

BAPTISM, CALLING AND SHARING DIVINE LIFE

Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 5, 1978

Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

During this time of Lent we continue our pilgrimage and one of the signs of this season is found in living a truly austere life. Another sign, one that is very common among our people, is seen in following the man from Nazareth on his way to the cross --- Jesus carrying his cross to Calvary. We follow this Jesus who fasted in the desert and was persecuted and then forced to carry his cross to Calvary. We know that this Jesus is not someone separated from or distant from us. Rather Jesus' love of God and his omnipotence inspired him to become one with us. The Church prolongs Christ's life and in every part of the world the Christian Community is aware of the fact that during Lent, they walk with Jesus to the top of Calvary. Thus we discover that our own history, our situation here in El Salvador and our unique way of living out this history is not done in separation from Christ. During this season of Lent, people feel that they are participating in the way of the cross and therefore, as we explain the Word of God, we cannot put aside the historic reality of our people who walk the way of the cross.

Anniversary of Rutilio Grande and removal of people from La Plaza Libertad

This week we will celebrate some important anniversaries. Last Tuesday, however, in the parish church of El Rosario, we remembered the violent removal of people from La Plaza Libertad and celebrated a Mass for those who died. Today at 10:30am, we anticipate the first anniversary of the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande and the two *campesinos* who died with him. Next Saturday, March 11th, at noon, we will celebrate a Mass here in the Cathedral to remember Father Grande and all those who have died. The Mass that will be celebrated at 10:30 this morning will take place at the site of Father Grande's burial in Paisnal. In light of these celebrations, I want to make some clarifications. I do so because the present circumstances can lead to much confusion and we also know that others are interested in taking advantage of this situation so that they can continue to slander the Church and distort her true mission. Therefore I want to speak about three things: (a) the Church's intention; (b) the government's obligation; (c) the obligation of all Christians.

When the Church gathers people together to celebrate the anniversary of those who have died, her primary intention is to pray for the deceased. Those who have died need many prayers and the Church has set aside these privileged days, these anniversary days, and designated them as times for prayer. Thus the primary and very clear intention of the Church is to pray for those who have died. But the Church also has another intention: to console those who mourn the loss of their loved ones. This is the other objective of the Church's religious and gospel understanding: to comfort those who mourn for the deceased. Thirdly, the Church calls out to those who have caused these abuses and these deaths that have left so

many family members of the deceased in pain and often has left them orphaned. The Church calls out to these people and invites them to reflect.

During this reflection we cannot forget that one of the Church's objectives involves the political order of society. The Church does not seek political power and her pastoral ministry is not based on political power. The Church does not enter into partisan politics and does not identify herself with any one political party. The Church, however, must speak her authoritative word when problems arise in the political order and when the fundamental rights of the human person and the salvation of souls demands this. (a) All of this has been stated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Church defends the human rights of every citizen and ought to give preference to the most poor, the weakest members of society and those who live on the margins of society. The Church acts in this way in order to promote the development of the human person and thus becomes the critical conscience of society. Indeed, the Church must be society's critical conscience. Thus the Church forms the Christian conscience of believers and works on behalf of the cause of justice and peace. A Church that does not fulfill these objectives is not the true Church of the gospel. Fulfilling these objectives is not meddling in politics but simply a way for the Church to fulfill her gospel mission: to enlighten the moral obligations of society and the human person. Thus, my sisters and brothers, I believe that it is very necessary that the Church enjoy complete freedom in fulfilling this mission. Indeed, the Church seeks that freedom that will allow our people to breathe, to sing with joy our national anthem and to be able to hear their legitimate aspirations echoed by their pastors. Thanks to God, this is exactly what the Church is doing.

Therefore it is very dangerous to tamper with the Church's freedom for in doing so another escape valve is closed and the environment of repression becomes more intense and stronger and people will not tolerate such a situation for any extended period of time. Therefore I want to thank and congratulate Father Alejandro Peinador who took on this role of the Church as he celebrated Mass in El Rosario and defended the open door policy of the Church. At this time we also want to ask for justice on behalf of those who have been captured in these circumstances. We raise our voice against torture and ask that, if it is necessary, bring these people to trial.

