

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Third Sunday of Easter
April 9, 1978

Acts 2:14, 22-28

1 Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

The Liturgical Year does not parallel the civil year but we could say that the Liturgical Year is like a golden thread that is woven through our concrete history during this year of 1978. Therefore I would like you to be very mindful of the sense, the mystique and the message that the Church offers in each Sunday's celebration. I ask you to listen to this divine message that is communicated through my poor words. As we say during the Mass: *Look not on my sins, but on the faith of your Church*¹. There will always be human defects but despite these defects we are concerned that our message enlightens the reality in which we live. If this were not so then our message would be a parallel that never intersects with life.

Therefore the homily --- this is what we call the message that is preached by the priest even though some people laugh at and do not seriously listen to this word --- is a sacred word that the celebrant speaks in order to apply the Scripture readings to the concrete situation of the assembly that has gathered together. The homily is a way of explaining to people that the Word of God is not some historical consideration of past events but a present reality. The Word of God that has been read in our midst, even though it was written many centuries ago, is the Word of an eternal God who is speaking today to the people of El Salvador gathered in the Cathedral or gathered around their radios and listening to these reflections.

Today, the Liturgical Year is like the noon day sun, a situation in which the sun reaches its zenith. The Easter Season is composed of seven weeks or fifty days that follow the celebration of Easter and continue until Pentecost --- a word that means the fullness of time. During the Easter Season the light of redemption reaches its zenith. It is the time when we celebrate the Paschal Mystery, for during the Easter Season we see the light of the One who has not died but has been raised to new life and lives now in his Church. Indeed, the Risen Lord is speaking to those who follow him today during this year of 1978. Today we conclude the first three weeks of the Easter Season during which time the Church, like a bride made more beautiful by the memory of her risen spouse, reflects on these historical passages that revolve around this revelation, this reality of the resurrection.

Today, we listened to the passage about the disciples on the road to Emmaus, a passage that we also proclaim during Communion when we sing: *A pilgrim journeyed with me on the road to Emmaus. As we walked I did not know who this pilgrim was but when he shared the bread with us, I recognized him for the Lord was walking with me.*² Beginning next week, the fourth Sunday of the Easter Season, we will begin to focus on summaries of the different ways in which this Risen Lord lives among us. Next Sunday, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. It is beautiful to reflect on the fact that this Christ who lives also knows us and calls us by name.

I refer to this in order to prepare for our celebration next week because the Pope has invited us to reflect on vocations on this day that is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. I want to make you aware of this fact so that during this week we might intensify our prayers for vocations. The Pope has asked us to reflect on vocations so that people might become more aware of the need to pray and work for vocations --- this is not a time to be asking for money for our seminaries. Rather we should reflect on the fact that the priests, men and women religious and seminarians and all those persons who have been inspired by the ideal of consecrating themselves to God and who seek to live their lives in intimate union with God --- all these people have received this inspiration from God and from their vocation. Therefore all people have a responsibility to pray for these people so that they do not falter in their ministry of service. My sisters and brothers, we must continue to pray. Prayer is the way in which we are able to ask God to bestow on these individuals the grace of their vocation. Many young men and women have received this calling to follow a vocation to the consecrated life and therefore it is very appropriate that we should reflect on this fact during this week.

During the Easter Season the first reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles and reflects on that historical period after the crucifixion of Christ on Calvary --- that time when the death of Christ had been changed into a mystical life, the life of the Church, the life of the new-born Church. During this time of Easter I encourage you to read this book of the Acts of the Apostles and read it as a community. Those who are part of the Base Communities of Faith ought to reflect on the book of Acts for you will find there an inspiration for your life together as Church today. The second reading, which is always taken from one of the letters of the apostles, is taken from the first letter of Saint Peter, a faithful witness, who in the first two readings this morning announces the *kerigma* to the people. *Kerigma* implies the announcement of the good news, the proclamation of the great revelation that Christ died as a result of evil intrigue but God transformed this evil into an act of redemption for all people --- for this Jesus was raised to new life and lives and offers salvation to all who believe in him. This is known as the Church's *kerigma*, the Good News that, like Peter, we continue to preach. Catechists, preachers, and leaders of the Word never have to go outside of this Good News: Christ died for us and Christ is risen and restores us to life. This is our message.

