

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Church of El Rosario¹
April 16, 1978

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 2:20b-25

John 10:1-10

This Sunday is the fourth Sunday of the Easter season. You know that there are seven Sundays to the Easter season and all of these Sunday celebrations constitute a unity: the solemn proclamation that Christ lives and will die no more, a proclamation that awakens in the hearts of the people a sense of confidence and faith and magnanimity. During this season, the first three Sundays present us with an account of the Risen Christ's appearances and this fourth Sunday offers us a wonderful synthesis of the person of Christ as the Good Shepherd. It is for this reason that this Sunday is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday.

It is also the reason why Pope Paul VI, fifteen years ago, asked that this Sunday of the Good Shepherd be a day of prayer for priestly and religious vocations. We have many powerful motives to make our celebration of the Eucharist today an occasion for intense prayer and open ourselves to the hope and the faith of this Church that now prolongs the person of the Good Shepherd. It is because of the pastors and those persons who have consecrated their lives to him that the Good Shepherd becomes present in so many different forms in the world.

Therefore, my reflections this morning will attempt to join all these ideas together. I will present the following three ideas: (1) The situation in which the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed (these situations must be kept in mind so that the gospel of the Risen Christ might illuminate our history); (2) This message of the Risen Christ is presented to us today in the person of a Shepherd (this is the image that we ought to bring to our homes, to our society, to our environment --- Christ is the Good Shepherd! He lives today as a Shepherd who loves his flock); (3) We are the flock and the message of Christ is directed to the people as a vocation, as a calling (and as the Pope tells us in his message this year, it is in the midst of this flock that we will discover vocations).

The situation in which the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed

My first idea is this: the Christians message is proclaimed in concrete situations. This is not something that is new to our era. In fact the proclamation of the homily has always taken on this meaning. By the homily we refer to the simple sermon of the pastor who celebrates the Word of God in order to tell those who are gathered together in reflection: this Word of God is not an abstract word but is a word that becomes incarnate in the midst of the reality of the assembly that has gathered together.

Even though I am mindful of this message every Sunday, yet today I bring this message to you because I noted the following in the three readings today. The Holy Spirit had just

descended upon Peter who immediately leaves the closed doors of the cenacle and preaches the first Christian sermon. Three thousand people are converted. This first sermon is a model for all preachers and it should be noted that this sermon does not ignore the concrete circumstances of the people. His sermon announces the great message that Christ has risen to give hope and forgiveness to all those who follow him. On the one hand Peter proclaims the wonderful works of Christian redemption, but at the same time he also denounced the sins of the people: *You crucified him* (a). He made this denunciation in such a way that *when they heard this they were cut to the heart and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?"* What a beautiful scene, my sisters and brother! The Church desires to do the same thing: to disturb people's consciences and to provoke a crisis in their lives. A Church that does not provoke any crises, a gospel that does not unsettle, a Word of God that does not get under anyone's skin, a Word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed --- what gospel is that? Very nice, pious considerations that do not disturb anyone --- that's the way people would like our preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be harassed and thus avoid conflicts and difficulties, do not illuminate the world they live in. They do not have Peter's courage, who told the crowd whose hands were still bloodstained: *You crucified him* (b). Even though the charge could have cost him his life, he still made the accusation. The gospel is courageous; it is the good news of Jesus who came to take away the sins of the world.

In the second reading Peter proclaims the wonderful deeds of the humble Christ who is led like a lamb to the slaughter. But Peter in his first letter denounces the fact that this death was caused by sin and by the way that people had gone astray. (c) He rejoices in the fact that people had turned from their evil ways and began to form a community with Christ. Here among us, my sisters and brothers are sinners. I am the first to admit that I am sinful. I have offended the Lord. But thanks to God one day we heard his call that pointed out our sin and instead of becoming arrogant and embittered in our pride, instead of slandering the Church because she disturbed us, we accepted the message of God. On that day, this lamb that had gone astray, this lamb that was I and that could be any one of us here today, on that day I humbly drew near to the Lord and asked for his forgiveness and gave thanks to God for the word that had reprimanded me and for the fact that someone confronted my behavior and told me that this was not the way to act. This is the role of the Church: to confront the circumstances of life and point out to people their sins so that they might repent and be converted.

