

RUTILIO GRANDE, MAN, CHRISTIAN, PRIEST

El Paisnal

March 5, 1978

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Dear Sisters and brothers:

Once again Christ is passing by El Paisnal. Each time that the Eucharist is celebrated, the Lord, as seen in today's gospel, passes by. This morning we are aware of the Lord's special passing and we want to interpret this event in the depths of our conscience, in our love and in our prayers for Father Grande and the two *campesinos* who died with him one year ago.

I want to base my reflections on the Word that has just been read and want to highlight three thoughts. I do this so that all might understand why the Church views Father Grande as a great individual. We do not want to see his grandeur mutilated or twisted for he proclaimed an authentic liberation. Therefore, we gather here to embrace his message. I want to speak about Rutilio Grande as a man, as a Christian and as a priest. This morning this is the message that we are going to take away from his burial place --- a message that my brother priests, men and women religious, pastoral ministers and all the People of God desire to take with them so that we might continue the wonderful mission that he undertook and, as I have already said, a mission that one year ago came to a glorious end as he walked with his people.

Rutilio Grande as a man

The man! How beautiful to listen to today's first reading and hear it proclaimed here in El Paisnal. Let us change the name of the city and instead of Bethlehem where Samuel was sent to visit the family of Jesse because God had chosen one of his sons to be the future king of Israel, let us imagine that God has sent his prophet to Paisnal. Here in a home in this town of Paisnal, like in Bethlehem of Judea, Rutilio Grande was born with the signs of one who was chosen by God in the midst of his people. God anointed Rutilio Grande just as David was anointed. We are also able to say that on the day of Rutilio's anointing the Spirit of God rested upon him. (a) Then this man carried from here the gift of love for his people. This man saw the landscape that we are seeing at this moment and like the children of today who live in Paisnal, felt the dust arise from the streets and experienced the sadness of poverty and the difficulties of living in a distant village. Yet this man also experienced the moral wealth of the people, the wealth of a home where he learned how to pray, where he learned how to see God and love the neighbor. It was here where Bishop Chavez, during one of his pastoral visits, found Rutilio among the other young men and asked him: *Do you want to be a priest?* Then Bishop Chavez brought him to the seminary. In the same way that David, the son of Jesse, was called, so too Rutilio was called to begin to walk that road on which day after day he would be led to become a better man.

Yes, we can see my sisters and brothers that the greatness of the human person does not reside in the fact that one goes to the great city, or that one has titles of honor or wealth or

money. The greatness of the human person resides in becoming more human. Thus when Rutilio achieved the fullness of his humanity, we find him returning here to El Paisnal. In the evening of the patron feast of this town, he returned here, filled with a love for humanity --- a love that was developed in his heart during the time of his university studies. This man had come to understand that true greatness did not reside in leaving Paisnal and becoming rich in some other place. Rather his knowledge and his vocation led him to realize that true greatness meant returning to his people, loving his people and becoming more human. Yes, this is true greatness. True human development does not consist in *having* more but in *being* more and Rutilio became the man that began his development here and continued to develop himself until he became the man that we now claim as our own, the man whose teaching we want to embrace. There is always the danger of confusing this man with merely human development. Indeed, he was so human that it could appear that there was no other dimension to his life but this humanness. Nevertheless, let us enter his heart and look at another dimension of his life: Rutilio, the Christian.

Rutilio Grande as a Christian

Like the blind man in today's gospel, so too Rutilio one day was anointed here in the parish church. The gospel tells us that Jesus anointed the blind man with clay molded from the dust of the earth and his saliva. (b) Jesus then commanded the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. All of these actions seem to refer to baptism, a baptism that makes the human person a Christian. This Christian, then, hears the words of Saint Paul: *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light* (c).

As a man, Rutilio died one year ago, but as a Christian, he can never die. The immortal light of Christ has enlightened him. In the depths of his being there is a commitment to the One he discovered within him. Like the blind man, Rutilio was asked: *do you believe in the Son of Man?* (d). He responded: *Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?* In his catechism, in the seminary and throughout his religious life, he came to know Christ. Like the blind man in the gospel, Rutilio was able to prostrate himself every day before the Lord and say: *Yes Lord, I believe in you; I will follow you.* (e) *My doctrine is Christian; my liberation is a gospel liberation and I do not want this liberation to be confused with other ideologies that are merely temporal. I want to be a Christian who hopes in the true progress of this society. While Paradise will never be found here on earth, yet I want this earth to reflect the Paradise toward which we journey.* This is the Kingdom of God that must be established on earth, a kingdom that many people do not want and yet a kingdom that is most necessary. Even if one must die as a martyr, this kingdom must be preached and announced.

