

19

INTERIOR BEING

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
10 July 1977

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

My dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

Today the word of God invites us to visit our interior being. It is as though Christ were telling all of us who take part in this reflection, «The kingdom of God is within you» (Luke 17:21). We live outside ourselves. There are very few people who truly enter into themselves, and that is why there are so many problems. If we were to penetrate into our own interior, we would understand that the voice of the Lord and the law which sanctifies us are not up there in the heights of heaven, as the first reading explains to us. We would not be asking, «Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us what God wants?» Nor would we search for a law on the other side of the sea, asking, «Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?» (Deut 30:12-14). If that is what our search is like, how will our republic improve? It is as if we were hoping that something would come to us from outside. So we blame the government, or wealth, or other things. But what use is it, church documents ask us, to change the social, political, and economic structures if there is no change in the hearts of those who have to live with and deal with those structures? (M 1, 3)

Be converted from within

There will be no change as long as those swamped with problems do not look within themselves and do not hear in their hearts the message of today's divine word: «Return to the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul» (Deut 30:10). Even better, let us listen to the words of Christ as he speaks unequivocally with a scholar of the law who asks him what is the greatest commandment: «You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind» (Luke 10:27).

Human beings are not great unless they look within themselves. From the heart of the church, the Council brought forth for the modern world a new humanism, a Christian humanism that tells us that it is from their own inner being that men and women understand their highest calling as intimacy with God (GS 14). There is in the heart of everyone something like a small intimate chamber where God comes to speak with each one personally. It is there that individuals define and decide their own destiny and their role in the world. If all of us who now have so many problems were to enter

into this tiny chamber and from there listen to the voice of the Lord who speaks to us through our own conscience, how much more we could do to better the situation of our society and our families. If all Salvadorans, on this Sunday when the word of God is the word of love, were truly resolved to live the greatest commandment, and if we gave our inner being its proper reason for being, then I assure you, sisters and brothers, that this Sunday would mark the beginning of a total change. There would no longer be any need to wait for something to come from outside, because all of us would be contributing from our inner selves just what our country and the world need. Be aware that the world and history are not going to progress without us. We are participants in the construction of history, and in that way humankind keeps on evolving.

Therefore, one of the signs of the present times is that sense of participation, that right that all persons have to participate in the construction of their own common good. That is why one of the most dangerous offenses at the present time is repression; that is, telling people, «Only we can govern; nobody else can; everyone else must be kept away». Yet every person can contribute something worthwhile, and in this way trust is achieved. It is not by turning people away that the common good is achieved. It is not by expelling those who don't suit me that I am going to enhance the welfare of my homeland. I will enhance it only by trying to capture all the good that there is in every person and trying to extract it from them in a trusting environment. The force we should use is not physical, as though we were dealing with irrational beings; rather, it is the moral force of good that attracts all people, especially restless young people, so that all contribute according to their own inner being, their own responsibility, and their own mode of action. In this way we will raise up this beautiful pyramid that is called the common good—the good that we work for together in order to create conditions of goodness, trust, freedom and peace. Let us all join together to build the republic, the *res publica*, the public realm which belongs to all and which we all have an obligation to build.

Christ, synthesis of all that exists

What is the essence of the people of El Salvador or of people from any part of the world? Has God not created all people precisely to make the world happy? The second reading today is a beautiful passage in which Saint Paul invites us to view reality from the cosmic perspective of Christ: «He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible. . . . He is before all things. . . . All things were created through him and for him» (Col 1:15-16).

My sisters and brothers, how magnificent is the Christian perspective. Christ is the God-man. We see that Christ as man is capable of great love, and we see that he as God is the beginning and the end of all things. As God and as man, then, Christ gives us a synthesis and a neat summary of all that exists. Only in him can we find happiness, prosperity, love, freedom, and peace. If we eliminate Christ, said the Council, we commit suicide.¹ This statement was directed to government leaders, especially those who do not value Christ or the body which represents Christ in the world, namely, the church

¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, «Messages of the Council to Humanity» (8 December 1965), *To Heads of State*, 5.

that has Christ as its head. Thus, all those who do not value this head and this body commit suicide because they have lost a universal vision of reality and a vision of humankind. They view people merely as rivals or as problems; they treat them as beasts that need to be brutally beaten. But in every person we see Christ, as the pope said at the close of the Council, «This Council has taught us to behold Christ and every person in Christ».² Therefore in the face of every person—all the more transparent and beautiful when purified by pain, poverty, anguish, and suffering—we behold the face of Christ, which is also the face of a person in pain, the face of one crucified, the face of a poor man, the face of a holy man. In the face of every person we learn to see the face of Christ, and we love every person according to the norm that he will use to judge us at the end of time: «I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink». Surprised by these words, the righteous ask, «Lord, when did we see you on earth and comfort you?» And he will say, «Whatever you did for one of these least sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me» (Matt 25:35-40). It will be a tremendous surprise, sisters and brothers, when many Good Samaritans, even without having faith in Christ, even without being Catholic, will find themselves saved at the time of the final judgment, while many Christians will be cast outside because they did not fulfill this commandment of love and mercy.