Look, my sisters and brothers, at the gospel. Notice the courageous words of Jesus! He is using a comparison: *Whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep* (d). Look at Jesus and listen to his words of love and kindness. But also note that this same Jesus is able to take up a whip and drive out the thieves and robbers. He says: *a thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy* (e). Jesus' whip is lashing out against all the abuses of his time. He feels that the synagogue has lost its meaning for it no longer represented the mercy of God.(f) At the same time the leaders of Israel, denounced by the prophets, had become evil pastors. This passage of the Good Shepherd occurs shortly after the narration of the man who had been born blind. (g) In that situation, the Pharisees, instead of rejoicing with the man who had had his sight restored, excommunicate him: *why did you allow this man to perform this work on the Sabbath?* (h). They were more interested in legal matters than mercy. Jesus lashes out at the hypocritical Pharisees, the selfish leaders of the people, the merciless synagogue and ecclesiastical authorities of his time. Jesus, the Divine Prophet spoke harshly against sin wherever he found it, whether in Herod or Pilate or the

High Priest or the priests. He reprimanded them and he used the comparison in today's gospel to teach them how to be like himself, the Good Pastor. He also used this comparison to teach his Church how to act: as a house of the Lord's mercy where sinners will not find reproach or excommunication or harshness but rather kindness and acceptance and the embrace of our Lord who calls them to repentance and forgiveness.

See then how the three readings are a model of the Church's preaching? Her preaching proclaims the wonderful work of the resurrection but does not ignore the concrete circumstances of sin that are present in the midst of the situation in which this proclamation is made. With this line of thought I am able to justify today the content of my homilies. I would not be a true preacher of the Good News if I did not consider the fact that this passage about the Good Shepherd, this passage that is proclaimed on this Sunday in April of 1978 has a tragic framework for it is being proclaimed in a situation where there are shadows of blood and suffering and depression and desolation --- in the midst of this situation we need to highlight the figure of the Good Shepherd. We would not be able to understand the goodness of Christ at this time in El Salvador without speaking about the reality of the present situation of our country. What is this situation that we must confront? It appears to be a situation of lies. Sunday after Sunday, my sisters and brothers, our situation appears to become more and more difficult! Each week when I conclude my homily, I think: *What will I say next week? I have said everything.* Yet the following Sunday comes and brings with it another series of events and history which are part of our lives as a people of El Salvador. This is the hour, then, when we are the protagonists of very decisive realities.

Events of the week

The first event that I want to highlight this morning is the one that we are living and experiencing at this present moment. This morning we are not celebrate our Eucharist, as usual, in the Cathedral and therefore I want to thank, in the first place, the Dominican Fathers who understand the situation that is occurring in Cathedral --- it has been occupied by a group of people --- and offered me this beautiful Church to celebrate the Eucharist today. I thank them because this gesture of the Fathers is also a sign of the hospitality that is a part of this community and today this celebration here in El Rosario gives a sense of pilgrimage to our Church. The Church is not some building made of concrete or bricks of mud or any other material. These buildings are signs of dwelling places that accompany and provide a dwelling place for the pilgrim people of God wherever they might go. Today we are a Pilgrim People here in the church of El Rosario! How beautiful to know that as we journey on this pilgrimage, we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of the Rosary, so beloved by our people! Let us continue to love the Virgin! Let us also be mindful of the circumstances that this morning have brought us here to this parish church and placed us beneath the blessed mantle of Mary. We ask her to take pity on this people who continue to journey in the midst of so much anguish and uncertainty.