Thus on the occasion of these celebrations and anniversaries, the role of the Church is quite clear: she is the voice that speaks on behalf of human rights, the voice of the people, the voice that speaks to people's conscience. She is that prayer that rises up to God, that prayer that comforts the families who place their trust in the Church. For the freedom to believe and love God, as well as the freedom to invoke God as one wishes, is one of the most sacred rights of the human person.

Secondly, in these circumstances the government has an obligation to respect and channel the right to equality and participation. The words that I am now going to read are not my words but the words of Pope Paul VI that are taken from his letter *Octogesima Adveniens* --- a letter that was written on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*. Pope Paul advances the social doctrine of Pope Leo XIII and, among other things, makes this beautiful observation: (b) *While scientific and technological progress continues to overturn man's surroundings, his patterns of knowledge, work, consumption and relationships, two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts, and they grow stronger to the extent that he becomes better informed and better educated: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of man's dignity and freedom.... It is not for the State or even for political parties, which would be closed unto*

themselves, to try to impose an ideology by means that would lead to a dictatorship over minds, the worst kind of all... The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, and it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power (c).

As you can see there are two signs of the times: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation. The Pope says *that the government has the right and the obligation to channel these just aspirations and not impose some ideology that would lead to a dictatorship over minds.* There is an urgency to remove the roots of all violence and terrorism. There will always be unrest as long as people are unable to find legitimate channels that enable them to realize these legitimate aspirations and participate in the formation of the common good. Repression is not the road to travel for it is an illegitimate way that frustrates the realization of these aspirations. Such an action cannot be tolerated for very long by society or by the individuals in society.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I make a third observation, one that concerns the duties of Christians. The documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Gaudium et Spes (d)*, and the decree on the activity of lay people (e), speak about the duties and the obligations of you, men and women who are in the world. The Council states that *all Christians should appreciate their special and personal vocation in the political community.* Therefore all Christians must participate in the political community and understand that they are cooperating in this area of the Christian apostolate when they vote and work for the common good. This, therefore, demands what we said before, namely, that ways be found to channel the different political options of people. It is not enough to create one channel and force all people to move in the same direction. Respect for the pluralism in our society is one of the demands of these new times.

It is true that those persons, priests, men and women religious, as well as lay persons who exercise leadership in some area of our pastoral ministry should not take on militant or leadership roles in the political community. They have a right to express their political views but should not be in positions of political leadership. Above all, they should be signs of unity and evangelical freedom. Here I am speaking about those persons who function as leaders in the Church and who guide the Christian community because of their relationship with the hierarchy. For example, those persons who are members of the Commission for the Laity, priests, religious, etc --- these people have to be signs of unity in the world. In order to preserve our evangelical freedom and fulfill the mission that we previously referred to, these persons, as leaders of the community, cannot be partial toward one faction of the political community. Rather they must accept their role as the critical conscience of society and point out the failings and short-comings of the political community regardless of who is responsible for these failures.

My sisters and brothers, we must remember to be faithful to the doctrine of the Church, not in some militant way, but Christians must remember that when they become part of some group, they become part of this group as people of faith. They should not betray the demands of their Christian faith! Let us return to the thoughts of Pope Paul VI who said: *the Christian who wishes to live his faith in a political activity which he thinks of as service (politics is a service and not an object that is bought and sold and traded) cannot without contradicting himself adhere to ideological systems which radically or substantially go against his faith and his concept of man (f).*

This idea is made concrete when the Pope refers to two specific cases: *people cannot adhere to the Marxist ideology, to its atheistic materialism, to its dialectic of violence and to the way it absorbs individual freedom in the collectivity, at the same time denying all transcendence to man and his personal and collective history* (g). This is a summary of the Marxist ideology that cannot be an option for Christians because Christians cannot accept atheistic materialism or the dialectic of violence. Christians cannot conceive of individual freedom as a collective reality which denies transcendence to man and to his personal and collective history.

