

# THE RISEN ONE LIVES IN HIS CHURCH

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 2, 1978**

*Acts 2:42-47*

*1 Peter 1:3-9*

*John 20:19-31*

*These things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and therefore, believing, you might have faith in his name. (a) We have solemnly proclaimed these words in song. Indeed it is for this reason that we come together to celebrate Mass and to listen to the Word of God or to read this same Word of God in our Bibles. We reflect on this Word not because we are seeking some form of human intelligence but because we realize that the Gospel is the power of God. Therefore at this time let us not focus on the human words that are spoken but rather let us believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that Jesus is the one who is speaking to us through his Church, speaking to us so that we might have life in him. We can see, then, how beautiful are this People of God! Just think of the cathedral this morning, filled with women and men and think of the many communities that are gathered in the name of the Lord and listening to this broadcast. We can say with St Peter today: *Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, for through his resurrection from the dead we have been born anew and live now with a lively hope.*(b)*

## **Events in San Pedro Perulapán**

Each Sunday as we reflect on the Word of God, we are not engaged in some simple spiritual practice but rather we proclaim that we are concretely walking through history, we are involved in the life of our people and living circumstances such as the ones that have occurred in San Pedro Perulapán. This is the concrete framework of Christians. It is also within this concrete framework that the Christian is called to be salt of the earth and light to the world. (c) Christians must live with great hope and carry this hope in their hearts. They must not allow their faith to be weakened nor can they lose hope in life and the resurrection. It is for this reason that I customarily place my words within the concrete framework of the people of the Archdiocese, within the framework of this people that desires to live their faith in the Word of God. If our preaching did not take this framework into consideration, if we did not allow the light of the gospel to enlighten the beauty of the week, if we allowed the light of the gospel to shine only on the ugly scars of our history, then we would not be proclaiming the authentic gospel of our Divine Savior.

The events of this past week have been so serious<sup>1</sup> that I do not want to confine these events to my personal and private memory. The Chancery has published a statement that I have asked to be read in all the Churches.<sup>2</sup> I have requested this not simply to give an example, but because I believe that it is good to illuminate these events with the light of the gospel. Allow me then to read this statement and also to share with you some brief comments.

*The Archbishop of San Salvador, together with his Auxiliary Bishop, and gathering together the sense of the clergy, the men and women religious of the Archdiocese and the faithful laity, communicates the following.* This introduction ought to give you the idea, my sisters and brothers, that even though I am the one who is speaking the words of this statement, nevertheless I speak as the voice of an institution. This voice proclaims the words, but the words commit the whole institution. The whole institution of the Archdiocese is speaking through these words. Those who want to isolate the Archbishop from the rest of the clergy or laity are mistaken. How is it possible to hear the words that are spoken with the mouth and not consider these words as part of the whole body? Therefore I want to thank the priests and religious and laity who each day live in a deeper solidarity with the teachings of the bishop. In their name I am going to read what I have written in this statement and I understand that all of them are committed in faith to this reality.

*Everyone is aware of the tragic situation that our country is now experiencing, especially the situation that has recently occurred in San Pedro Perulapán: the military operations that have occurred there, the high number of dead and wounded, the great number of "disappearances", the number of families who have abandoned their homes and the number of people who have been taken to prison. This is certainly a tragic situation and as pastors we cannot remain silent when confronted with these events. As we have done on other occasions, we must enlighten these events with the light that comes from our Christian faith.*

*As pastors of the People of God, this situation reminds us, in the first place, of the parable known as the Good Samaritan who found a wounded man on the road.(d) We find ourselves today, in the presence of a people wounded and cast aside on many roads of our country. We know the nature of their past and present wounds --- wounds that have occurred as a result of the events that have recently occurred. This wounded nation prevents us from simply passing by and ignoring those who are wounded. This was the response of the priest and Levite in the parable. We, like the Good Samaritan, are encouraged to approach the wounded persons and heal their wounds.*