This brings me to another event: we are unable to celebrate today in the Cathedral because it is occupied. At the same time four embassies have also been occupied.² The Popular Revolutionary Bloc, who has taken responsibility for this action, wants to put pressure on people so that they do not remain indifferent to the situation that is occurring in the rural areas of our nation. They have occupied the embassies because they want these countries to help them so that they can return to their land. The rains have begun to fall and their fields must be planted. They tell us: *If there is no corn in our fields and if we are unable to harvest our beans, then we will die of hunger.* The *campesinos* are right. They

want to return to their fields and work and they are asking for the support of those who are able to speak on their behalf: the Cathedral, the embassies and their government. They ask these persons who are able to speak to put pressure on the government of El Salvador so that they can return to their fields and live in peace. They do not want more promises. They want security and guarantees because they tell us that there have been cases where the *campesinos* have returned with confidence to their lands only to find themselves being led off to prison once again. We pray that the Lord will resolve this situation!

I also want to congratulate the diplomatic delegations because they have dialogued with the *campesinos* with a great sense of understanding. Both sides asked for the mediation of the Church and the Church has been pleased to be able to offer the Chancery for these negotiations. I know that this will be interpreted in the wrong way but I want to make it clear that before the chancery was offered as a place for these negotiations, it was suggested that it might be better to find some diplomatic environment for these conversations. The *campesinos* tried to find another place and were unable to do so. Thus the Chancery which is always willing to offer the collaboration of the Church and the gospel, has offered this place in an impartial way. I also want to state that I personally have provided for the needs of the Ambassador of Panama and I am surprised that the newspapers have stated that the Chancery has provided no assistance to this woman³. I and my Auxiliary, Bishop Revelo, have been present during the negotiations and we have witnessed the honesty of the *campesinos* and the openness of both sides during these dialogues. We do not know where these negotiations are right now nor do we know why the occupation has continued.

This leads me, my brothers and sisters, to speak about another important consequence. This situation in which we find the Cathedral occupied and, thanks to God, celebrating the Eucharist here --- this situation enables us to speak about the radical difference between the Church and Popular Revolutionary Bloc. There has been a tendency (as we would say, this is diabolical) to view the activities of the Bloc as being dependent on and connected with the Church. Let me say this again, for I have stated this many times: just because the Church is concerned about social justice and charity and is not in agreement with the actual unjust order that is now in place, this does not mean that she identifies herself with all those who also desire the same change. The Church has a perspective that is completely evangelical. The gospel inspires the Church as she embraces the *campesinos* who have no place to rest during the night and are hungry and have nothing to eat. The gospel inspires the Church when she comes to the assistance of people who need help and when she speaks out on behalf of the just demands of those who are persecuted. None of this, however, means that the Church identifies herself with these groups.

This should be very clear because the Church cannot identify herself with any political party or any political, social or economic organization. The Church does not have some system or method. The Church only possesses a Christian inspiration, an obligation in charity that urges her to accompany those who suffer injustice and to speak out on behalf of the just demands of the people. Yes, the Church is in the midst of these situations, but she is present there without identifying herself with any system or method. Again I repeat this and let us be very clear here, I am not the director of any political organization. Neither I nor my priests are leaders of these groups. If we coincide with each other's objectives, it is because the gospel perspective illuminates these objectives.

My sisters and brothers, do not confuse the Church with any sector or party or method or group. The Church is independent and therefore able to criticize the evil that she finds in any

organization. I say this very clearly and I have spoken the same words to the Popular Revolutionary Bloc and to other groups that have an official character --- the Church denounces sin wherever she finds it.