At the same time Christians cannot adhere to the liberal ideology which believes it exalts individual freedom by withdrawing it from every limitation, by stimulating it through exclusive seeking of interest and power, and by considering social solidarities as more or less automatic consequences of individual initiatives, not as an aim and a major criterion of the value of the social organization (h). Thus we see that atheistic materialism and liberal capitalism are excluded as options for the Christian, for liberal capitalism is selfish and its objective is to enrich the individual and possess power for its own personal interests.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, do not try to identify the Church with these ideologies. The Church has a duty to orient people, as I am doing now, but no one who feels they have been guided by the Church has the right to say: *the Church and my organization are one and the same reality*. This is false. The Church maintains her autonomy and independence from every political party and ideology. Yes, the Church points out those aspects that are not in conformity with Christian principles and ideals but at the same time she respects legitimate Christian options. My sisters and brothers because this is such an important area of discussion for us at this time, I believe it is necessary to clarify ideas, especially for those persons who have social concerns. It is in this way that people can orient themselves in light of the gospel.

Life of the Church

Now you can understand why it is that within the framework of the homily we try to be concrete in addressing the present situation of our country and Archdiocese. The Church lives in the midst of this situation and so now I wish to share with you some family news.

First, tomorrow morning the priests will gather together and will help to prepare us to express the opinion of the Archdiocese in the bishop's meeting that will take place in October in Puebla, Mexico. I refer to the General Meeting of the Latin American Bishops. During this meeting of the priests that will take place tomorrow, our beloved brother, Bishop Mario René Revelo, the auxiliary bishop, will make a presentation. We await him with true brotherly love.

With regard to the Christian communities, I am happy to invite you to join with the community of Zacamil where the people have organized a day dedicated to the theme of contemplation and action. We have seen that it is very appropriate that we be people of prayer so that our activity does not become sterile activism but rather a true ministry of the Church. I want to greet and thank the community of Cantón Tecoloco in San Pedro Perulapán where the people joyfully celebrated the feast of their patron, Saint Anthony. I want to congratulate the people of Chalatenango for the course that they have offered to the catechists --- a course that is now about to conclude. I want to greet and congratulate the pastoral team of Lourdes and Colón that will inaugurate, this Sunday, their pastoral ministry

and their catechetical program. As you can see, people are working with a true understanding of the gospel and the pastoral ministry.

At this moment we have received the sad news that the buildings located on Avenida Cuscatlan and 8 Calle Oriente have been set on fire. We have raised our voices against these actions and we offer our solidarity to those persons who now suffer the consequences of this deed. The Church's moral teaching is very clear about this: those who are responsible for serious damages, such as damages caused by fire, are guilty of serious sin and cannot be pardoned until they have made restitution for the evil that was caused by these criminal acts.

Now my sisters and brothers, while there are still many other realities that I could talk about, I believe what I have already said is sufficient and at the same time enables us to understand the beautiful message that is presented to us on this Fourth Sunday of Lent. You know that Lent is a time that prepares us to celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ --- also called the Paschal Mystery. Lent is a journey toward Easter. Thus Lent does not conclude with the celebration of Good Friday. I want to highlight this fact because we have to put an end to a very negative tradition that exists among us. Many Catholics view Holy Week from the perspective of Good Friday and see the burial of Christ as the conclusion of Lent. Such a perspective leads us to follow a religion that can be seen as a religion of failure and thus we view death as the end. But Christ died because he loved us and therefore God raised Jesus to new life. This is great news, for the death of Jesus was completed at the time of his resurrection and the resurrection guarantees our redemption. Therefore true Christians should not be satisfied because they have participated in the holy burial of Good Friday, but should continue to celebrate with the Church on Holy Saturday when we proclaim the definitive triumph of our redemption. Lent and Holy Week lead us toward the celebration of this most holy night when we celebrate the Easter Vigil. Let us accompany the Church and let us be Church as we celebrate the night of our great triumph, the triumph of faith and hope. It is not right that we, who as a people have been marked by the sign of the cross and travel the road to Calvary, should conclude our celebration with the death of Christ. Perhaps it is this type of attitude that leads many people to see religion as pessimistic, in conformity with things as they are and lacking in courage. But those who celebrate Holy Week and culminate this journey with the Easter celebration find that their hearts are filled with hope and even though they must journey to the top of the mountain with their cross, even though they are tortured and murdered and misunderstood and abused like Jesus was abused on Good Friday, they know that the story was not concluded until three days later. We do not know when our own story will be concluded but the time will come when the people of El Salvador will find that their hope has become reality --- they will live this Easter moment.

