

RELIGIOUS LIFE

San José Villanueva, La Libertad
December 17, 1977

Isaiah 7,10-14
 Romans 1, 1-7
 Mathew 1, 18-24

.....¹ this is the time of salvation that has at this moment come to San José Villanueva. The Word of God that will be proclaimed in all the churches of the world this afternoon and tomorrow, the fourth Sunday of Advent, announces the saving plan of God that will be realized in Christ who takes a name that is filled with hope: Emmanuel, God-with-us. (a) Saint Paul has spoken about how that plan of God will come to us. (b) In his letter to the Romans that was written many years after Christ died he says: *now, this morning, we can tell you, the inhabitants of San José Villanueva, that the saving plan of the Lord has arrived.*

All of you who have had the goodness to come and receive this community of Passionist Sisters who are going to minister in this town, we can tell you that as you receive this message of salvation, you can then carry this same message to the whole town. I say the same to you who have come from other communities, I greet you and I feel that we are all participating in a missionary moment of our Church, a moment when we are truly a Salvadoran Church of the people.

Even more these Sisters can now say as Saint Paul said in his letter: *we are servants of the People of God and we proclaim the good news of salvation; we are apostles who have been set apart from the beginning of time* (c). Indeed the Lord had chosen Paul just as he chooses vocations to the religious life or the priestly life, the way he chooses people to become catechists --- they are all true elections of God. Saint Paul experienced feelings of gratitude and committed himself to proclaim this word of salvation. This is the servant of Christ --- one who proclaims the saving plan of God that people were unable to understand. You have listened to the prophet Isaiah and how King Ahaz, under the guise of a false religiosity, refused to accept the sign that God would send him.(d) You have also heard how Saint Joseph was disturbed and perplexed. (e) When God realizes his plans, men and women experience the true extent of their smallness and of their inability to understand. We should not be surprised that the world is unable to understand this saving plan of God and as a result many times will unleash persecutions against the Church. At those times when the clouds seem to become darker than ever before it becomes more important to be light and not to become discouraged.

In these present circumstances the Passionist Sisters have come to San José Villanueva to become light in these distant corners of our nation and to announce in simple words the fact that God is saving the world. I was pleased to listen to the prayer that we are going to pray tomorrow, a prayer in which Christians ask the Lord that we who have heard the angel proclaim the incarnation of Son of God might, through his passion and cross, come to the

glory of his resurrection.² The passion and the cross are the charism of this group of religious sisters. It is for this reason that they are called Passionists, just like the Passionist Fathers who were founded by a great saint in the Church³ and given this charism: to proclaim the cross and tell people that there is no salvation apart from the cross, apart from this sorrowful mission of Christ --- a mission that continues to be the sorrowful mission of the Church.

My sisters and brothers, to use a comparison of the Second Vatican Council, I believe that today we are planting a seed. The Council says that the practice of the evangelical counsels in religious life is like a seed that the Lord has planted in his Church (f). The Church, carefully preserving these counsels, has seen these counsels come alive in many different communities. Indeed, these evangelical counsels are lived in many different ways. Thus the tree grows and grows and religious congregations and orders arise and different ways of living the three vows are discovered. These women are consecrated to God by the three vows of religious profession: vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Poverty

Through these vows they have renounced possessions --- they possess nothing. Like Jesus they are able to say: *the Son of Man has no place to lay his head* (g). They want to imitate Jesus in this joyful freedom of renunciation. They feel no attachment nor are they tormented or afflicted or disturbed because others possess material things. From the perspective of their vows, especially their vow of poverty, they simply desire to convert people and to save them.

The Sisters live their authentic poverty in the midst of other poor people. They do not tell people that they should be resentful of others who have more than them and thus must engage in some form of class struggle or revolution. No, nothing like this. They live their poverty in simplicity, in the same way that Christ, the Virgin, Saint Joseph, the apostles and all other good people have lived this poverty --- through renunciation. They teach others that the goal of their life is achieved here in this world but that they renounce the goods of this world as they journey toward the true possession of the Kingdom. Through their life they give witness to this reality. This is one of the missions of religious life, namely, that through their vow of poverty they show the world that the riches of this earth have a value but they are transitory. Through their renunciation, as a result of the vow of poverty, they hold the true possession in their heart. What a beautiful message! See, these virtues must be lived. This is the time when poverty should not become a motive for revolution or alienation or resentment or a lack of confidence. Rather poverty should be accepted with the same love that Christ embraced his cross in order to save the world.