One of the greatest sins, and it pains me to say this, is the fact that the actual system of El Salvador has caused this confrontation between *campesinos*. The hunger that causes anguish to those persons who are members of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc is the same hunger that causes anguish to those who are members of the Nationalist Democratic Organization. We should also remember that many of those who are members of our army are *campesinos*. When I look at the police guarding *campesinos*; when I look at *campesinos* guarding other *campesinos*; when I see the Nationalist Democratic Organization confront the Popular Revolutionary Bloc, I think to myself: *What evil have we brought about here! How could we live in a situation where a social system has been established by taking advantage of people's hunger! How can one think of earning a living by persecuting, dividing and becoming enemies with people who share the same situation of poverty!* Instead of helping one another through a constructive dialogue so that ultimately all might be able to breathe more easily and live with freedom, we see greater confrontations. One side takes advantage of gangs and this allows people to belong to an "official" organization. Others feel they are on the margins of society and so they struggle to become part of this group on the margin and then raise up their voice for their just demands.

Therefore I repeat that neither the repression nor the violence is going to resolve this situation. We need to establish a sane and authentic democracy and establish channels of dialogue so that the anguished cries of the people from the city and the rural areas can be heard. We need to establish laws and organizations that will allow people to live in an environment of justice and peace. As long as these means of communication do not exist, then everything else is simply patch work, and most often violent patches, for as Jesus said: *No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse* (i).

Life of the Church

My beloved sisters and brothers, at the time of this homily I want to express my gratitude for the many gestures of solidarity that have been shown to our Church. Thanks to God I have received many numerous donations of materials to assist our sisters and brothers. The Commission of Investigation and the Committee of Assistance have received much support from the communities and from people of good will.

I want to read to you a letter that was sent to me by the Baptist Church when they offered their assistance: *I lament the fact that many of the leaders of the different Protestant denominations are not aware of all that is happening here in our country but I am able to assure you, even though you might already be aware of this fact, that there are many people who support you and the Church you represent and they support you as individuals and as a community. What you are doing is nothing more and nothing less than what Christ demands of all of us.*

I was also very pleased to receive some donations from the Diocese of Santa Ana. The pastor who sent this donation said: *I consider this donation of money a donation of gold --- 25.00 colones --- for it represents the donations of people who work in the marketplace. Another woman who wished to remain anonymous donated 2.00 colones. They also have*

asked me to send you their greetings. I believe this is a symbol of the hearts of gold of the people of Santa Ana that has been revealed now in this way. Many other parish communities, like San Marcos and many parochial schools and high schools, have also made donations. I am truly grateful for your hearts of gold that enable you to respond to the needs of our people.

The present situation led our Catholic schools to dedicate three days this week to a reflection on the reality of our country. Many people have distorted this activity and said that we are trying to make the children and the women socialists and communists. This is definitely not true! This activity is the voice of the gospel that wants to illuminate the Christian education of these young people so that they do not turn their backs on the problems that our country must confront. This voice of the gospel will enable these young people to confront and judge these various situations. This is not a form of converting people to socialism. One of our school principals was asked if she was in accord with the Archbishop and his pastoral guidelines. She responded affirmatively and I want to thank her for this support. At the same time another person was asked to sign a petition that was being circulated that stated I was implanting socialism in the schools. This person stated: *This word is very ambiguous and I cannot sign this petition.* We cannot accuse our schools of implanting socialism because this is a very ambiguous word. What we are attempting to do is to make our students more aware of the demands of social justice and the demands of the gospel and the demands of charity. It is our obligation to do this.

Thus I want to greet the students and personnel from the Escuela María Catalina Dimaggio. They sent me a recording of the results of their three days of reflection. I will tell you here publicly that I cried when I listened to the children and women of our *barrios* express their love and gratitude to their Pastor and to the Church that is trying to make people aware of their human dignity and that is promoting the human development of all people. Why does the Church do this? Why does the Church encourage people to develop themselves, to distinguish themselves? We do this because the Church can never approve of a poverty that allows people to remain on the margins of society, can never approve of a poverty that results from the laziness and inactivity of people.