Therefore my sisters and brothers of El Salvador, I invite you to celebrate this Holy Week as it should be celebrated --- celebrated until the solemn celebration of Easter. In this way we give Christian hope to our work on behalf of liberation and we transform the redeemed People of God into a people filled with Christian hope. Thus I proclaim to you now that the night of Holy Saturday is a night of true victory. Our young people are preparing the liturgy and so all those young men and women who want to be part of the hymn of the Church's hope are invited to participate in this celebration. The same invitation is extended to all adults and children. Thus we can make it very clear that during Holy Week the Church plants seeds of hope and not seeds of pain and suffering that terminate in a sacred burial. Yes, we sing hymns of thanksgiving for this person who loved us so much and yet suffered such terrible pain. But because of our hope we sing Alleluia to the One who overcame death and

promised us that we would also be victorious in our struggle for the genuine liberation of people.

Today's readings orient us in our journey toward Easter. The three readings today offer us a beautiful catechesis and make us aware of the meaning of our baptism --- a baptism that, in former times, was received during the celebration of the Easter Vigil. The resurrected Christ lives today in those persons who have been baptized, in this priestly people who through baptism participate in Christ's redemption. Therefore, the Lenten readings are a true catechesis, for they are intended to instruct those who are to be baptized and awaken the conscience of those who are already baptized to the greatness, the hope and the joy of being Christian. The readings present us with three ideas: (1) Baptism as a vocation; (2) Baptism as a participation in the divine life; (3) Baptism provokes a crisis between those who have been baptized and the society in which they live.

Baptism as a vocation

What a beautiful lesson! How real is all of this for those who have been baptized! In the first place, baptism is a vocation. God reveals himself and calls people to himself. People grow in their faith and discover Christ, the God, who calls them and offers himself up for them. This is the meaning of the first reading. God rejected the king, Saul and said to the prophet Samuel that *he had chosen another king because the Lord looks into the heart*. God sent the prophet to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse and inspired him so that he would be able to see which of Jesse's sons had been chosen to be the future king of Israel.

Samuel was afraid because the repression of Saul was terrible: *How can I go? Saul will hear of it and kill me if he knows I am looking for another king* (i). God counseled him about what he had to do. So Samuel pretended that he was going to offer a sacrifice. He said to Jesse: *Show me your sons*. When Samuel saw the oldest, well-built and strong, he thought that this son would be the future king. God said: *Not that one [...]*¹. *Man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart ... I will point out the one to you* (j). The eight sons of Jesse passed before Samuel and when this was concluded Samuel had still not found the inspiration of God in any of them. So he said to Jesse: *Are these all the sons you have?* (k). Jesse replied: *There is still the youngest who is tending the sheep*. Samuel spoke to Jesse and said: *Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here*. When David arrived he looked so young --- what could he be thinking? God spoke to Samuel: *This is he, the one who according to my heart has been chosen to be king* (l). Then Samuel, in the presence of Jesse and his sons, anointed David. He took the horn of oil in his hand --- the sign of anointing --- and bathed David in oil. He anointed him. The Bible says: *from that day on the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David* (m). Now he is king. He must only await the right circumstance to take possession of the kingdom.