My sisters and brothers, the parable of Jesus condemns the attitude of the priest and the Levite because it is not enough to be clothed in ecclesiastical garments and it is not enough to say: *I am Catholic*. Neither of these two actions will provide us with God's approval. What is necessary here is love, especially love for the neighbor. Even though one might be a bishop or a priest or a baptized person, yet if we do not fulfill our obligations and follow the example of the Good Samaritan then we become imitators of the evil priests of the ancient Law who passed by on the other side of the road in order to avoid confronting the wounded man on the road. In this way we become convinced that we should not get involved in these kinds of situations: *Be prudent! Do not offend anyone! Be more gentle!* Yet as we act in this way, we must realize that we do not fulfill the command of Jesus but we simply pass by on the other side of the road. Look at how many people pass by on the other side of the road so that they will not have to confront the wounded individuals on the road! Look at how many people also try to pass by on the other side of the road, but still they cannot avoid the wounded individuals on the road! Their own conscience does not allow them to live in peace until they confront this situation! The Christian commitment is most serious and our priestly and Episcopal commitment obliges us to go out and provide for the poor wounded individuals on the road.

*Putting aside all partisan interests, we want the truth of this situation clarified. We ask for a true clarification of the facts because the versions that have been presented to us are*

*confusing, partial, and contradictory. We have an official version but we also have another version that appears in our newspapers, and finally another version from witnesses of these events,<sup>3</sup> people who continue to come to the Chancery to speak with us. We have spoken about this previously in our Bulletins, #39 and 40.<sup>4</sup>*

*Our newspapers are witnesses of the confusion that revolves around this information. We ask them to look for some mechanism that will lead to an investigation that will ultimately guarantee the impartial and true presentation of the facts. In this clarification of the truth, the voice of those who are directly implicated and officially accused must be heard. This clarification of the truth is a right that the Church imposes on everyone. It is one of the pillars of our social order and this takes on greater importance because here we are not only talking about the truth but life itself is in jeopardy.*

It is a shame, my sisters and brothers, that in these serious matters, there are those who want to deceive the people. It is a shame that the means of communication sell themselves to other interests. It is a shame that we cannot trust the news that appears in the newspapers or the television or the radio because everything is bought and forged and no one speaks the truth. We are not saying that the whole truth resides with the other side but our Chancery --- even though at different moments it has been surrounded by police --- has had the great satisfaction of receiving witnesses who wanted to make statements about the events that they experienced. We have told these people: *We do not want stories nor do we want third hand information. Tell us what you have seen. Tell us your experience.* What has occurred there is most cruel. Neither the press nor the television has told the truth. Not even in our courts where one would think that the truth can be freely presented, not even there have the accused been able to get a hearing. I call upon the Supreme Court to provide us with a more authentic form of justice so that our justice does not become reduced to the justice that we experience in the means of communication --- a partial justice.

*Once again we want to state that the Church and the Chancery have never defended violence nor incited others to act violently. In fact I ask you to be mindful of our recent message that was published in January where we stated: Yes to peace and no to violence!<sup>5</sup> Therefore those statements that declare that the Church is instigating violence are false and slanderous. We repeat these words and yet we are aware of the fact that there are certain sectors of society that will never be convinced of this fact. These persons seek to discover in the Church the origins of certain evils that in reality proceed from the unjust structures of society. Our venerable predecessor, Bishop Luis Chávez y González had to defend himself from these slanders and issued a statement on December 9, 1976 and we have repeated his words in our homilies, messages and pastoral letters. It ought to be very clear that the Church does not promote violence.*

My sisters and brothers, it is a shame that even in official statements, statements issued by the Ministry of Defense, our present situation is seen as the result of *subversive preaching*. Motivated by evil intentions these same individuals say that *religious associations* are provoking the disorder in our society. You can see the tendency to blame the Church. For this reason and for quite some time the Church has tried to define herself: the Church defends human rights and the just demands of the *campesinos* but she also distinguishes herself from those groups that many of her children have joined and have a right to join, but these groups are not the Church.

Let us be very clear here: these groups, more specifically, FECCAS and UTC<sup>6</sup> are not the Church and they are not religious associations. Yes, Catholics are members of these groups and they have a right as citizens to join any organization that they want. In conscience they must be responsible for their actions, so do not say that the Church is sowing violence and discord. Do not speak of the Church in this way even when baptized people join ORDEN or the army and then abuse other sisters and brothers. The Church is not responsible for their actions. Yes these people are baptized but they are certainly not living their baptismal commitment. The Church is also not responsible even when some government officials proclaim that they are baptized Catholics --- they are not the Church. Later I am going to speak about what is this Church but for now I simply say that the Church inspires the words and thinking of Christians who are in agreement with the just demands of social justice that calls upon the Church, in the name of the gospel, to create a society that is more fraternal. We are going to speak about all of this now.