Events of the week

These Sundays are most enlightening and consoling and filled with hope and life in the Christ who came and lives here in his Church, in his Church here in El Salvador. This risen Christ is moving through the realities of our life here in El Salvador. It is also here, my sisters and brothers, where my words encounter their greatest obstacles. It is not that I possess the only truth. Indeed it would be foolish if I were to believe that I alone possess the truth and it would also be foolish if I wanted everyone to think like me. Thanks to God I have a greater openness and I look for truth among all people. I reproach those who want to monopolize the truth or manipulate the truth according to their whim or special interest.

At this time I want to make a solemn profession of faith in my adhesion to the Holy Father. The Holy Father has always been a source of light for me and I hope to die having been faithful to him. I also want to profess my communion with the body of bishops throughout the world. I want to thank some distinguished bishops who like the one this week sent me a special message. Here I refer to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume. He expressed his admiration and love for our Archdiocese and invited me --- when it was possible --- to visit his Diocese in England. I am grateful for the immense suffering that

my communion with the world's bishops reveals and for the expressions of solidarity from so many of the beloved bishops of Central America, the continent and even Europe. All of this indicates that the bishop of San Salvador, even though he is not infallible because he is not the Pope nor does he possess the only truth, yet he is in solidarity with his priests and people and walks with them in search for the truth. The presence of the people who fill this cathedral and the solidarity of so many people who are gathered around their radios, listening to this reflection in so many towns and villages and plazas, people who remain after this broadcast has concluded and continue to reflect on this word --- all of this tells me, my sisters and brothers, that this word will never be abandoned but together, you and I, we will continue to seek the truth with sincerity. It is with this truth that I attempt to preach and continue to enlighten the events of our lives. In this way these events are not manipulated by one side or the other and we are able to provide assurance that justice and the truth and the voice of the voiceless is heard.

During this past week the Vicar of the Department of Cuscatlán spoke on our radio station about the desolation that he had noticed as he traveled to some of the villages in the area of San Pedro Perulapán: *Fields are abandoned at a time when they should be planted. Who is going to plant these fields?* he asked. *Animals are running away as if they had no owners: chickens and other animals have been abandoned by their owners who are fleeing from what has been commonly called in these areas "psychological warfare".* This fear is seen in many persons who speak with great sadness and say: *They have robbed us! They have killed us! They have wounded us!* Some people humiliated by their experience in prison have spoken about the cruelties that occur there. Above all, my sisters and brothers, their Pastor is greatly pained by all of this. We have already met with the priests from that Department. We are saddened by the seeds of disunity that have been planted and by the spirit of vengeance that has been fomented by these circumstances. The Vicar when speaking about a mother who had been handcuffed said: *What son or daughter could remain indifferent before such a scene?*

We have proposed to the priests of this area that they undertake a ministry of reconciliation and I believe this is a great obligation of the priests. For this reason I am pained when some people slander and ridicule my words and say that I am sowing hatred. I would not be listened to by such noble people if my words were sowing seeds of vengeance. It would also be foolish to think that the people who fill this Cathedral would leave from here in order to stage a demonstration of hatred and violence. I believe the contrary is more like the truth, that is, I believe today's preaching is attractive to people because we proclaim words of true love, forgiveness, justice and peace. We proclaim a peace that is achieved by building upon a foundation of justice and love and not a peace that is the result of repression or a peace that is found in our cemeteries. Thus we say that the peace that is preached here is same that Jesus preached --- yet when Jesus preached this peace, he also caused division (a). True peace will also sow division because not everyone understands the depths of justice where true peace is found. People often want to hear easy, comfortable and comforting words that offend no one; they are willing to accept a false concept of peace.

In light of this situation I am happy to tell you that our Church has been hard at work. The Commission of Solidarity has taken their work seriously and has created two sub-commissions to make their work more effective. One sub-commission is gathering together testimony from the eye witnesses of these events. It is hoped that this will enable us to find the truth, a truth that we are all seeking. The other sub-commission is gathering together donations of food, medicines, clothing and money and looking for ways to make these

donations available to those who are most in need. The first commission that I spoke of has edited a bulletin³ that contains the details of their work. I am not going to take your time here and read this to you. If you wish to read this, it is available in the Chancery where we are gathering all of this information. This information is not based on third person accounts or stories that people have heard --- these are all eye witness, first person accounts. We have exhorted people to speak about what they have seen and what they have experienced. My sisters and brothers, in summing up all these events we sadly report that 68 people have “disappeared”, 6 have been killed (4 of them decapitated) and 14 persons have been wounded. In the bulletin certain conclusions are also published and again I am not going to read these conclusion here because they coincide with the thoughts that have frequently been expressed here in this Cathedral, namely, as long as a just social order does not become a reality, then there will always be sown seeds of disunity. If there are no roots of justice then we will only have fruits of violence.