This is the Christ that Rutilio encountered. Saint Paul in today's reading seems to be describing Father Grande's soul when he writes: *Live as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them* (f). So much evil is done by the children of darkness! So difficult to reveal and bring this evil into the light! So difficult to proclaim that this evil is unjust! So difficult to preach about the disorder, the abuses and the transgressions! Yet because Father Grande had the courage to unmask so many evils, the children of darkness looked for a way to kill him, and then they did kill him.

It is said that someone was laughing on the day of his assassination and said: *Now we have proven that even the priest's skin can be penetrated by bullets.* Yes, they laughed because they believed that they had put an end to Rutilio's Christian preaching. What they did not expect was that his death would cause a storm, a spring time, and a new beginning

that was initiated by the Christian people of El Salvador one year ago. They did not know that they had planted a seed that would produce a great harvest. Jesus said: *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit* (g). The children of darkness have not triumphed over Father Grande. My sisters and brothers, the harvest of persecution has yielded much fruit!

At this time I want to give thanks to this Christian, to the Christians who died with him and to the Christians who worked with him, for the seeds of spring that are now being harvested. It is said that there has never before been so much hope in our Archdiocese and Church. The Superior General of the Jesuits said that the death of a Christian is the seed that produces more Christians and more vocations. This is the life that was undertaken by Father Grande and through his baptism he broadened the horizons to such width that we, who here are on earth, are unable to understand all that has happened.

My dear sisters and brothers who are reflecting with me in light of the gospel, I invite you to realize that this is the example that must be followed by you and by everyone who is concerned about the liberation of our people. Let us not confuse this liberation with other liberations of this world. Let us open ourselves to the horizons of faith. Let us believe like Father Grande. Let us proclaim the Church's doctrine of liberation. Let us proclaim this doctrine from the perspective of knowing that one does not die when one is martyred, rather one rises above death and continues to become incarnated in the lives of those who follow. Christian ideals made this man great. Christianity enhanced his humanity --- a human Christianity that enabled Father Grande to embrace God and enabled him to live with hope.

Rutilio Grande as priest

Finally, my sisters and brothers, let us talk about Father Grande as a priest. Excuse me, before he was a priest, he was a religious: a Jesuit. At this time I want to pay tribute to and extend my gratitude and the gratitude of the people of God to the Jesuit community. The Jesuit Provincial of Central America is present with us. Also some of Father Grande's companions are here, men who knew the depths of his religious soul that pulsed with the spirit of Saint Ignatius --- a soul that knew how to ask the crucified Christ who died for him: *what have I done for Christ? What do I do for Christ? What should I do for Christ?*¹ It seems to me that the life of this Christian religious is the answer to this question.

What should I do for Christ? It explains how one is inspired to live a life consecrated to God and walk tirelessly along dusty roads, carrying a backpack, walking like a *campesino* pilgrim, visiting humble houses and feeling as though he was a brother to the poor. Among the *campesinos*, he felt himself to be the most incarnated man because, like a good Jesuit, he carried Christ in his heart. As stated by the other Jesuits who were expelled from this region, Rutilio Grande lived and thought like the Christ he had learned about. Here he learned how to be a Christian because you, the people of El Salvador, showed him the true image of Christ that Saint Ignatius spoke about. This image of Christ is not only discovered during a spiritual retreat, but is also found here, living among the people where Christ is enfleshed and suffers, where Christ is persecuted, where Christ is found in men who sleep in the fields because they are unable to sleep in their houses, where Christ is seen in the sick and those who suffer the consequences of so many painful conditions. Here is Christ carrying his cross, not as a meditation in a chapel as one contemplates the Stations of the Cross, but alive in the midst of the people. Here is Christ with his cross on the way to Calvary. This is the Christ that became incarnated in this religious, in this Jesuit, in this follower of Jesus.

My beloved Jesuit brothers, we have in Paisnal a Jesuit martyr. His tomb gives glory to the Society of Jesus and the Church. I want to thank all of you who, as a team, came here and taught the people to love Jesus, gave to people's poverty and suffering a sense of salvation, liberation and redemption. Now the greatest suffering for Rutilio Grande would be to misunderstand him and mutilate his message of liberation. Let us honor him and, in the name of Jesus, let us embrace his message. For without Jesus there is no real liberation. Jesus is the only liberator and without him we can never understand the depths of hope that filled Father Grande's heart --- a hope that enables him to live with joy in heaven because he knows that better times will come for these lands.

Finally, my sisters and brothers, I want to speak about the priest, the priest who embraced his vocation, who was anointed not only with the Oil of Chrism that is used to anoint all ministers of the altar, but also anointed with the oil of martyrdom, with his own blood. Last year, when I saw him that night in the Church of Aguilares, that is how he appeared: prostrated, like the priests who prostrate themselves to be anointed, to become eternal priests, to become martyrs. He has begun to celebrate Mass in heaven, but he lived here and we felt that he was a part of us. Now here, with his brother priests around the altar, we say that we miss him. We feel as though he should be walking with us and that someone was killed who should not have suffered such a fate. We feel as though he should be walking with us and doing good. He was so strong, so young! He could have done so much!

