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PEACE¹

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time **3 July 1977**

Isaiah 66:10-14a

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio listeners, let us reflect upon the word of God that should always inspire and strengthen the true follower of Jesus Christ. Each Sunday that we come together for Mass this divine word offers us a new message. No two Sundays are alike. Throughout the liturgical year—I keep repeating this—the church has a plan: she wants to infuse ever deeper into people’s souls this divine revelation which is a bright light that clarifies all our confusions and that places us on the sure road for knowing God’s divine plan for us. Blessed are those who catch this light and make it the driving force of their lives. Today’s scriptural message is about a theme that answers to the anguish of our time: peace.

Peace. Seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah described the arrival of the messianic era in the beautiful passage that you have heard today. He presents Jerusalem as an idealized image of what the Messiah will create: a city of joy and happiness because God has made it overflow with peace. I am happy to proclaim this word of Isaiah because it is the same reading that is proclaimed on the feast of Our Lady of Peace, the patroness of all El Salvador. Today I call upon this beloved Salvadoran mother because she will give me words and she will make your minds capable of grasping what is embodied in her, the Queen of Peace. God poured out on her soul, which is a beautiful expression of the church clothed with all her virtues, what God desires to give to every heart, to every people, to every family: an overflowing torrent of peace.

When Christ came to fulfill those ancient prophecies, he summed up his redemptive action with this one word: peace. Today the gospel relates for us the first attempts to evangelize the world. The messengers are not the group of the twelve apostles, whom Jesus is preparing to inspire the whole people of God. Rather, it is a group of seventy-two people in whom I see you, dear sisters and brothers. I see you lay people, you who are baptized, mothers and fathers, teachers, professionals, students. You are the seventy-two that Christ chooses and sends out with a mission like the hierarchical mission: «Go out into the world and preach that which sums up my redemption: peace to this household. If peaceful people live there, my peace will remain there. But if people are arrogant or proud, if they reject God, then this peace will not remain there but will return to you. And as a sign of the rejection you have suffered, shake the dust from your

¹ Two days before this homily, 1 July 1977, General Carlos Humberto Romero, the new president of El Salvador, was inaugurated. Archbishop Romero did not take part in the official ceremony, in accordance with his decision on 15 March 1977 after the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande, a decision he referred to in an interview after the inauguration ceremony: «Faithful to my promise of not taking part in official acts until the situation between the archdiocese and the government is made clear, I could not be present at the official ceremony, but this does not mean a declaration of war or a definitive rupture». See «Information Bulletin of the Archbishop’s Office No. 6», ECA 341 (1977) 257, and «The Archbishop Requests Only One Condition for Dialogue: Sincerity» in *Orientación* (17 July 1977).

sandals before them, as if to tell them that they are not worthy of this message of God. And the peace will go with you, and other people will accept it. But there will always be people who reject it» (Luke 10:5-11).

When Saint Paul philosophizes about this peace, about this mystery of Christ's redemption summed up in this short word «peace», he discovers the source from which this peace derives. And he feels that he is himself an instrument of the peace that flows from the cross: «I am crucified for the world. The world does not understand me, and I do not want to conform with the world. I am crucified for the world, and the world is crucified for me. I carry this treasure of peace in my heart and share it with all those who want to receive it» (Gal 2:20, 6:14). This is the church, sisters and brothers, personified in Saint Paul. We can speak now with great clarity to the Catholics of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and to those who don't want to be Catholic because they have voluntarily rejected Christ and his peace. Every one of you who follows the church can say today, more than ever before, «I am crucified for Christ. May I never boast except in the cross of Christ» (Gal 6:14). And I repeat with immense joy that for me this is a glorious time for the church of San Salvador. Blessed are those who understand this and live it. Do not seek your glory in the wondrous triumphs of the world. Do not seek power in the force of wealth or the things of the earth. All these things are for me crucified; they are worthless, and I am also crucified for them.

Blessed are those who know how to detach themselves in order to become true instruments of peace. The Second Vatican Council spoke this famous phrase: «The problems of today's world take on a universal dimension, and yet the ties which unite the faithful are stronger than those that separate them; nevertheless they find themselves in front of an insoluble problem; they cannot create a peaceful world» (GS 77). Still, the word of Christ remains with us and is felt as a joyful blessing: «Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God» (Matt 5:9).