Chastity

These sisters also take a second vow, a vow of chastity. In other words, they do not marry. They renounce marriage and they renounce having a family here on this earth. They do not pass on their name to another generation. But what a beautiful contrast! In exchange for this renunciation they receive a name for all people: mother, sister --- a member of every family like Charles de Foucauld, the younger brother of humanity.

These religious, through their vow of chastity, know that marriage is holy and that it is necessary for men and women to enter into marriage that is blessed by God. They know that this is necessary in order to continue to populate the world and provide children for our

country and for heaven. But they also know that marriage can become a source for attachment to love and the things of this world. They invite all married people and families of this earth to live with a great heart this love of the heavenly Father. They invite all families to live in this divine relationship and to live this message that they, with their vow of chastity, are proclaiming --- the same message that Christ proclaimed: *At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven* (h).

As they give this witness to this heaven where all of us will live like angels of God, the celibate person here on earth, having renounced marriage and the pleasures of the flesh, tells those who have married: your marriage is holy, but be careful, do not lose your life because you do not know how to use the value that you have in your hand. For many married couples marriage becomes a source of sin. For many men and women the attractions of the flesh are dangerous and can become sinful. Be careful, young men and women, and look at the beauty of the message that these religious can proclaim to the innocent children in our towns and villages, to the young men and women who struggle against the vile passions of this world. These religious proclaim the message of celibacy and virginity and chastity. This does not mean that marriage is evil or that because of certain dangers people should not marry. Rather they are saying: marriage is good but one must maintain this marriage with the angelic ideals of God.

Obedience

My dear sisters and brothers, in the third place these religious are women who live a vow of obedience. During these times of so much rebellion, when obedience is abused by those who wish to impose unjust laws, and when the concepts of rebellion and obedience are so clouded, it is necessary to have clear concepts. These religious women with their vows of obedience have renounced their own will in favor of the will of their superior. We have come to understand the role of the superior as they decided on the establishment of their ministry here in San José Villanueva. Their style of obedience is not one of: *you, go there!* but rather is based on dialogue.

Today obedience is understood as co-responsibility. The superior calls the congregation together and says: *the Archdiocese of San Salvador has asked us to establish a mission in San José Villanueva. Who would like to go there? What advantages do you see in this decision? What are the disadvantages?* There is a profound dialogue and after the dialogue certain individuals make a commitment. In this case, as you have already heard, Sister Teresa Tario and Sister Rosa Lidia Castaneda affirmed their desire to come here. They are going to say a few words later but I am simply explaining that they have not come here because they were ordered to do so.

Authority in the Church is very beautiful and good --- it allows people to develop their personality and allows people to freely live where obedience wants them to be. When the Sisters encounter difficulties they speak with their superior and their superior, understanding their situation, attempts to resolve these difficulties. There are various religious communities here in our Diocese --- some are ministering in La Libertad.⁴ These Sisters, because of their love for our country, have left their homes in North America and live here without many of the human comforts that they could have in their homeland. They share in our poverty with the same spirit of Christ who, obedient to the will of his Father, came to save the world. This is another sign of obedience as a great renunciation and we see that people will be saved

through obedience --- a wonderful witness, my sisters and brothers, a witness that is so necessary at this time in our history.

Holy freedom in obedience places religious in a position in the Church and in the world to speak to those who abuse authority: we must obey God above men because authority comes from God and must be exercised according to God's will. (i) If authority becomes abusive or establishes itself as an idol: *you must do what I say*, then the Church says: *be careful! You can command another to do only what God commands. If you go beyond this limitation then there is no obligation to obey you because you are a human being who has trampled on the law of God and the laws of human rights.*

My sisters and brothers, you can see that obedience is a holy renunciation, a rebellion that proceeds from the will of God. No one is as free as the person who is truly obedient. Thus these sisters who give us three great testimonies and who incorporate themselves into the life of the Church of this Diocese, these sisters have a great mission among us.

Now I am going to allow Msgr. Urioste, who is in charge of the pastoral ministry of the Diocese, to speak some more about these charisms, these gifts, these vows, this precious seed of the religious life that is being planted in so many parishes and town and villages where there is no resident priest. Msgr. is going to going to explain the objectives of their ministry.

¹ The greeting and initial words of this homily were not recorded on the tape.

² The collect for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

³ St Paul of the Cross

⁴ Reference to the Ursuline Sisters from Cleveland.

Margin References (a) Mt 1,23: (b) Rm 1,6: (c) Rm 1,1: (d) Is 7,13: (e) Mt 1,19: (f) LG 43: (g) Lk 9,58: (h) Lk 20,34-36: (i) Ac 15,29.