Let us also state clearly that when we speak of a Church of the poor we are not speaking about a Church of lazy people or thieves or prostitutes or despicable people who earn their living by sinful means. This is not the Church of the poor! When we say Church of the poor we are telling people that they ought to understand that their poverty, their huts and their rural origins should not make them feel inferior to others because all people are created in the image of God. Therefore we must respect and promote this dignity. This is not communism or subversion. This is the gospel of the One who came to offer his life for all people without any exception.

I am also grateful for the work of the lawyers who have continued to negotiate an amnesty for prisoners and who are trying to apply the full weight of the law to this situation. As they themselves have said: *In our country there is a law and a legal system that has been prostituted. Therefore lawyers, the defenders of this justice that has been stained by so many injustices have to be the ones who promote the law.* Blessed be God! A lawyer who does not belong to this group told me: *this is a sign of hope for the people!* I truly feel the same way.

I want to thank God and ask all of you to do the same because Gustavo Cartagena, after a mysterious abduction, has been released and is recuperating. Blessed be God!

Finally I want to advise you that because of the present situation in the Cathedral, all the liturgical celebrations that were to take place there have been cancelled. Thus there will be no confirmations in the Cathedral this week. Speaking about confirmation, I want to remind you that on May 14th, Pentecost, the Catholic schools and the youth groups are preparing a beautiful celebration of confirmation. Those students who are in the second and third years of High School and have not yet been confirmed will receive the sacrament. People should be confirmed when they reach this age. Those young men and women who are at least 16 years old will also be accepted for confirmation.

But I want to ask for your collaboration here. I ask you to help the Church as she attempts to give new meaning to the sacrament of confirmation and therefore please do not bring your small children to the Church to be confirmed. This is not the proper age to be confirmed. Confirmation is a sacrament for young people, a sacrament in which the person who was baptized as a child is now able to consciously affirm that baptismal commitment. In this sacrament the Holy Spirit strengthens the faith of these young men and women, a faith that they received at the time of their baptism. Therefore, I repeat, that on May 14th we will not be confirming small children but we are asking that those who are to be confirmed be at least 16 years old and receive an adequate preparation.

The Risen Christ is presented to us today in the person of a Shepherd

My sisters and brothers, we are living here in El Salvador in a very concrete situation and we are living in that situation with our own particular style. Our situation reflects the situation of sin that is spoken about in today's three readings --- a situation that was illuminated by the light of faith. The situation here in El Salvador in 1978 also responds to the light that appeared twenty centuries ago, the light of the Good Shepherd.

This is the central person and the second point of my reflections this morning: the Good Shepherd. Today's readings present the Good Shepherd against a background of sin. There is no need to repeat all these things. I encourage you to re-read these passages and carefully analyze the number of denunciations that Peter makes in his first sermon and in his letter to the Christians community. Notice the number of denunciations that Saint John makes in his gospel. Though he is often seen as a mystic who presents lofty thoughts, nevertheless, here he denounced the concrete actions of concrete historical men and women. This also explains the conflicts that the Apostles encountered and the fact that they died as martyrs. No one wants to have their sins pointed out to them. No one, that is, unless they are humble and desire what the Church desires: conversion. In this sense, then, the conversion of the person of Christ, the Good Shepherd, the gate through which the flock legitimately enters, is an inspiration and a complete lesson. *I am the Good Shepherd. I am the gate.* (j).

Saint Peter says in his first sermon that Jesus was constituted *Lord and Messiah* through the resurrection (k). What profound expressions! We can see then that while Christ lived incarnated in his humanity, a man like any other man, he did not distinguish himself from others. For example, he went to the synagogue just like you now come here to celebrate the Eucharist. If Jesus lived today, he would be here among the men and women and we would not be able to distinguish him from other people. Jesus was a man like every other man.