I have brought these statements here to read to you and they give us some hope. The President of the Central Council on Elections presented credentials to the newly elected legislators and told them that they should consider passing some modern legislation, legislation that would take into account the present situation of the *campesinos*.⁴ Hopefully these beautiful exhortations are not simply more empty promises. Hopefully among the new legislators of our nation there are people who are more understanding, people who realize that the true progress of our nation will not be achieved by repressive laws that attempt to justify the cruelty that exists among us. Hopefully there are people who, as the President of the Central Council on Elections stated, are willing to enact laws that correspond to and inspire institutions and relations between management and labor. This would be wonderful! This is what we have always asked for: a form of justice and laws that will allow the political concerns of the people to be freely expressed; laws that will not view these expressions as clandestine that must then be cruelly repressed. Repression provides a just cause to the people, especially the young people and people of experience, to demonstrate against such laws. All the people of El Salvador must be allowed to contribute to the common good of our country.

I want to thank and congratulate the Commission of Lawyers that is composed of ten lawyers and seven law students who have seriously taken up the petition for amnesty⁵. As you read in the newspapers they have presented their petition to the Assembly. I see this group of lawyers and law students as a source of much hope for our people. I hope that they will continue to be noble and true men of the law. I expect much of them and in the name of the Lord and the people I encourage them to act with justice. May their legal knowledge enable them to legalize positions that lead toward justice and oppose those ways that seek to legalize the abuses that are leveled against our people. May they know how to be, as the Bible says, defenders of the poor, the dispossessed and the voiceless (b).

Life in the Church

From this Cathedral we must lament the abuse leveled against the people of the Church of Monte San Juan and the beloved pastor Father Toñito Alfaro⁶. May these people know that we are with them during this time of trial. I want to thank the people in the community of San Juan Opico where I visited this week and installed their new pastor, Father Jorge Salinas. I also thank the people of the community of San Rafael Cedros whose pastor, Father Leopoldo Deras was kind enough to invite me to celebrate Confirmation for a group of people that he had prepared. I was warmly received into their church by the people of the

community and a group of students. I was also warmly received in the community of Dulce Nombre de María, a very scenic town in Chaltenango. The Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart are ministering there and the Carmelites Missionaries from Laguna participated in the celebration. After the ceremonies, both groups of Sisters dialogued with the Archbishop and studied the pastoral problems of that region.

I am happy to announce that during this week a new parish church was erected in Colonia Miralvalle. This church will be dedicated to Our Lady of the Presentation. The beautiful image of this Virgin that we have here in the Cathedral, the first image that was venerated in El Salvador and that had been in the church of San José until it burned and then was brought here to the Cathedral, will be brought in a solemn procession to this new church in Colonia Miralvalle. In that way the Virgin of the Presentation will be seen as the patroness and the sign of the love of a people who were born to be a people of Mary, a people for Mary, and a people of Christ. The Augustinian Community that is ministering in Miramonte will minister in this new parish. We thank them and congratulate them for the pastoral work that they are involved in.

I also want to express my gratitude for a gesture of communion and unity that was shown to me by the Vincentian Community of Central America and Panama. They are gathered here in a meeting and visited me to express their solidarity and tell me that they were in full accord with the pastoral ministry of our Archdiocese.

My sisters and brothers, all of this provides us with an Easter framework that I would like to be the doctrinal nucleus of this homily. I am happy when some people tell me that they do not like to call my preaching a homily, but rather prefer to call it a catechetical instruction. I am happy to be a catechist of the Diocese. So here is my catechetical lesson this morning, we might call it "the Paschal Mystery" because all the readings this morning focus on this wonderful Paschal Mystery. The Second Vatican Council cannot be understood unless we understand the meaning of the Paschal Mystery, for it is this mystery that has given the Church her origins and her mission for all times. The Church is the messenger of this Paschal Mystery.