*As we analyze the real roots of violence in our society we want to remember that if we do not create social and political possibilities that enable the poorest members of our society and the campesinos to present their just demands and their urgent needs, then unfortunately violence will increase. If the campesinos find that all the doors for dialogue are closed, if they find it impossible to organize themselves and defend their legitimate interests, if they are unable to demonstrate in a peaceful manner, then --- as we said in our January statement<sup>7</sup> --- violent incidents will increase in number. Therefore, it is most urgent that a social and political climate be created that will enable the campesinos to express their needs clearly and freely.*

My sisters and brothers, the right to organize is a basic human right. No one can restrict this right. The Constitution lays out the fundamental principles that protect morality and public order.<sup>8</sup> All other realities that deal with providing food for one's family, obtaining land so that one can plant crops, lowering the price of fertilizers and insecticides; all the realities that deal with the vital necessities of life and with organizing people so that they do not die of hunger --- all of these realities are basic rights that people possess. When these people arrive for a scheduled appointment at a bank and find the bank closed, then these individuals feel as though they have been taken as fools. And then what do these *campesinos* encounter? They are attacked --- and here I am referring to the events that occurred on March 17<sup>th</sup>. This is not just! No, the Church is not planting seeds of violence. This violence is caused by the unjust situations and the unjust institutions and the unjust laws that favor one sector of society and do not take into consideration the common good of all people. When faced with these situations the Church cannot remain silent. Indeed the Church has an evangelical right to aid people and an obligation to the Father of all people to demand a more fraternal order in our society.

*This dialogue, however, will not reestablish our desired peace if there is not a strong resolve to transform the unjust structures of society. Only this transformation can eliminate oppressive, spontaneous, repressive violence. As the bishops of Latin American have said,(e) without the transformation of structures, institutionalized violence will continue and we do not want to continue to experience the fruits of this institutionalized violence. The Church believes in peace; but she is aware of the fact that peace is not simply the absence of violence and that peace is never achieved through repressive violence. True peace is only obtained as the fruit of justice. We want to believe that no person and no one in El Salvador wants violence or an on-going struggle among campesinos or more military operations. To combat*

*this violence we must become involved in the long and difficult struggle of sharing among all the people of El Salvador the wealth of our nation and the wealth of all men and women.*

This is not communism but rather this is Christian justice. To point out the roots of violence does not mean that we are planting seeds of violence but rather we are pointing out the sources of this violence and we also demand that those who can change this situation actually bring about those changes. This kind of change should be seen as a positive step toward the construction of a true country, a true common good. Military operations that repress our sisters and brothers will achieve nothing more than planting more seeds for violence to occur. Yesterday we saw violence in Aguilares. Yesterday we saw violence in San Pedro Perulapán. Last night we experienced violence in Perulapía and San José Guayabal. Violence will continue to arise if the roots of violence remain well established in our society. Therefore with these well established roots of violence, should we be surprised that violence arises in so many different parts of our country?

*Therefore we call upon all the people of good will in El Salvador to cooperate in the establishment and promotion of true justice and peace. Once again we condemn the violent structures of our society and those forms of violence that occasion self-defense through the use of more violence. We say NO to institutionalized violence and we say NO to the use of violence for self-defense. This is the only way that we can eliminate this spiral of violence.*

*We call upon people to reflect and use common sense. Our country cannot continue along the same path. We must overcome the indifference that exists among many people and enables them to be spectators in the face of this terrible situation. We must overcome this attitude of indifference especially in the rural areas. We must also combat selfishness that hides itself within those persons who do not want to place what is theirs at the disposal of others. We must return to the discovery of that profound gospel truth that speaks of serving the majority of people who are poor.*

*My sisters and brothers, we also call upon the government to put in place effective means to pacify the country. We believe that one of these means should be an amnesty, reasonable and generous, an amnesty that shows that the government really wants to establish peace among the people of El Salvador. This would be the first step toward a common dialogue that would lead to other steps in the common construction of a better social order.*