But when his hour arrives, what he proclaims: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (l), then he distinguished himself as Lord. First he humbles himself in a way that was equaled by no other person. In this sense the second reading from Saint Peter's letter seems to be a passage from the prophet Isaiah: silent, like a lamb he is led to slaughter.(m) With his attitude of humility Jesus teaches us how we should suffer. Jesus also distinguishes himself as Messiah, the Messiah who incarnates all the prophecies of the Old Testament: *He himself bore our sins in his body.*(n)

Peter tells us that Jesus is our Savior precisely because of his suffering. He also tells us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Messiah whom many people awaited but expected would be accompanied by acts of political triumph. Therefore when the disciples were traveling to Emmaus they were disillusioned because *our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides, it is now the third day since this took place* (o). Jesus reprimands them: *Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into glory?* (p). This is Christ's condition. Therefore my sisters and brothers I tell you: the Church should not be confused with other liberation movements, neither with the Popular Revolutionary Bloc nor with the Communist Party nor with any other earthly organization. Those who speak about the Church in this way are speaking vile, slanderous words. The Church is seen in Christ who says: *The Messiah must suffer and die. There is no other liberation but the liberation of the cross. One cannot speak of liberating people without hoping in another life. One must work for a more just world but cannot expect Paradise here on earth.* The Messiah speaks to us about a liberation that was bought with his blood and suffering. The teaching of Jesus in today's reading provides great hope to all those who want to liberate our people: the Good Shepherd gives his life. (q)

Let us look at another aspect: Messiah and Lord, Kyrios, emperor and king. Jesus is Messiah and Lord but bears no attitude of ostentatious triumphalism. Rather he reveals a divine royalty that makes him all powerful, present in his Church, architect of history, the fundamental cornerstone of all human movements, and the compass point that guides history toward its true destiny. Jesus is the Lord of history, the Lord of time and the Lord of eternity. He is the one who embraces the past, the present and the future. Saint Paul says that Jesus is *Christ forever*. Christ is the Lord. Christ lives. Christ is risen. Death no longer has dominion over him. But this Christ presents himself as the Good Shepherd. What a beautiful reality to consider that this all powerful king and this man who bears the scars of so much suffering has become a glorious star, our great liberator, our great pastor!

I invite you, my sisters and brothers, not to leave this celebration of the Eucharist without having first removed from your heart all the bitterness that so often leaves one pessimistic because one has lost all hope. I invite you this morning to awaken in your hearts the magnanimity and joy of those whose hearts are filled with hope. I invite everyone to do this. There is no redemption apart from Christ. For this reason I speak to the hearts of government officials and to those business people who hold the destiny of our people in their hands. I speak to the hearts of the *campesinos*, the poor, those who live on the margins of society. I speak to the hearts of the humble. Instead of hating one another, let us love one another and hope in Christ, the Good Shepherd who guides the people. Only the Good Shepherd can guide us and there is no other guide for our people. If people arise and want to lead us but also want to put aside Christ, then Jesus himself condemns them: *If someone has entered by another gate, they are thieves and robbers. They have entered not as shepherds but thieves*

who want to take advantage of the present situation. They come to steal and kill and mistreat (r). Taking these words literally we can say that there are many people who want nothing to do with the Good Shepherd. They are not interested in the common good but are only concerned about their own advantage and their own position in society and want to maintain this situation with a brutal force that is totally irrational.

Yet here we have the person of the Good Shepherd before us and this should inspire parents, the bishop, government officials, the rich and the poor. The Good Shepherd, Christ, Messiah and Lord, should be the inspiration for all Christians. This is a beautiful meditation and we could continue with this reflection but we have said enough here to give you an idea of the central message of this Sunday: Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

The message of Christ is directed to the people as a vocation

My third point is the following: we are the children of this present situation and we live as protagonists of these circumstances of our country. But thanks to God we are Christians and we believe in the Good Shepherd. Then what? We have a personal responsibility. The Good Shepherd who is presented to us in today's three readings is a pastor who calls us to collaborate. Look at the first reading. Saint Peter says that *through Christ, God has given us the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit* (s). This promise that God made in Christ is valid for all of you, for all your children, for all those who call upon the Lord.

