love to this earth. You who brought fire to the earth so that the hearts of men and women might be enflamed, look at all this hatred and cold-heartedness; look at this materialism and selfishness and envy! Lord, remove these evils from our hearts and make us saints.* The holiness that we celebrate today, on this feast of All Saints, is the holiness that results from the work of each one of us according to our own vocation --- I as bishop, others as priests, religious, catechists, workers. Each one has worked in a different way, but we have all done our work with love --- we have served our neighbor for the love of God.

The Social Doctrine of the Church

Our struggle for liberation is not only inspired by faith and love but is also based on the social doctrine of the Church. The Archdiocese has published a pamphlet that contains a summary of the social teaching based on the writings of the Popes and the gospel. I invite all of you, but especially those who are concerned about the social problems of our nation, to study the social doctrine of the Church. The Church knows how to unite respect for human rights and the obligations of these rights.

This then is the standard we have before us as we process to the grave of Father Grande and his companions in martyrdom. This is the standard we have before us as we celebrate the feast of All Saints. For before the grave of Father Grande, we will pray for all the priests who have died. We pray also for all the men and women religious, the catechists, for all Christians and for our family members who are asleep in peace. We are not going to visit cemeteries, but before the grave that is the symbol of all those who have died, before the grave of Father Grande and his two companions, we pray for all those who have died. We are doing this now. We remember those who have died and we see them as saints. As we do this, we also want to be saints who struggle for this Christian liberation. Let us make ourselves holy!

My brothers and sisters, we will not become holy unless we allow the demands of today's gospel to penetrate our hearts. Therefore, do not be afraid of the conservatives, especially those who do not want to speak about the social questions and thorny problems that our nation confronts. Do not be afraid of us who speak about these concerns, we have not become communists or subversives. We are simply Christians who take seriously the gospel demands that humanity and our people so desperately need to see realized in their midst. So we walk on these paths, paths of those who are poor in spirit, peacemakers, and those who struggle for justice. The paths of the Beatitudes are today very dangerous and thus there are few who are willing to walk along these roads. Let us not be afraid! Let us follow these roads that will lead us to the celebration of All Souls Day! Let us pray for one another so that we might also live with the saints in heaven and participate in the glory of the risen Christ!

Let us celebrate this Eucharist! This morning, the Church of El Paisnal is converted into the cathedral where the bishop, the center of unity for the Diocese, lifts up the host and the chalice to the Lord as a sign of the unity of all the people of the Archdiocese. I pray that God, who accepts this sacrifice of Christ on the altar, might also unite the sacrifices of all of those who work for the Kingdom of God. May God bless us and make us holy with this modern holiness of Christians who are committed to the situation in which we live. May we be more encouraged as we leave here. To those who have not drawn near to us (perhaps on radio you are listening to my voice) know that from the grave of Father Grande the shouts of the Archdiocese can be heard: Have courage, Christians! Do not worry about these difficult times because if you are faithful, you will hear the voice that cries out in the book of Revelation: *these are the ones who have survived the time of great distress... for this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple* (h).

Margin References (a) Rv 7,14: (b) Mt 25,40: (c) 1 Co 15,56: (d) Mt 5,3: (e) EN 38: (f) Mt 5,6: (g) Mt 5,5: (h) Rv 7,14-15.