My sisters and brothers, this week has been very revealing. You know that when confronted with this situation I organized a Committee of Solidarity. Through the generous initiative of a woman, we called upon all those organizations that are in agreement with us. Many of these organizations sent representatives while others sent a message: *we cannot participate because we do not want to take sides*. Other told us they could not participate because *they did not want to get involved in politics*. My sisters and brother, what a shame to remain indifferent under the pretext of not becoming involved in politics! These people stand with their arms crossed and do good only when it is easy to do good, when doing good brings them glory and prestige. To serve is to sacrifice oneself.

Here I want to thank those groups that were present and who are helping us in our efforts. In a special way I want to thank a group of lawyers and law students who are going to help not just the Church but the people of El Salvador, those who need a voice so that they can be heard in the courts and in government offices where so many times the voice of the poor is overwhelmed by the unjust shouts of the most powerful. I thank you, my beloved lawyers

and law students. I hope that this initiative will bring about constitutional laws and legislation and principles that will instill true hope and joy in all people and put an end to the fear and terror and mistrust. We can expect much of these lawyers because they are animated by a true Christian spirit and we lament the fact that others have not joined them because they were afraid they would lose clients. These others lack courage and their pockets and comfort are more important. What a shame!

Here I call upon those persons who call themselves Catholic, those who are the Church's instruments in her pastoral ministry: our Catholic Schools have to communicate the voice of the gospel and teach their students and families that in these schools they must draw closer to the voice of the Church. I call upon the communities and the parishes and all those other institutions in every part of the Archdiocese to be the voice of the Church and to not flee from this responsibility in the way that the priest ran away in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Finally, my sisters and brothers, *We ask everyone to pray for those who have died and for the members of their families. Pray that they might rest in peace with the Lord and pray that their families might begin to reconstruct their lives even though they are now missing a loved one who once sustained them.* I want to call to your attention the memory of Miguelito Acosta, a poor young man who was looking for work in San Salvador and the only place he found where he could sleep was an abandoned pick-up truck. This vehicle was set on fire and Miguelito burned to death. What a horrible scene! His mother and sisters came here and had to bury the person who was the hope of their family! Once again we must see such an event as the fruit of unjust social organization.

*We also ask for the generous cooperation of all people so that we might provide economic assistance to the many families who are in mourning, homeless and so many others who have been wounded in these violent actions.* The Committee of Solidarity is doing some wonderful work. In conjunction with Caritas and other Catholic institutions they are collecting food, clothing and money. These donations can be made in the Chancery and in the offices of Caritas. Also Caritas has an office beside the Cathedral and we are grateful for all your contributions.

In the same line of thought allow me to publicly give praise to the community of Ilopango for a letter that they sent me during Easter Week that contained the fruit of their Lenten fasts. The prophet Isaiah says: *To fast is to share your bread with the hungry* (f) and this community --- adults, young men and women and children --- deprived themselves of many things and have deposited at the Chancery the result of their fasting. To assist the people in need in San Pedro Perulapán they brought 70 colones to the Chancery. Putting aside for a moment the amount of money, I want to highlight the quality of this gift for it is the fruit of fraternal Christian charity, the fruit of poor people who want to help other poor people. What a beautiful gesture! We have so many wonderful communities in the Archdiocese!

*We want to conclude with the same evangelical consideration that we began with. Our nation is wounded and needs a Good Samaritan. This is the only interest that motivates us as pastors of the People of God. It is for this reason that we want the truth clarified, that we want everyone to be free to speak, that we want the needs of the campesinos to be heard, that we want to be able to create a society that can satisfy these needs. Only in this way can we put a halt to the violence and build in peace.*

My sisters and brothers, in light of this truth it is now easy to understanding today's three readings. My commentary is entitled, *the Resurrected Jesus lives in his Church*. During these days we reflect on the history of the resurrection that is the essential and fundamental witness of the apostolic Church. The resurrection of Jesus is the title that the Church puts forth to the public to justify her role as an instrument of the world's salvation. Why? This is made clear in today's readings that refer to the resurrected Jesus breathing forth his Spirit: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you* (g). Then, as we saw in the book of Genesis (h) when God breathed the spirit of life into the clay from which he formed our ancestors, so in today's gospel Jesus breathes his redemptive mission to the world into this institution that he had created: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you*. The breath is then interpreted: *Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain, they are retained* (i). These words outline the Church's mission and thus a new Paradise is created: Adam, intelligent, awake, free, capable of love, an image of God; the Church, awakened from the sleep of Pentecost, is a new creation. My sisters and brothers, you are that Church. You who are listening to me and reflecting with me, you are that Church. We are the Church, a new creation that received the breath of life. Now we will never die but we will be raised up to a new life.