What is the Paschal Mystery

What is the Paschal mystery? The Council defines the Paschal Mystery in the following way (c): *The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion and resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby "dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life." For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth "the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church".* What a beautiful text! This text seems to be a summary of today's three readings.

My sisters and brothers, if we are able to understand the Paschal Mystery, then we will have that desire and that love to come to Mass every Sunday and celebrate Holy Week as an Easter feast. The Church has two Easter focal points: the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist and the celebration of Easter which we are presently celebrating during these fifty days that began with the celebration of the Easter Vigil and will conclude with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Church views these fifty days as one Sunday, one great feast, the feast of the mystery of Christ's passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven. We call these two aspects of Christ his Paschal mystery, that is, his

suffering and death in order to destroy our death and our sins and his resurrection and ascension into heaven that restored us to life and opened for us the doors of hope.

We call this the Paschal Mystery because this action of Jesus was accomplished within the context of Passover. Note well that it was a Passover which Christ called *the hour*. *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (d) --- the Passover. When the hour had arrived he sent his disciples to prepare for the Passover in Jerusalem (e).

Secondly, we call this the Paschal Mystery of Christ because when John the Baptist presented Jesus to the world, he called him the Paschal Lamb. Also Jesus during the last supper referred to himself as the Lamb of God. (f) This is the lamb that is immolated during the time of Passover. The lamb that was eaten by the Israelites and offered to God signified God's protection of his people. On that first Holy Thursday when all the people of Israel gathered to eat the Passover lamb, Jesus had gathered his disciples to share the Passover meal. But at that time Jesus was thinking of the lamb that was going to fulfill his mission: *Tomorrow, Good Friday, I will be hung on the cross as the bloody lamb who takes away the sins of the world*. The Passover Lamb!

Thirdly, this Paschal Mystery is also called the mystery of redemption. It is the Paschal Mystery because that supper of Holy Thursday enabled Jesus to unite the Passover of the Old Testament with the Christian Passover. Today, for example, we are celebrating the Mass. The altar is the Passover altar where the body and the blood of the Lord is immolated. He is the Lamb. When I show you the host before taking communion, I will say: *This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*⁷. Jesus says: *Take and eat, this is my body* (g). This is the Passover during which the lamb offers his divine blood in order to take away the sins of the world. And so the Eucharist remains, my sisters and brothers, during the celebration of the Mass, in the tabernacle, during our processions of Corpus Christi, during our visits to the Blessed Sacrament. This wonderful honor that our Church renders to the sacred host is like the love that a wife has received as an inheritance from her husband who has disappeared. But in this case, the one who has disappeared reappears. The great gift of Jesus' Passover is the Eucharist. Therefore, to come to Mass is to be grateful, to feel that one is joined with the holy people of Israel, to sit down with Jesus during the Last Supper and prolong his presence to this Sunday of 1978. The Sunday celebration of the Mass, the Mass for our deceased sisters and brothers, the Mass that is celebrated on the occasion of First Eucharist and Matrimony, the Mass during which we ask for Christ's light and comfort is the sacrifice of Christ, the Lord's Supper that becomes Easter in all the different circumstances of our life. It is for this reason that the Council advises us to celebrate the Mass for our deceased sisters and brothers with a Paschal meaning and avoid somber and grim tones as though everything had come to an end.(h)

What is the Passover ?

What is the Passover? In order to understand the meaning of the Passover that Jesus wanted to give to the Christian community through his redemption, we must go back in time. This is my second thought: the Passover of the Old Testament and the Passover that Jesus embraced.

Historians have discovered that the origin of the Jewish Passover predates the people of Israel. It is possibly a celebration that occurred on the night of the full moon that took place during the time of the spring equinox. This full moon of Holy Week allowed the shepherds to sing with joy because it signaled the passing of the cold nights of winter and the arrival of

spring. Passover meant a passing, a passing from winter to spring. The Passover was celebrated on the night of the full moon because in the spring the shepherds moved from the desert to the lands where there was pasture. At a time when agriculture was prevalent in Israel, another feast was celebrated together with the Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus also celebrated this feast. This feast celebrated the harvest of the wheat crop and signified the passage from the old harvest to the new harvest. The people ate unleavened bread which was not made from the old wheat but from the new harvest. Everything was new and so this was a time to thank God for the new wheat. This then, is the origin of the unleavened bread --- the movement from the old to the new, the movement from the old harvest to the new harvest.