This is the great anguish of our time, and here in El Salvador we are feeling it; there is no peace. We were very pleased to hear this anguish on the lips of the new president who cried out, «Peace for the people, peace for the family, peace for every heart!»² We are happy that the new government has this desire for peace, but we are concerned because it does not want to follow the true road that leads to peace. Here, then, is the church, willing to enter into dialogue with all people but principally with those who have political power and economic power. We want to tell you about the peace and the great capacity for peace that is yours if only you follow the voice of the Gospel.

Peace is the fruit of justice

I am going to present, sisters and brothers, something I studied this week in order to communicate it to you: two precious passages from documents that illustrate the teaching of the church today. There is a chapter from Vatican II that deals with peace (GS, chapter V), and there is a document from Medellín, the meeting where the bishops together with the pope also reflected on peace (M 2). These two documents illustrate the present teaching of the church, and I cite them as an authoritative commentary for today's biblical readings, which are precisely a message of true peace.

² Reference to the speech of General Carlos Humberto Romero in his inauguration as president of El Salvador on 1 July 1977. See «Documentos», ECA 345 (1977) 515-519.

Both documents say that peace is not just the absence of war (GS 78; M 2:14). That is a very negative notion. We cannot simply say that there is peace when there is no war. Right now there is no war in many countries; in fact, in most of the world there is no war; nevertheless, in no part of the world is there true peace. It is not enough, then, that there be no war. The balance of opposed powers is not really peace. Russia and the United States threaten one another, so that there is no proper peace between the two great powers. What exists is fear, fear about which is more powerful. That is not peace. Two young boys or two men threaten to fight one another; there may be no fight, but neither is there peace. There is fear between two powers. The pope stated, «No one can speak of peace while holding a pistol or a rifle». That is fear. Neither is there peace, says the Council, when despotic authority seeks to subject a people or even an individual. This is the peace of death, the peace of repression, but not true peace.

What then is peace? Peace, says the Council, can be defined in the words of the prophet Isaiah which Pius XII placed as a motto on his coat of arms: *Opus Justitiae Pax*—peace is the fruit of justice (Isa 32:17). This indeed is peace. There will be peace only when there is justice. We were pleased to hear this concept mentioned also in the presidential address. When there is justice, there is peace. If there is no justice, there is no peace. Peace is the result of the order that God desires but that we have to work for as the great good of our society. There will be peace only when there is no more repression, when there is no more segregation, when all people can enjoy their legitimate rights, when there is freedom, when there is no fear, when there are no towns smothered in arms, when there are no more dungeons where so many children of God suffer the loss of their freedom, when there is no more torture, when there are no more violations of human rights.

That is why the country is filled with hope when the government says that there can be no peace without justice. But it is necessary to add works to those words. Many situations of injustice must disappear. At Medellín the situation of Latin America was described using these words that scandalize many: «In Latin America there is a situation of injustice; there is institutionalized violence» (M 2,16). These are not Marxist words; they are Catholic words; they are Gospel words. For wherever there is a power that oppresses the weak and does not allow them to live justly with their rights and their human dignity, there is a situation of injustice. Medellín used this memorable phrase: «If development is the new name for peace, then the people who live in underdevelopment live in an unjust situation which continually provokes violence» (M 2,1). The pope has stated that if violence exists, then many times it results from affliction or anguish. We do not say that this legitimizes violence but it helps to explain it. Naturally, sisters and brothers, when violence becomes institutionalized and constitutes a way of life, and when there is no desire to examine ways of changing that institution, we should not be surprised that there are outbreaks of violence (PP30). There can be no peace when there is provocation against peace (M 2,16).

If there is a sincere desire for peace and if it is truly recognized that justice is the root of peace, then all those who can change this situation of violence are obliged to do so. We have seen the names of many Christians on the list of the new collaborators in the government, even some *Cursillistas*. We hope that they know how to listen to the voice of the Gospel, which tells them that this situation in El Salvador is provoking violence and that they are obliged to promote from their positions in government those structural changes that the country needs to create an environment that fosters peace. The reason for this, says Medellín, is that all those who are able to do something to create a more just order in Latin America sin against peace if they do not do

what is within their ability (M 2,18). Let us hope that this sin of omission, which we confessed at the beginning of the Mass, might touch the conscience of many who are able to do much but who do nothing, perhaps to protect their advantageous situation or their salary or because they want to win political favors or stay in the good graces of the powerful. They would be traitors to the law of God, and they would be sinners by omission if out of fear of losing their life on earth they do not do what they must do to give to their fellow citizens—the people, the society, the common good—that breath of peace that rests on a more equitable justice.