In order to understand all of this I will speak with you about two ideas: (1) Christ lives; (2) Christ lives not only in heaven but also in the community of believers on earth. Today as we commemorate the resurrection once again, hopefully my poor words will enable all of you who are gathered here and all the baptized to discover the greatness of your life, the beauty of the Church and the richness of the community, even though this community might be composed of poor *campesinos*. Remember that these communities are rich when they experience the breathing forth of the resurrected Jesus.

### **Christ lives**

Christ lives! We should note the insistence of the evangelist as he speaks about those who were witnesses of Jesus' presence. Look at how Thomas touched him and ate with him. In his appearances Jesus insisted: *Touch me and see! I am he!*. They ate together and he gave them some fish. He eats with them so that they can understand that spirits do not eat. It is Jesus with flesh and bones, the same historical Jesus who has passed over from death to the resurrection. He lived incarnated on this earth. But now he is not only incarnated as the son of Mary and a Jewish man from Nazareth but is also incarnated as a son of the resurrection, a son of God who became flesh and is able to become enfleshed in all people at all times. He is able to understand the people of El Salvador who lived yesterday, who are alive today and who will live tomorrow. He is the Salvadorian Christ. Christ lives in El Salvador. Christ lives in Guatemala. Christ lives in Africa. The historical Christ, the Christ who became man lives in every age of history and in all the people of the earth. This is characteristic of the Christ who lives and is present. In today's gospel, Jesus receives the most beautiful profession of faith that was ever written in this sacred book. Today, my sisters and brothers, we have the honor of listening to that passage in which Saint John, the sublime evangelist, arrives at the height of an inspired author. This passage speaks to us about Thomas who first doubted and then became convinced of Jesus' resurrection. He falls to his knees and exclaims: *My Lord and my God!* (j). This is Christ.

Look at the biblical interpretation of these two words: *Lord* and *God*. These are the same words that the people of Israel used when they referred to the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob, the Creator. In Hebrew God was referred to as *Yahweh* and *Elohim*, the Lord God.

Thus Thomas refers to Jesus as *Lord and God* --- the creator God, the God of the Old Testament covenant, the God who accompanied the people throughout their history, and the God who will not allow those who believe in him to perish.

It is interesting to remember that at the time when Saint John wrote these words, the Roman Emperors were called gods. Woe to those Roman citizens who called anyone else but the Roman Emperor a god! Yet this remnant of Christians called Christ *Lord and God! We have no other god on earth!* Jesus has come and brought a redemptive mission. How beautiful is the greeting of the Risen Lord. In today's gospel Jesus says three times: *Peace be with you* (k). Peace is Jesus' gift. Therefore when people shatter this peace it must be said (though sadly) that they are not Christian. In the areas of El Salvador where people experience great repression and hostility, the greeting of peace can sound sarcastic. My dear sisters and brothers in Perulapán, I hope that all of you, without any distinction among you, are able to fall on your knees before Christ who alone can give us peace. Jesus gives us peace but not the peace of those who carry out military operations with the collaboration of ORDEN (Nationalist Democratic Organization), not the peace of revenge that is carried out by some of the Popular Organizations. Peace comes from Christ. Only through Christ and through our belief in him can we ever experience true peace.

And it is Christ who will come again. The second reading from Saint Peter is most beautiful. Peter tells us: *Even though we may have to suffer trials yet we await the Lord's return. At that time our faith, which now is being tested, will achieve its culmination with the great event of salvation* (l). Those who are sensitive to salvation and who today are convinced that this salvation cannot ignore the political, economic and social liberation of this planet earth likewise must remember that the Church cannot ignore this liberation of the world. The Church provides a perspective of hope in Christ who will come once again to restore order and make our history an offering to our God.