Now what is baptism? It is an election by God, a God who through a sacrament draws near to us, calls us and anoints us. My sisters and brothers, we live as anointed people! Remember the moment the priest pours oil over the head of the child and anoints this person as priest, prophet and king. You and I are like David: we have been called and we have a vocation. Thus Saint Paul is insistent: *Be faithful to your vocation*.

My Christian sisters and brothers, because of our baptism, you and I are great. We have been anointed and we are a kingly people, a people called by the Lord. People discover this God little by little. Indeed this is the task of those who have been baptized: through faith,

which matures day by day, we enter this process of discovering God. Here I am going to speak about the beautiful example that is presented to us in the gospel: the blind man who is aware of what is about to happen to him. Jesus, who is God, is passing by and pauses when he sees the blind man. He gestured in the way that you have just heard. When the blind man is asked, *how were your eyes opened?*, he replied, *the man called Jesus.*(n). His knowledge of Jesus is still vague. Later when he is asked if he believes Jesus is a sinner because he cured on the Sabbath, the blind man says: *He is a prophet* (o). Thus we see that the blind man has grown in faith.

In verse 33, when the enemies of Jesus see him as a sinner, the blind man says: *If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything* (p). He states that there is a relationship between God and Jesus. See how the faith of this man is becoming more profound! Finally, in verse 36, when the blind man encounters Jesus who asks him if he believes in the Son of Man, he says: *Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?* (q). What a beautiful revelation of Jesus! This is similar to the revelation of Jesus to the Samaritan woman that we spoke about last Sunday. (r) *You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.* Thus the blind man has not only had his sight restored but has also had his soul enlightened by faith and he discovers in the man Jesus, the God who had come to save people, one who was so powerful that he was able to restore sight to the blind and do everything that he desired in order to save the world. The blind man falls to his knees and proclaims: *I do believe, Lord* (s). He has achieved the height of faith.

My sisters and brothers, this is the meaning of our baptism: an on-going journey in our knowledge of Jesus. Hopefully all of you who are participating in this reflection have also achieved this height of faith. Hopefully you can kneel and adore Christ because you see him not only as a man, but as the God who became man.

When I speak with you about liberation, do not confuse this liberation with the liberation that the world offers. The Church rejects any liberation that is characterized by materialism, atheism, class struggle and violence. God has no part in any of this. The Church also rejects liberation that is based on money or power or selfishness because God's peace is not found in any of these realities. The peace of God is exemplified in the blind man who encounters Jesus and says: *Lord, I believe and even though I do not know where history is leading me yet I know that you are the Lord of history and that you fill my heart with hope* (t). This is the Christian, who during Holy Week and on the night of the holy Resurrection, celebrates the risen Christ and says: *You, the powerful One; you, the Lord of eternity and life; you know how you are going to lead our beloved country and Church out of this dead-end street.*

Baptism is a participation in the divine life

My sisters and brothers, my second thought: baptism is a participation in the divine life. According to Biblical commentators, Saint John is reflecting a baptismal rite in this passage. This is evident in Jesus' gestures that are presented to us in today's gospel passage. You know that the gospels were written many years after the death of Christ, written at a time when the Christian communities reflected on the life of Christ in light of the liturgy, the preaching and their own reflections. Surely Saint John found a beautiful way to describe the beauty of a person who was baptized as he reflected on the baptismal rite. We see in today's reading the gesture of saliva, anointing and bathing in the Pool of Siloam. All of these are elements of a baptismal rite.

What is a sacrament? My sisters and brothers, a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality. Do not forget this theological definition. In every sacrament there is a visible element, but there is also a reality that is signified by this visible element, a reality that is invisible. In baptism we see the gestures of Jesus. The hands of Jesus smear mud on the blind man's eyes; (u) the hands of Jesus anoint his eyes and the blind man washes his eyes in the Pool of Siloam --- all of these gestures are visible signs like the water in our baptismal fonts and the hand of the priest who pours water over the head of the child. These are visible signs like the host made of wheat that is prepared on the altar and through the hands of the priest becomes a sign of an invisible presence. Christ, who will become present here at the Words of Institution, is the One whom we thank for the water of baptism. Jesus is the same one who put curative power in the mud and in the Pool of Siloam that gave sight to a man who was born blind. Jesus is the great sacrament of the Father. Jesus is visible.