On this day dedicated to vocations, it is beautiful to call to mind that our first vocation is that of being Christian. As Christians we have come here to celebrate this Eucharist together. Without being aware of it, we were baptized because of the love of a Christian mother, a blessed woman among our people. My mother brought me to the Church to be baptized and from that day I was a Christian. The Lord called me. He called me from the heart of my mother. The same could be said of everyone who has been baptized. We have been called, called to receive the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are intended to be given to all people --- the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, our Savior.

The second reading also presents us with the concept of vocation when we are told *when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to do this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you* (t). My Christian sisters and brothers, those who think that Christianity is the key to avoid suffering are mistaken. Those who no longer pray because they asked God to cure them of some illness or to give them better luck and say: *Since God has not listened to me, since I continue in my misery and disgrace, I will no longer pray* --- these people are also mistaken and have not understood the dignity of their vocation. We are called to suffer. Jesus is the only one who did not sin and yet he suffered greatly. We are gathered together in a Church that is dedicated to the Virgin and, like Christ, Mary was innocent and sinless and yet as she stood beneath the cross seven swords pierced her heart. Yes, the Lord calls us to suffer! But we are called to suffer as we do good. Look at the contrast here in the politics of God! The reward for doing good does not mean that we will rejoice in some good position. Saint Peter makes this very clear in his letter today: *do good and suffer* (u). What a beautiful reality! Since Christ suffered we are also called to suffer.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, any liberation that is achieved without suffering and pain is a pure lie. Paradise does not exist here on earth. True liberation is only found after death, but we begin to bring this liberation to realization here on earth. But for this to happen

we must be willing to be unsettled and disturbed by our present situation. My sisters and brothers, I am embarrassed that at this time when the people can no longer tolerate this present situation there are so many people who are indifferent and who prefer, like the people of Israel in Egypt, to continue to eat onions in Egypt (v). These same people raised up their voices against Moses because on their way to liberation they had to suffer in the desert: *Would that we had died at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!* (w). This is the situation of many people --- they only want to be in a good place. But how long would this last? Definitive liberation implies suffering and, like the passion of Jesus, a passage through a dark tunnel. Saint Peter encourages us and tells us that the passion is brief. The time of suffering is brief but just as Christ accepted his cross and walked the way of Calvary and fell but did not remain on the ground but lifted himself up three times and then allowed himself to be nailed to the cross so that our redemption might be complete, so too we must accept our suffering with the same joy. Then everything will be accomplished and we will no longer experience weariness (x). My sisters and brothers, as Christians let us not be afraid of suffering, rather let us realize that is the common vocation of every Christian.

The gospel also speaks about the meaning of vocation: *I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep* (y). Here we have a general calling. All those people who want to be saved have to enter through Christ. Without Christ there is no salvation. Those of us who have the honor of being pastors would not be pastors if we had not been called to enter through the door. The true bishop and pastor, the authentic and only Pope are those who have entered through the gate -- - the gate that is Christ. The day that I should find myself no longer in communion with the Pope (may God free me from that sin) I would be a schismatic, a thief, an assassin, a robber. I would be like those pastors who usurp the churches, like those persons who belong to ORDEN (Nationalist Democratic Organization) who have occupied the church of Dulce Nombre de María. You see, our churches are not only occupied by members of the Bloc but also by ORDEN. They have thrown many parishioners out of these Churches so that they themselves can take possession of the parish churches. They see the Church as some type of game that is at the disposal of their every whim. Those who do not enter through the gate who is Christ are thieves. Only those who enter through the gate that is Christ and preach in his name and announce his Word are true shepherds and pastors. Thus the criterion is very clear: we must enter through the gate that is Christ and not through the windows or some other opening.