This concept of Passover was assumed by the people of Israel who had recently arrived in Egypt. Here they began to be persecuted and oppressed and God revealed to the people that on that night, the night of the full moon of spring, God with his angel would pass over the land and the doors that were marked with the blood of the lamb that had been eaten by the Israelites would be spared. (i) The doors of the Egyptians that were not marked with the blood, a sign of protection, would experience anguish since their first born children would die. On that night of extermination God passed over the land, the Passover of God, the passing over of God. How terrible was the passing over of God's justice that put down the oppressors who became ungrateful toward the pilgrim people of Israel! All the first born children of Egypt died. On the other hand, those families that had marked their door posts with the blood of the lamb that they had eaten, people who had prepared themselves for a journey, were saved and would begin their exodus on that night. The Passover is exodus, an exit, a movement of the people out of slavery and bondage: *Thus you must also observe this rite when you have entered the land which the Lord will give you as he promised* (j). So the people of Israel departed from Egypt and Moses commanded the people: *You shall observe this as a perpetual ordinance for yourselves and your descendants* (k).

Passover, then, took on the meaning of a night of liberation: the passage from slavery to freedom, the passage from a land of oppression to a land of promise, the passage through the Red Sea. Through a wonderful act of God the people of Israel would pass through the waters and the Egyptian army would be buried in those same waters. (l) The Passover was again celebrated when the people arrived at Gilgal and offered their first sacrifice in the Promised Land. What joy! What gratitude!

The Passover was then celebrated each year as a feast of independence, a feast to commemorate their passage from slavery to salvation, a feast of life, a feast during which they recognized their Savior-God acting through the instrumentality of Moses. This was a celebration of thanksgiving and other biblical elements would be joined to this celebration, for example, the creation of the human person, the Covenant, the sacrifice of Isaac. All of this began to enrich the celebration of Passover for it was like a river that began very small and became a torrent of water through the passage of time. When Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples, all these historical events were recalled.

Now we are able to understand the meaning of today's readings. The Christian Passover, the Passover that Christ celebrated took on all these ancient symbols of the Old Testament. Jesus filled these symbols with the redemptive reality that he would accomplish through his death and resurrection and ascension into heaven. Easter then is this mystery of Christ because in this Christ who died for us, rose for us, and lives forever for us we see how the Church must live. If we do not understand the Paschal Mystery, it is impossible to

understand the Church. Therefore as we celebrate this Easter season today in 1978 we should remember that our life here in El Salvador is very similar to the life of the people of Israel in Egypt and we must also remember that God is with us.

What significance for Christians of the Passover that Jesus left us ?

We can thus ask the question: what is the significance for Christians of the Passover that Christ left us? This is my third and final thought. The Christians Passover has four characteristics: (1) Christ's Passover is the cause of our salvation. It is a Passover of liberation; (2) Christ's Passover is a sacramental Passover, signs that now embrace and hide divine realities that we do not see --- this is sacramental; (3) Christ's Passover is ecclesial and communitarian. This is not a Passover that is meant to be lived individually but meant to be lived in community, as a people; (4) Christ's Passover is eschatological --- a Passover of hope.

What do we mean by this? This is explained in the first reading when Saint Peter preached his first sermon on Christianity: *God raised him [Jesus] up, releasing him from the throes of death* (m). Also in Saint Peter's letter we heard these words: *you were ransomed* (n). From what were we ransomed? We were ransomed from a way of acting. Saint Peter says: *you were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.* This is redemption, a ransom that is not bought with silver or gold!

Therefore, let us look at the gospel. As the disciples were traveling to Emmaus on that Easter afternoon, they felt disillusioned and deceived: *we were hoping that he [Jesus] would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place* (o). This is the kind of disillusionment that occurs when people look for worldly liberation. My sisters and brothers, I want to emphasize this point because I am being accused of preaching a revolutionary liberation on this earth. No one believes such foolishness but I want to make it clear once again that the liberation that I proclaim is not the liberation that caused the disciples to be disillusioned as they traveled to Emmaus. The same disciples, as they accompanied Jesus at the time of his ascension, asked him: *Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?* (p). This was an expression of their political hope, a hope rooted in this world, a myopic hope and a hope with no horizons. It is the same hope that is shared by many liberation movements of our day --- those who do not share our Christian hope but who believe that they are going to resolve our problem through violence and hatred and class struggle. This is not Jesus' liberation and this cannot be the liberation that the Church proclaims.