The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me "Go to Siloam and wash" (v). For people who have no faith, no depth, this man is Jesus. But those people who have faith, fall to their knees. (w) You are not just a man but rather in your visibility as man is hidden the power of God. This happens in every sacrament.

For this reason, my sisters and brothers, we insist on the need to receive the sacraments with a greater awareness. It is useless to receive the consecrated host if our conscience has not become aware of the fact that the taste of wheat hides the infinite presence of the Lord, our God. What use is it to bring a child to the baptistery --- even though it might be acceptable socially --- if we are not aware that this child, a child of the flesh, is being presented before the visible signs of water and oil? But even more, what happens to this child's soul? The child is cleansed of original sin, incorporated into Christ as a living member and becomes a member of the living body of Christ --- the Church. This is the grace of baptism.

My sisters and brothers, we have still not understood the greatness of the dignity of having been baptized and we will probably never understand this until we are in heaven. Through water and the ceremonies of baptism, Christ anoints us, just as Samuel anointed David and gave him the spirit of God and made him king of Israel. The blind man of the gospel was given sight but, more importantly, the vision of his soul was made clearer and he discovered the value of faith. Hopefully during this season of Lent, we will purify ourselves and allow ourselves to become more aware of the life of God within us, the life of God in which we participate because we are Christians. If, unfortunately, we have lost this life of God because of sin --- each time that we sin we lose the life of God --- let us run to the Holy Spirit and drive out this demon. People say there no one is possessed by a demon. How is it possible that no one is possessed when those in mortal sin are possessed by a demon? In such a situation, God no longer possesses these individuals, but because of sin they are possessed by the devil. Lent is a time when we are called to do penance so that if we, who have been baptized and been honored to be called children of God, if we have lost our dignity because we have opted for sin, now we are able to repent and return to God. Therefore, during this Easter season of 1978, through repentance and forgiveness we are able to recover the life that was given to us at the time of our baptism. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, we should see the gestures of Jesus in the sacraments.

In the intimate diary of a Protestant minister, we find this beautiful confession: *As a good Protestant, I believed that the Church was a screen that hindered my relationship with Christ. Therefore, I rejected the Church with its institution of sacraments and the Roman Pontiff. All*

of this appeared to me to be false. But now I am a Catholic and I have understood that the institution of the Church and the sacraments of the Church are Christ's instruments that give me his truth and his grace. I understand the need for the Church and for this reason I have become Catholic so that I can rely on these sacraments of the Church and know that in every sacrament of the Church, the hands of Christ are present. The hands of Christ are present in the confessor who signs me with the sign of the cross and says: *I absolve you from your sins.* The hands of Christ are present in the hands of the bishop who places his hands over the young person and in the sacrament of confirmation brings the power of the Holy Spirit to this person. The hands of Christ are present in the hands of the priest who anoints a dying person. The hands of Christ are anointing this person as he/she travels to eternity and leaves this world behind. What is a sacrament? It is Christ acting in our life, an action that enables us to participate in the life of God. Let us hold in esteem the sacraments and above all, let us hold in esteem the great sacrament of our baptism.

Baptism provokes a crisis between those who have been baptized and the society in which they live

Finally, my sisters and brothers, I share with you this final thought that underlies the greater part of today's gospel: every baptized person provokes a crisis. The man who was born blind makes this reality most evident. The reaction begins with those who knew the man when he was blind. After he was cured they stated: *This is not the same man, he just looks like him* (x). The blind man had to tell them: *I am he!* Later, because of their fear of the Jewish authorities who have already said that anyone who believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue, (y) the blind man's parents were afraid to profess their faith in Jesus. So they said: *We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself* (z). Then the crisis with Jesus' enemies begins. The Pharisees who are going to judge Jesus because he gave sight to a blind man on the Sabbath said: *We know that this man is a sinner* (a2). The blind man responded: *I do not know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see and God does not listen to sinners* (b2).