How wonderful it will be for those who are found with this faith in Christ, with faith in this Christ who will come again! How wonderful it will be for those who live with this hope, the hope of being embraced by a friend who has not been seen for a long time but who has been long awaited! As we will do in short time, the Church as the spouse longs for that time and proclaims: *Come Lord, Jesus!* (m) The One who is afar, loved and aware of the fact that others await him and long for the time of encounter with him --- this one is Christ; this one is the Church. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, Christ lives!

### **Christ lives not only in heaven but also in the community of believers on earth**

My second reflection is the following: Christ is alive in the community. Here it is good to take time to listen to the first reading. In fact I would suggest that the parish communities, the base communities of faith, and all religious communities if they really want to live the true Christian meaning of this Easter season, then read with special devotion the book of the Acts of the Apostles. During these fifty days of Easter, the Church uses this book for her daily Scripture readings. The Acts of the Apostles is a beautiful testimony about how some people encountered Christ alive in the faith of believers and thus became members of this community of believers. Today's reading from Acts speaks to us about this reality. We might examine this community from three distinct perspectives: the community of life, the community of faith, and the eschatological community.



*A community of life.* Acts speaks about a community of life, a life lived in community with one another, a life in which the members of this community sold their possessions and brought in the apostles to administer their funds. In this community no one suffered and everyone was seen as an equal. This then is the meaning of community life: to share. We are far from this reality but at least in our Constitution we have a principle that could provide a bridge for our community. Our constitution states: *private property ought to have a social function.*<sup>9</sup> This social function does not consist of greater production but in fact means that these goods of production should redound to the benefit of the common good of all people. These goods should be shared justly. Everyone should be able to work and participate in this project. Community life does not mean that we just say to one another: *I love you*. Community life involves action. Good works are a clear demonstration of our love and speak louder than good intentions. Today we have a wonderful opportunity to identify with and help those who are homeless and have no food.

Today's reading tells us that the way in which the first Christians lived together was very attractive to others. Word began to spread about this new lifestyle and other people joined the community. Who joined? Look at the final words of today's reading: *every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved* (n). This community was a community of salvation. Thus by belonging to this Church that is known as an instrument of Christ's life, people are able to be saved. It is not enough, however, to just belong to this Church. It is equally important that people be imbued with the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, it is this Spirit that should strengthen people in their resolve to belong to the Church. There are many people who have the name *Catholic* but are not Christian because they are not inspired by the Spirit of God. They will not be saved because only the Spirit of the Redeemer can save --- the Spirit of the Redeemer that is in this Church. Therefore when people say that the Church or the bishop or the priests preach violence and hatred, it is clear that these people are unaware of the Church's origins, for the Church has been placed in the world to proclaim love and communion.

*A community of faith.* Above all, my sisters and brothers, the Christian community is a community of faith. We must be very careful with this word because the Christian community must distinguish itself from all other human organizations and groups. Catholics, as members of this community of the Church, have to live the commitments of their faith in their local community. If outside of the Church people want to bring the light of their Christianity to some collaborative effort that attempts to bring about the liberation of the world, if people decide to join some group, then that is their personal decision. Do not tell your fellow Catholics that they have an obligation to become members of the same organization. This is not true! Everyone is free! Every person must decide for themselves the concrete ways that in conscience they feel called to opt for this liberation of the world. But as Church, the Church only commits herself to be a community of faith.

What does all of this mean? In the passage from the book of the Acts of the Apostles we heard the following words: *they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles* (o). This was a community that prayed often, lived a sacramental life, and broke bread together. This is the same Church that has filled this Cathedral this morning and come together with a sense of faith to listen to a successor of the apostles (unworthy as I may be). Here in the Archdiocese I am a successor of the apostles and the community of faith gathers around this successor to listen to words of faith. My sisters and brothers, I would be foolish and would betray my mission if I were to tell you that your faith brings with it a commitment to become a member of such and such an organization. I would be foolish if here in this Cathedral I

were planting seeds of revenge and hatred and violence. I have never done this. Jesus said that his listeners had spoken on his behalf (p) and anyone who has come here can also say that they have never heard here words of vengeance, hatred or class struggle. This has never occurred here!