Jesus responded to these disciples who were disillusioned and said: *Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!* (q). Christians cannot forget that the true Passover that is celebrated every Sunday at the Eucharist and the true hope that they have in their hearts is this liberation from sin. It is this liberation from sin that enables us to break the chains that intimately bind us to slavery. It is this liberation from sin that enables us to break the chains of death and hell and to rejoice in the holy freedom that is worthy of the children of God. There are no freer persons than those who have been freed from sin, from the terror of death and hell. They are free because they love God and follow Christ who is alive and who bestows true liberation on them.

True liberation is what Jesus began to explain to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures* (r). The redemption and the liberation that the Church preaches and awaits is not a liberation of disillusionment. Even when things turn out differently than we expected, even when we have to die on the cross, even when we have to be tortured and die because people do not want to listen to cries of true liberation, we must remember that all of these events are part of Christ's struggle to save the world.

Let us remember, my sisters and brothers, that redemption is still being accomplished and therefore we will die and there are cemeteries. If Christ triumphed over death, why do we have to die? Precisely for this reason, redemption has not been completed. Saint Paul tells us: *The last enemy to be destroyed is death* (s). This is what Saint Peter is also telling us today in his letter --- the lamb that was sacrificed.(t) When one is building an edifice we are not surprised to see scaffolding and building materials. One is in the process of building! When the building is inaugurated, we remove the scaffolding, we clean the area and we see a beautiful constructed building. Jesus' liberation can be seen in the same light. Jesus is working now and therefore there are tombs for the dead and there is scaffolding. In the Church there is imperfection and defects for we have not yet become the Church triumphant of heaven. We are still in the process of building in the midst of sinful, envious, and manipulating people --- and we are all human. We are doing the work of redemption. Thus, we do not wait for a paradise or a redemption that is accomplished with merely human effort or through the ideologies of this world. The Church cannot be communist nor the liberator that brings about worldly liberation. Hopefully the Church inspires this liberation and does so because she bears within her a hope that is powerful enough to give effectiveness to all liberation movements if they want to become Christian liberation movements.

We say that our Passover is a sacramental Passover. Therefore, what is a sacrament? A sacrament --- once before I gave you this definition --- it is a visible sign that conceals an invisible grace. We are going to receive Communion, a sacrament. I experience the taste of bread but through faith I discover that this sign of bread conceals the presence of Christ. I am going to raise up the host but it has become the body of Christ and we will adore the host because we know that the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ is hidden in the signs of bread and wine. All of this tells us, my sisters and brothers, that the liberating power of Christ on Calvary, the liberating power of the Risen Lord, the Lord now seated at the right hand of the Father is present in the Church. We read at the beginning of one of the Council documents: *The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus* (u). The Church is a great sacrament for it is the presence of Christ in the world. You and I, my sisters and brothers, are holy people who make this liberating presence of Christ visible in the world. This is what it means to be a sacrament.

We say that the Church is a sacrament because in every sacrament that the Church offers, Christ is present with all of his power, with his divine power. Thus heaven is now on earth, the Kingdom of God is in our midst. All those persons who believe in the sacramental life of the Church, all those who bring their children to the Church to be baptized, those who confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness, those who come to Mass with faith and hope to find support for their struggles in Christ, all these people experience the risen and glorious Christ alive here in this Church. Christ continues to forgive, continues to triumph over death and is working on behalf of the great liberation of humankind.

My sisters and brothers, the gospel passage that we have just read seems to be an account of some very ordinary events. Jesus is walking with his disciples who are on their way to Emmaus. He appears to be joking with them and we might even say that he seems to be pulling their leg. They tell him: *are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days* (v). Jesus asks: *What sort of things?*. As though Christ were ignorant about all of this, the disciples respond: *The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word. He proclaimed that he was going to free Israel but three days have passed and all of our hopes have been crushed. It is true that some women are going about and saying that they have seen him risen to new life, but we have not seen him* (w). These are human calculations of people who have lost sight of the presence of Christ who is hidden in the pilgrim on the road to Emmaus! As they approached the village of Emmaus this pilgrim tells the disciples: *thank you for your company, I must travel further!* (x) The disciples respond: *Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.* He had won them over! As they prepared their supper and sat down to eat, Jesus made a divine gesture in breaking the bread and they recognized him. But when they recognized him, he disappeared. They commented: *Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?* (y). So they ran to Jerusalem to join the community there.