We are not justifying violence. The Council and Medellín have spoken the same words as the pope: «Violence is neither Christian nor evangelical. Christians are peaceful and are not ashamed of it» (M 2,15). We do not say «pacifist» because there is a movement of non-violence that does not proceed from Christianity. Gandhi and other followers of non-violence are part of this movement in the world that has its origins in a philosophy that is centered rather on fleeing from struggle and forgetting the rights of oppressed men and women. Christians know that they can struggle, and their Gospel urges them to defend justice as something valuable. But Christians also know that violence only engenders more violence and that, like war, it should be the last recourse, used only after all peaceful means have been exhausted. Meanwhile, we must use every peaceful means for these are more fruitful and productive. We cannot let the passions of hatred and resentment overwhelm our firm resolutions to seek the order that flows from peace. For pacification to take place it is necessary that the children of peace, the children of God who work for a better world, be inspired not by violence or by non-Christian non-violence, but by a peace that is fruitful, a peace that demands the fulfillment of rights and respect for human dignity, a peace that never yields just for the sake of avoiding problems with those who abuse these great rights of humankind. Here the government can count on some great peacemakers as long as it leaves the church free to preach her Gospel and free to preach the promotion of humankind. No government in the world could find a more effective and powerful collaborator than the church, the herald of true freedom, justice, and peace.

Justice is not enough; love also is necessary

The other concept we take from these documents is the following: justice is not enough; love also is necessary. We have always preached this, sisters and brothers. I am happy to say that all the persons who have examined the church's thought at this time have never heard a word of violence from my lips. We have said that the power of the Christian is love, and we repeat it: the power of the church is love.

Love enables us to feel that we are sisters and brothers to one and all. Love is what is proclaimed in today's second reading from Saint Paul, who is inspired by the One who loved us even unto death and who therefore draws us to the love of feeling crucified for Christ and for our sisters and brothers. As long as we do not reach that strength of love, we cannot be true peacemakers. Those whose hearts are filled with resentment, violence, and hatred cannot be forgers of peace. We have to know how to love like Jesus, who loved even those who crucified him: «Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. They are idolaters of their money and their power. If they knew you, they would love you. That is why, rather than feeling resentment and hatred, I feel sorry for these poor idolaters who do not know the power of this love that you have given me. Give them love also, Lord» (Luke 23:34). How much good the powerful would do if they truly loved and were not selfish and envious! How beautiful the world would be, sisters and brothers, if we all were to expand this power of love!

Here the Second Vatican Council was careful to define two kinds of peace, and we should pay close attention to this (GS 78). One kind of peace is that which Christ reserved for his closest friends, those who understood the redemption and the need to root out sin from themselves. As long as there is sin in the heart, there can be no truly divine peace, such as the peace Christ achieved when he reconciled us with the Father by dying on the cross and bearing the sins of all of us in his body. For us Christians and Catholics, this is the culmination of peace: peace in the grace of God, the peace of those who have left sin and controlled their passions, the peace of holy souls. This is the peace that Christ spoke of: «I leave you peace; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives peace» (John 14:27).

Here we distinguish another kind of peace, the peace that the church shares with the world, the peace that non-Christians can also possess, the peace of people of good will that we sing about in the Gloria of the Mass: «Peace to people of good will» (Luke 2:14). Here is meant this other peace, the peace that proceeds from natural love. It is the peace of those who, even though they do not know God, are able to discover the intense power of being in solidarity with those who suffer. It is the peace that enables people to bring a little comfort to the grief-stricken and to denounce injustices in the face of unjust wealth. This is the peace that all people can possess. Here I call upon all people, even those who do not believe in this faith that has brought us together in our Mass on this Sunday. Many people are listening on the radio who are not Catholic and who may place no value on the Mass. Some may even be disturbed by the pious prayers of their wives or their mothers or other devout persons who have found divine peace. They have still not found this peace, but I want to ask them, «Dear friends, even without believing in this Christ and in this peace of soul, do you not feel the ability to forgive? Do you not feel the power of saying no to that rancor that you have carried in your hearts for so long? You who do not believe in Christ, do you not recognize that belief in Christ is not necessary, that it is enough just to be human in order to enter into solidarity with the poor and the destitute and to feel that there are injustices in the great inequalities of our society? Therefore, we appeal also to you. You also can be called forgers of peace».