The dialogue between the Pharisees and the cured blind man is most interesting. It is good to reflect on this dialogue because we discover how people who have been baptized ought to act. They must give witness to their baptism and not be ashamed or embarrassed by their great benefactor, for without Jesus they would be unable to see. We must give witness to our faith and to the fact that we are children of God. When we proclaim this reality, then there is no way that we can ever deny this fact but must continue to be witnesses before the world. Thus every person who has been baptized is a trusted witness, an eye-witness: *I have seen him and I am a protagonist of what I proclaim.* This is the boldness of those who have been baptized and their commitment is most important.

Finally, we reflect on the polemic against Jesus who is absent, yet finds himself accused. My sisters and brothers, look at how Jesus is persecuted in every baptized person. The Pharisees are not really interested in the man who was born blind but rather were most interested in Jesus. Because we are not lords over our own lives, but rather representatives of Christ, we have a responsibility to give witness to our faith. Those who have been baptized and are cowards and refuse to proclaim their faith in Christ during these difficult times of the Church, those who sell themselves and seek a more comfortable life and those who betray their Catholicism, not only betray themselves but also betray the Church and betray Christ.

The outcome of this trial of an absent, accused person concludes when the accused person becomes present. At the conclusion of today's gospel, the accused one becomes present and also becomes the judge who speaks to his enemies: *I have come into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see but sincerely seek for sight, then they will see; but all those who believe they are self-sufficient and better than others and reject the humble gesture of the blind man who was cured, those will remain blinded (c2)*. Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus: *Surely we are not also blind, are we? (d2)*. Jesus then responds to them: *I do not say that you are blind, for if you were blind it would not be your fault. But because you say that you see, because you are gratified with your vain knowledge and because you judge with human criteria, therefore you are guilty and you are willfully blind. Indeed, there is no worse blindness than to have no desire to see (e2)*.

My sisters and brothers, before the Christ of our baptism we should be humble and recognize that we see only because of Christ. Thus we should attempt to see the history of the world with Jesus' criteria. We should attempt to see our social, political and economic relationships not with the self-sufficiency of the Pharisees but with the humility of one who was blind, but because of our faith, God shared his light with us. We are poor and as people of faith, we are even poorer. But to the extent that we confess our poverty, God will share his light with us. Indeed, we are blinded by self-sufficiency and pride. We are blinded when we feel we are capable of judging everyone and everything because we possess the supreme truth. Jesus tells us that he came to bring judgment, (f2) a judgment that he does not have to pass down to us because we are passing sentence on ourselves. Those who believe in Jesus and see, will receive an absolutionary judgment. Those who reject Jesus' doctrine and Jesus and the Church and the Church's preaching, have passed judgment on themselves --- they are blind!

My beloved sisters and brothers, we want to see Christ and therefore our faith has to be the source of our greatest pride. Let us prepare ourselves to celebrate this Holy Week worthily. Like the blind man, let us now proclaim our faith.

¹ Interruption in the recording of the homily.

Margin References (a) GS 76: (b) OA 22: (c) OA 25: (d) GS 73: (e) AA 14: (f) OA 26: (g) OA 26: (h) OA 26: (i) 1S 16,2: (j) 1S 16,7: (k) 1SW 16,11: (l) 1S 16,12-13: (m) 1S 16,13: (n) Jn 9,11: (o) Jn 9,17: (p) Jn 9,33: (q) Jn 9,35-36: (r) Jn 4,26: (s) Jn 9,38: (t) Jn 9,38: (u) Jn 9,6-7: (v) Jn 9,11: (w) Jn 9, 38: (x) Jn 9,9: (y) Jn 9,22: (z) Jn 9,20-21: (a2) Jn 9,16: (b2) Jn 9,25-31: (c2) Jn 9,39: (d2) Jn 9,40: (e2) Jn 9,41: (f2) Jn 9,39.