This is a sacrament. For this reason, my sisters and brothers, we are becoming more conscious of the fact that the sacraments must be received with greater knowledge. It is not right to present children for confirmation if they do not know what they are going to receive. It is not right to celebrate a party for baptism if people do not know the meaning of this sacrament. Jesus is passing by, disguised as a pilgrim and yet we do not recognize him. Again like the beautiful hymn that we sing: *I am the Lord and you do not know me. I am your God who is present at the celebration of the Eucharist and you are bored by my Mass.* There are many Catholics who do not participate in the sacraments and they are like the disciples who traveled to Emmaus and did not recognize him. As he broke the bread, then they recognized him. My sisters and brothers, may we recognize the Lord even though we do not see him! Last Sunday we heard the words: *Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed* (z). Christ gave this lesson to Thomas last Sunday and now he gives that same lesson to these two disciples, for as they come to recognize him, he disappears. Jesus does not like to become visible while we continue to live our life here on earth for our life ought to be one of faith and hope.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, the third characteristic of our Passover is that it is communal. Moses gave this command to the people: *On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure a lamb. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share the lamb* (a2). From that time the Passover became a family celebration and also a national celebration. Even now at Passover time Jewish people from different parts of the world will travel to Israel in order to celebrate this patriotic feast in Jerusalem. It would be the same if people were to travel from different parts of the world to be here in El Salvador in order to celebrate our Independence Day.

This community meaning of Passover is seen in the beginning of the first reading when Peter speaks with the eleven disciples.(b2) Look, my sisters and brothers, at how Peter, the Pope, gathers together with the other eleven disciples, the bishops at that time. As long as an apostle is united with Peter then there is communion among those individuals. Your bishop, my sisters and brothers, is in communion with Peter who today is called Paul VI. I remember

well his words that gave me so much encouragement last year⁸: *Courage! Courage! You are the one who leads!* I am also mindful of the fact that my communion with the Pope holds the secret of my words and my orientation of the People of God. The day that the Pope does not recognize me or is not in accord with my preaching, he will let me know this. Then with total humility I will say: *my sisters and brothers forgive me. I was mistaken. I retire and another will follow who has the full confidence of the Holy Father.* But until that time, like Peter and the eleven disciples, I am part of the eleven. But now there are not eleven disciples but more than two thousand bishops who were present at the Council, who continue to govern the Church throughout the world and who are in communion with one another and with the Pope. This is what gives a sense of communion to the Church.

My sisters and brothers, in light of all of this you also should feel that our Passover is a family celebration and you should feel that your participation in the Mass each Sunday is a community celebration. Perhaps I am abusing your goodness by speaking for so long, but when I look at all of you, so happy and content to be seated on these benches each Sunday, when I look at all of you gathered together as one family of God listening to this humble messenger of the Father's message, when I walk, like yesterday, through the streets of Dulce Nombre de María and the humble people of these rural areas tell me that they listen to these words and that they are comforted, nourished and given great hope, then I want to cry and repeat the words of Jesus: *I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike. I give you thanks because you have given me a voice and you made a radio program available to me to communicate this message. Hopefully I can continue to give this comfort to so many people* (c2). There in Dulce Nombre de María the people gifted me with the first serving of their thick soup and a blanket that was woven for me. Who would not be grateful for these gestures of kindness from simple people who are living in communion with their Pastor? Thank you for expressing this communion on so many occasions! Without this communion there is no Church! Thus our Passover is joined intimately with the Church and the true Church lives the Passover communion.

Finally, my sisters and brothers, the Christian Passover is an eschatological Passover. Eschatology refers to the final events, the final salvation, and the end of times. Saint Peter has told us today (d2) that Christ was the Lamb that was foreseen from before the creation of the world and the Lamb who will come and reveal himself anew at the end of time. Between this time when the Lamb was announced before the beginning of time and his arrival as the Judge of history at the end of time, there is this period of history that we are weaving. Thus human persons must have as their starting point the Lamb who lived before history and who is now the object toward which history is moving. Let us not lose sight of this perspective. When we struggle for a better world without this eschatological horizon, we are then losing sight of this perspective.