That is why, when we were burying the unforgettable Father Alfonso Navarro, we stated in the parish of Miramonte that we were issuing a call for everyone to sow peace. We called not only upon Catholics, who are riddled by slander that almost discredits them, but also upon all the vibrant forces in El Salvador: the Protestants, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, all the benevolent institutions, so many people of good will. Even if they are secular, even if they are atheist, they can do much good for the sake of this peace. That is the desire of today's gospel. When Christ says that we should love one another (John 15:12), he is not saying that it is necessary to be Christian. It seems to me that the saying of Christ, «Love one another», is a point of contact between those who have faith and those who do not because even those who do not have faith can love others and be peacemakers.

My call today, then, springs from the heart of the Gospel and from the heart of the church. But her arms are also extended to those who do not have faith so as to offer sincere collaboration for the sake of true peace. This is the dialogue that the church offers. The new president asked us to place our confidence in him and told us he would follow through. Here, then, is the church waiting for that dialogue. The church has never broken off dialogue with anyone. It is others who have broken it off; it is others who have mistreated the church. Many words come out of the mouth, but works are also needed to demonstrate the sincerity of this search for peace for our country. For example, the church needs the priests who have been taken from her to be returned. Many families need the return of their loved ones whose whereabouts are unknown. Much work

needs to be done to gain this trust and to seek truly and sincerely the peace our country needs. My sisters and brothers, we need great mutual trust, and this is justice. If there is no justice, then El Salvador will continue to long for that peace that we sing about in our national anthem, but that we have not known how to preserve. Our Lord, who today gives us this promise for peace and points the way through his church, tells us now to be makers of peace (Matt 5:9).

Let us be makers of peace

I am going to conclude with the statement of Christ at the beginning of today's gospel: «The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest» (Luke 10:2). The problem of peace is immense, and it needs many peacemakers: priests, men and women religious, laity who are involved in every political and economic situation—the call goes out to all. The harvest is abundant. El Salvador possesses extraordinary vigor and exuberance. What a marvelous people El Salvador would be if Salvadorans were nurtured in an environment of peace, justice, love, and freedom! Let each one of us, according to our means, nurture this vocation to become instruments of peace. Jesus Christ in the gospel and Saint Paul in his letter describe the conditions of those who want to be forgers of peace. We would do well to review this passage of the gospel where Jesus preaches to us about the indispensable condition of being poor in spirit, of being detached: «Carry no money bag, no rucksack, no sandals—go as pilgrims» (Luke 10:4). This is the great adventure for us today. There are those who only seek security and comfort, who do not want to take the risk of poverty, who do not want to detach themselves from lucrative situations, not even in their hearts—these people do not want to collaborate with God.

But external poverty is not enough. I also want to address those who preach poverty and a church of the poor but do so insincerely, seeking demagogic praise—that does not help either. The poverty preached in today's gospel is the poverty of Saint Paul: «I am crucified to the world» (Gal 6:14). This is poverty that flows from love for Jesus Christ. It is poverty that beholds Christ naked on the cross and tells him, «I will follow you wherever you go, taking the roads of poverty, not out of demagogy but because I love you, because I want to be holy with my own holiness». This poverty makes me feel that the world's riches are crucified for me and that I am crucified by all the criteria of the world—this is true poverty.

Blessed are the poor of heart, those whose hearts feel the need for God, those who find the joy of life in the cross and sacrifice, those who have learned the true secret of peace in the crucified One. This secret consists of loving God to the extreme of letting oneself be killed for him and of loving one's neighbors to the point of being crucified for them. This is the love of the modern redeemers, the love of Christ, the love that endures forever. Only these will be the true peacemakers that Christ blessed in the sermon of the Beatitudes: «Blessed are those who sow peace, for they will be called children of God» (Matt 5:9). Let us promise this to the Lord while we proceed to proclaim our faith in him.