Here I have preached our faith, a faith in Christ. Yes, I have said that every person who is enlightened by this faith has to become incarnate in history, in the history of El Salvador. Thus every person has to examine how and where they will become incarnated into this history and how as true Christians are they going to live this incarnation. Do not mutilate yourselves because of the mystique of some group that proclaims violence. A Christian who becomes violent is no longer a Christian. A Christian who becomes a member of ORDEN and then as a member of this group is ordered to beat and kill others --- such a person is no longer a Christian. Christians are people who are loyal to their faith and who are devoted to listening to the word of the apostles, to the revelation of God. Christians are people who allow their lives to be inspired by this listening and then put this word into action. They are not traitors! If there is some Catholic person who doubts the words of the bishop and tells others: *The bishop has to define himself!* My sisters and brothers, I have defined myself very clearly. Now you must define yourselves: are you with the Church or against the Church; are you inside the Church or outside the Church?

*A community of prayer.* Another great power of this Church of Christ is the fact that it is a community of prayer. *They devoted themselves to prayer* (q). My sisters and brothers, this word *prayer* fills me with joy. When you read the book of Acts you will notice how many times the community gathered together to pray. For example, the community came together to pray when they selected Matthias as a substitute for Judas (r), when Peter was imprisoned,(s) when the apostles were leaving for a mission,(t) and during Herod's persecution of the primitive community. In prayer the community found strength because only God can give people this power that the Spirit of God breathed forth upon the Christian community. I want to publicly express my thanks for the strength that I receive from the prayers of so many. Nothing is more beautiful for me than to hear: *We are praying for you. You are not alone. We are with you in prayer.* God be blessed! Thank you! And so I say to you my sisters and brothers, let us pray for those who are weak! Let us pray for those who are traitors! Let us pray for those who are ashamed of their faith! Let us pray for our poor brothers and sisters who doubt even the bishop's sincerity. Let us pray that we have the courage to live as Christians, even when we have to confront the perilous risks of our mission. We must be firm in our preaching, and, like those first Christians, at times we shall have to say: *We must obey God rather than men* (u). From God we will receive the power to proclaim the teaching that is one and true.

This community of faith lives a sacramental life. My sisters and brothers, the sacraments are part of our Church. The Acts of the Apostles states that the members *devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread* (v). This is a precise and mysterious way to refer to the celebration of the Eucharist. We must remember that at that time the community shared their meal together. They ate together, but like Christ who first ate the Passover meal and then created a sacred environment, so too the leader of the Christian community consecrated the bread and wine and these elements became the Lord's Body and Blood.

This is why Pope Paul VI described the present Church as the sacrament of salvation. (w) Entering the Church community shows itself in many ways which express its nature. The person who welcomes the Gospel as the word that saves normally expresses it in sacramental

acts. People could not be true children of the Church unless they valued the sacraments of the Church.

I hope the person who asked me the following question is listening to this broadcast. Why would two people who love one another and are living together and are faithful and kind to one another but are not married by the Church, why would these people decide to have their marriage blessed by the Church? Here is your answer. There are many people who are cohabitating and are more faithful to one another than those who are married in the Church. This is certain. But it is also certain that those people who are joined together by bonds of human love have not received the sacrament. The sacrament is a sign that one is part of the Church of Christ. When a man and woman who belong to this Church proclaim that their love is so noble that they are not embarrassed to be children of God, then, they present themselves to a priest who blesses their love. No, cohabitation is not evil, but it is incomplete because the sacramental sign of conjugal love is missing.

The same could be said of those persons who come to Mass and do not participate in the Communion Rite --- the sign is incomplete. I hope that some day we will all come to understand that the breaking of the bread is a sign of Christ inviting us to share at the table. Let us not forget the fact that the altar is the family table. When we gather to celebrate the Mass, when we enter the doors of this Cathedral, we should feel as though we have come home. In our homes, our mothers await us and want to serve us at the table, so too, Christ awaits our presence and wants to serve us at the table. We snub the Lord when at the hour to share the meal we are not hungry or we are not prepared. A sign of our identification with Christ is communion. My sisters and brothers, hopefully one day we will understand the beauty of the Eucharist that is celebrated in our Church! Hopefully we will come to understand that the Mass is not only a word but is also nourishment; it is communion and life.