When we have faith and hope in this Christ who will return and in the realities that are further beyond our own failures and death and difficulties, when we maintain this perspective then we are living in this Passover Church, this Church of hope. The gospel speaks to us about this eschatological sense when Jesus speaks to the disciples and calls them foolish and slow to believe. (e2) They did not understand that Jesus had to suffer all of these things in order to enter into glory. He had to die and they should not be surprised or scandalized by these sufferings and unexpected failures. How many times have we heard the family members of a deceased person cry out in an almost blasphemous way: *If God loved me, why has he taken my beloved away?* God loves us and he takes our loved ones to himself so that

they might be in that same place as our God. Those who struggle for liberation and see their efforts fail are tempted to say: *This is not solved with Christian hope, therefore we have to resort to violence.* Lies! God is patient because he is Eternal and therefore we must await with Jesus the definitive heaven, the definitive triumph, the true Passover.

In light of this my sisters and brothers, we laughed when we read that a newspaper had interpreted my preaching as a form of subverting democracy. They say that I am proposing socialism⁹. What foolishness! The Church does not propose any system. The Church does not have any social systems or any political parties. Rather the Church gives an inspiration of hope and an eschatological meaning to history and asks her children --- you my sisters and brothers who live in the world --- to build according to their criteria a more perfect democracy, a more just social system. You have an obligation to do this work!

We, as members of this Church, have to remind people about this Christian hope that will always critique all the different social systems. It is for this reason that the Church will always be criticized for she critiques the social systems from a perspective of the enduring systems of eternal happiness and therefore says: *this system is not good; this system is not just; this system is better than the other....* The Church illuminates the realities of the earth from the perspective of hope. This is the Church's mission.

My sisters and brothers, as we celebrate this Eucharist today, the true sacrament of our Passover, I want to conclude by reading the words that Saint Peter proclaimed to the crowds who had gathered together to listen to him: *But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it. David says of him: "I saw the Lord ever before me, with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence"* (f2). How beautiful is this Christian hope! Even when we are tormented by the worst forms of torture we can lift up our voices and say to the Lord: *You are at my right hand and you will not allow me to perish.* Courage, my sisters and brothers, and with this Easter hope and faith let us proclaim now our faith!

¹ *Roman Missal, Rite of Peace.*

² Mons Romero paraphrases a well-known Salvadoran hymn *El peregrino de Emaús.*

³ See "Informe de la comisión de la Arquidiócesis de San Salvador, Boletín de prensa n° 2, *Orientación*, 16 April 1978.

⁴ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 8 April 1978.

⁵ See "Petición de amnestía", *Orientación*, 9 April 1987.

⁶ Fr Antonio Alfaro, parish priest of Monte San Juan, Cuscatlán, was threatened by the military and forced to leave his parish after being obliged to hand over the keys of the presbytery and church. See "La Iglesia en El Salvador", *Orientación*, 16 April 1978.

⁷ *Roman Missal, The Communion.*

⁸ Reference to his meeting with Pope Paul VI in the general audience of 30 March 1977. See *Osservatore Romano*, 3 April 1977.

⁹ See "Violencia engendrada desde el púlpito". *La Opinión*, April 1978.

Margin References (a) Lk 12,51: (b) Is 11,3-4: (c) SC 5: (d) Jn 12,23: (e) Mt 26,17-19: (f) Jn 1,29: (g) Mt 26,27: (h) SC 81: (i) Ex 12,21-27: (j) Gn 12,1: (k) Ex 12,24: (l) Ex 14,26-31: (m) Ac 2,24: (n) 1P 1,18: (o) Lk 24,21: (p) Ac 1,6: (q) Lk 24,25: (r) Lk 24,26-27: (s) 1Cor 15,26: (t) 1P 1,19-20: (u) SC 5: (v) Lk 24,18: (w) Lk 24,19-24: (x) Lk 24,28-29: (y) Lk 24,30-33: (z) Jn 20,29: (a2) Ex 12,14: (b2) Ac 2,14: (c2) Lk 10,21: (d2) 1P 1,19-20: (e2) Lk 24,25-26: (f2) Ac 2,24-28.