The crime of Father Grande's assassination is horrible especially because a man of such great hope has been taken from us. Yet as the Jesuit Provincial said: *We are the ones who now inherit his gifts*. The empty space that he left we are now going to try to fill. Here we have the new pastor, Father Octavio Cruz. He has taken on a great responsibility. When Paul VI stood before the tomb of John XXIII he said: *His inheritance is great. No, it cannot remain encased in this tomb* and so he took up this inheritance in order to move forward the work of the Church.

A priest does the same thing and so I see in the person of the priest the figure of Christ who is described in today's gospel, curing a man who was born blind and saying: *I am the light of the world and I have to do the works of the One who sent me* (h). A priest, like Christ, is judged by other Christians. The hatred of the Pharisees against the blind man who recovered his sight was not just directed against him, but also directed against Jesus. So too the ferocity of the persecution is not only directed against the Jewish people, but is also directed against and culminates in the persecution and death of Jesus. Thus the ferocity of the persecution in Aguilares and in Paisnal culminated in the persecution and death of Father Grande. Today, they are no longer able to kill Father Grande, so they persecute those who follow his teaching. But we have acquired a commitment --- not a commitment to Father Grande but a commitment to the One who was the center of Father Grande's preaching: Jesus Christ, the immortal One.

Jesus is the priest who embarrassed the parents of the blind man: *he is of age, ask him* (i). They were afraid because the Jewish authorities had decreed that anyone who believed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. Therefore, woe to those who preach the teachings of Father Grande! Because of fear many may walk away. Hopefully my sisters and brothers, this anniversary will remind us of our great commitment to Christ, a commitment that we share in common because of our baptism. May Father Grande's absence

stimulate us to faithfully follow the teachings of Christ, the One in whom we believe and whom, through baptism, we carry within us.

The blind man was expelled from the synagogue because of Jesus. (j) The priest must realize that his preaching is dangerous, and many people will separate themselves from the Church because they do not want to commit themselves. How many friends of Father Grande are now embarrassed to admit that they knew him! Hopefully that is not the case because I know there are many courageous people who follow Father Grande's teaching. It is the priest, Christ, who goes out to confront his persecutors and tells them: (k) *Do you want to believe in the Son of Man? Do not be afraid! Who is the one you must believe in? It is I, the one who is talking with you.* The priest bears the presence of Jesus and encouraged by this presence he performs in the person of Jesus, sacramental actions that attract the hearts of people to grace and truth.

Finally, the priest, together with Christ, the One who stands accused, becomes the judge. Jesus says: *I have come into this world for judgment* (l). A trial: to blind those who see and to give sight to the blind. There is a cutting irony in Saint John's gospel. The Pharisee's ask: *Surely we are not also blind, are we?* (m). Jesus responds: *If you were blind you would have no sin; but now you are saying, "We see," so your sin remains.* They were blind of heart; blind because they did not understand the true message of liberation; blind because they thought they were self-sufficient; blind because they disrespected others and understood very little of Jesus' message; blind because they did not know what it meant to walk in the light of the Lord. This is the priest who identifies himself with Christ who suffered and died; the priest, who like Father Grande, is willing, if it is necessary, to die for the doctrine of Christ.

My beloved sisters and brothers, I thank you and want you to know that because of your kindness the memory of Father Grande is alive, alive with great enthusiasm. For this reason we have come together here in his birthplace. We have come to the tomb of Father Grande, like Samuel went to the house of Jesse, and we know that the Spirit of God is with him. The memory of him will bring hope to our people if we know how to understand the Christian and priestly dimensions of his life. For this reason we commemorate today his life and death in this celebration of the Eucharist, for it is here in the Eucharist that the priest finds the center of his life --- it is here where Father Grande was able to offer his joy and hopes and anguish, his work and his pastoral plans to God. The Mass is the center because the Eucharist is Christ. My sisters and brothers, let us live intensely this solemn moment of our history, this moment in which we find ourselves not only with Father Grande and his message, but also find ourselves with the source of that priesthood, Jesus Christ, the Lord. So be it. Amen.

¹ St Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 53.

Margin References (a) 1S 16,13b: (b) Jn 9,6-7: (c) Ep 5,14: (d) Jn 9,35-36: (e) Jn 9,38: (f) Ep 5,8-11: (g) Jn 12,24: (h) Jn 8,12: (i) Jn 9,23: (j) Jn 9,34b: (k) Jn 9,35-37: (l) Jn 9,39: (m) Jn 9,40-41.