Finally my sisters and brothers, the Christian community is also an eschatological community. Previously I have explained to you the meaning of this word, namely, eschatology refers to those realities that are beyond the limits of this world. It implies waiting and so we are a people who are waiting. We are a community of hope. Therefore the ways in which the Church contributes to the liberating forces of this world must also take into account her hope in another life. The Church must make the liberators of this earth aware of the fact that there is no paradise here on earth. Neither Communism nor any other group will ever be able to build a paradise outside of heaven. Yet at this present time we must continue to struggle to make this heaven present here on earth. The community of the Church ought to be a reflection of this heaven. It seems to me that this Cathedral is a reflection of heaven when I see people from such different classes and different walks of life seated together on the same benches. I feel that love binds and unites these people together and that this human community reflects that life of the Kingdom of Heaven that we await.

We wait my sisters and brothers and for this reason our life here on earth is not perfect. Yes, even in the Church we will discover defects. We should not be surprised that the prelates, the priests, married people, religious men and women, students in our Catholic schools, etc. do not always fulfill their obligations. We have our faults and defects. In all sincerity I can tell you that every night I have to ask the Lord's forgiveness for my own faults and I believe each one of us finds ourselves in the same position. The Pope also confesses his sins and as priests we must also confess our sins because we are aware of the fact that even though we journey this earth planting seeds of hope in a life hereafter, yet our feet are

covered with the dust of this earth. Every person must step aside from different situations of sin and this could be said of the holiest of Christians.

My sisters and brothers, let us live this sacramental sign. Excuse me for having spoken for so long but today's readings and the concrete history of our nation present us with such beautiful lessons. It is worthwhile to have spent this time reflecting on these realities together. In this way we are able to encourage one another in this faith in Christ who is alive here, in the community. Let us be aware of his presence on the altar and let us worship him in the consecrated host so that with sincerity we can repeat the words of Thomas. Indeed with no doubts in our heart but as true believers let us say: *My Lord and my God* (x).

<sup>1</sup> During Holy Week of 1978, members of ORDEN, with the support of the National Guard, carried out a military operation in several cantons of San Pedro Perulapán, causing the death of six campesinos, four of whom were beheaded; in the same place fourteen campesinos were wounded and sixty eight disappeared. See "Informe de la Comisión de Solidaridad de la Arquidiócesis de San Salvador. Boletín de Prensa n° 2, *Orientación*, 16 April 1978.

<sup>2</sup> On March 31 1978 Mons. Romero wrote a denunciation of these serious events which he read in full in this homily. See "Comunicado del Arzobispado de San Salvador", *Orientación*, 9 April 1978. The passages in italics in the first part of this homily belong to this statement.

<sup>3</sup> See "Los sucesos de San Pedro Perulapán", *ECA* 354 (1978), pp. 223-247. This document gives a comparative análisis of the different versions of what happened in San Pedro Perulapán.

<sup>4</sup> See "Arzobispado de San Salvador. Secretaría de Comunicación Social, Boletín informativo n° 39, *Orientación*, 2 April 1978.

<sup>5</sup> See "Mensaje pastoral de año nuevo", *Orientación*, 8 January 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos (FECCAS) and Rural Workers' Union (UDC).

<sup>7</sup> See "Mensaje pastoral de año Nuevo", op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> "Constitución de la República de El Salvador", 1962, Art. 160.

<sup>9</sup> See "Constitución de la República de El Salvador", 1962, Art. 137.

*Margin References* (a) Jn 20,31: (b) 1P 1,3: (c) Mt 5,13-14: (d) Lk 10,29-37: (e) M 2,16: (f) Is 58,6-7: (g) Jn 20,21: (h) Gn 2,7: (i) Jn 20,22-23: (j) Jn 20,28: (k) Jn 20,21.26: (l) 1P 1,5-6: (m) Rv 22,20: (n) Ac 2,47: (o) Ac 2,42: (p) Jn 18,19: (q) Ac 2,42: (r) Ac 1,24: (s) Ac 12,5: (t) Ac 13,3: (u) Ac 5,29: (v) Ac 2,42: (w) LG 48: (x) Jn 20,28.