This then is the meaning of vocation. I wish to conclude by reading a beautiful passage from the message that was written by Paul VI for this occasion: *When Jesus talks about the "shepherd" and the "flock" he is presenting himself, the Good Shepherd, and he is presenting the community of believers, that is, his Church, as the flock open to receiving the whole of humanity. Now, to understand the meaning and value of every vocation, these are just the two realities that we must fix our minds on: Christ and the Church. Here we have the light to accept, and the support to persevere in the vocation fully understood, freely chosen and strongly loved. Look at Christ. We say this particularly to you young people, with fatherly affection, and great confidence. Look at Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Many and Son of God,. The High Priest of the New People of God, the eternal Shepherd of his Church who offered his life for his flock, "taking the form of a servant... obedient unto death, even death on a cross".⁴ The Pope then explains the profound theological meaning of these words: *There comes from Christ, who is the only priest and pastor of all people, the pastoral concern of all men who are called to be priests and pastors.* Therefore, the vocation of the*

seminarians, the bishop and the priests cannot be understood without taking into consideration Christ who is the only priest. Vocation must also consider the fact that the Church is the flock of Christ where Christ is pastor and we make the presence of Christ visible in the midst of his people.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, you who are listening to me ---I want to thank all of you because you are giving your attention to Christ. Thus the Pope concludes his message with the following words: *And so to you young people, be concerned about knowing these two realities: Christ and the Church. For without them you will not be able to understand the meaning of your life. But we must also say to you shepherds of souls, men and women religious, missionaries, and teachers, to you theologians, and to you experts in spirituality, education and vocation psychology: make these realities known, teach these truths, make them easy to understand, stimulating and attractive, as Jesus the Teacher and Shepherd did.*⁵

On this Sunday we offer our prayers to the Good Shepherd. We pray that his courageous and guiding presence might continue to be revealed in the world through the voice of his pastors. We pray that the vocation to be Christian might also continue to be embraced by those persons who have been baptized and might be recovered by those who have lost their faith in Christianity. May all people come to understand that to be Christian means that they are called to suffer and to embrace the cross. This is how the world will be saved and therefore we should not be afraid when the hour of suffering approaches. We are invited to embrace the cross. May our young men and women understand this great plan of Christ, a plan that they are called to participate in and collaborate with so that through them the presence of Christ might become more real in the world. May they understand that their hands are the hands of Christ who extends the gift of peace. May they understand that their feet are the feet of Christ who walks through the world bestowing the gift of salvation and redemption. We need Christ. On this Sunday that is dedicated to Jesus, the Good Shepherd and is also dedicated to a reflection on vocations, we thank God for enabling us to be a part of this Church where vocations are flourishing and where many young people long to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ. United, then, to Christ the Good Shepherd, we are going to join ourselves to the Pope's prayer. We are going to do this as part of the Prayer of the Faithful. But first, let us proclaim our faith.

¹ On this Sunday Mons. Romero couldn't celebrate Mass in the Cathedral since on 11 April 1978 it was occupied by members of the BPR (Bloque Popular Revolucionario) as he explains.

² The embassies of Panama, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Switzerland.

³ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 12 April 1987.

⁴ Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1 February 1978.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Margin References (a) Ac 2,36-37: (b) Ac 2,36: (c) 1P 2,25: (d) Jn 10,7: (e) Jn 10,1: (f) Jn 10,10: (g) Jn 9,1-41: (h) Jn 9,16.34: (i) Mt 9,16: (j) Jn 10,9.11: (k) Ac 2,36: (l) Jn 12,23: (m) 1P 2,24: (n) 1P 2,21: (o) Lk 24,21: (p) Lk 24,25: (q) Jn 10,11: (r) Jn 10,1,9-10: (s) Ac 2,38: (t) 1P 2,20b-21: (u) 1P 2,20b-21: (v) Nm 11,5: (w) Ex 16,3: (y) Jn 10,2-9.