What is it that makes great the human visage and the human situation? It is precisely this vision of faith, seeing in every person the face of Christ, for then the Lord can tell us the wonderful parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). For me as a priest this is a tremendous wake-up call. Even though I am fulfilling the word of God and denouncing all that is not in accord with the word of God, I see myself reflected in the priest and the Levite who passed by the wounded man and did nothing to help him.

The one who denounces must also be prepared to be denounced. I have told you a thousand times, dear sisters and brothers, that when a priest assumes an attitude unworthy of the love that ought to inspire a preacher of God's word, then report him to us, but always with love and charity. Do not commit the same sin that you denounce: don't tell the priest that he is Marxist or a scandalous rabble-rouser. If he is criticized with charity and he takes heed, then a soul has been won for God. It is a duty of Christians to act in this way. But if the criticism is done in the savage manner used in many newspaper ads and even with threats of death, then such actions promote neither truth nor love. They reveal the crassest selfishness, and the sins committed thereby are more serious than the faults found in us preachers of God's word. We are human and will therefore also commit errors, but if we commit them, we do not do so cruelly as do those who with criminal spirit threaten preachers with death.

Let us be converted in heart. We priests must also be converted. In the parable of the Samaritan, Christ is directly speaking about people of the church, not only priests. Let us reflect then, beloved religious, members of Christian movements, married couples, all of you who come to Mass every Sunday; we all have to examine our conscience in the light of this sincere parable of the Good Samaritan. Let us not be content with denouncing the sins and the defects of the sinful world. We have to begin, as we do at the start of Mass, by beating our breasts and recognizing our own faults

² PAUL VI, «The Religious Value of the Council», Allocution at the closing of the Second Vatican Council (7 December 1965) 16.

because our love of neighbor and our knowledge of ourselves should flow from such sincerity and love.

The immense capacity to love

What is there in people that merits such respect? I would like you to recall today the passage of Saint Paul and to think of yourselves as you reflect on it. It is said that all things were created through the eternal Word of God and that they were created for him. Well, those creatures include me and every one of you. We have been created by God, and what God did not do in other creatures, he did with you and me.

The intimate sanctuary of creation is the human person because God did not place in any other creature as much of himself as he did in the heart of every man, woman, child, old person, young person. What is the uniqueness of the human person in the midst of creation? It is being free, being intelligent, and above all being immensely capable of love. The law of God is love, and that is why the Old Testament writer tells us, «You don't have to seek it across the sea or high up in the sky, for in your own heart is the kingdom of God» (Deut 30:12-14). You may feel that you love, but you can't love in just any old way. Love in the way that has made the saints be saints.

What joy I would feel, sisters and brothers, if one of the fruits of this word that I am communicating on God's part were a true awakening in the interior of every heart that hears me. May each of you be concerned to develop the great capacity for love that results in a respect for one's own dignity. And may there flow from proper self-dignity and self-love a respect and love for others. In this capacity for love we are not our own, for we have received this love from God. The Bible speaks of this gift of God as *agape*, a Greek word that expresses the coming together of family or intimate friends for a meal. It is when we share the happiness of a meal that we give generously of ourselves. God makes us this *agape* and gives us his love so that we also may give in return from the depths of our heart to God and to neighbor. It is like an invitation to dine, an *agape* in which we feel happy because we are sharing this tremendous ability to love with God and with all people without exception.

We love because we are the heart of creation. No other creature has what the human person has, the capacity to love—not the stars, not the flowers, not the birds, not the dawn, not the sea, not the hills. Human beings give meaning to the dawn and the birds and the flowers. It is the man with a capacity to love who cuts a flower and gives it a meaning of love as he presents it to his beloved. It is the loving woman who gives meaning to the concert of the birds and the dawns so as to rise up to God and say, «How beautiful are your works, Lord, how worthy you are of praise!» Therefore when people do not love, when they do not use this ability of the heart that God has given them in creation, then they are reprobates. Hell begins when people begin to hate. One of the nicest of the many letters that arrived in recent days came from a person who told me, «I give thanks to God because my heart was a hell full of hatred. I saw only evil everywhere, and I trusted no one. But when I begin to reflect on how good God is and on the need to forgive, as you preach to us, then I feel that I am being transformed, and I now feel more content».

I know that this word is reaching many hearts experiencing hell, hearts that hate. Those who wrote the threats against the Jesuits wrote with pens of hell. Those who have killed our beloved priests are infernal souls as long as they are hating and killing. Those who cannot see the church without feeling resentment and rancor are hearts that Satan has won because Satan is hatred, envy, evil. I am saddened to think that there are many hearts like this, but they still have the opportunity to fill themselves with love, to repent, and to return to God; they still can put aside their weapons and their war-like attitudes. All those who torture others are hellish. All those who despise human dignity and trod it underfoot are inspired by Satan. They have no love.

Love is the only reality that can transform the world. That is why we said last Sunday that if the government truly desires peace, then it has to go to the roots of peace: justice and love. And it must be love that leads to forgiveness and that makes us throw away our weapons and embrace one another as sisters and brothers. It must be love that enables us to rise up to God and tell him, «Thank you, Father, because you gave me the ability to love. I don't want that ability to be suffocated in hell, and so I put aside my hatred, my envy, and my ill will». As Paul VI said, when we look at people with love, then we have arrived at the threshold of God because that person whom we respect and love is the image of God. It is then no longer difficult for us to fulfill the first of the commandments: «Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your being» (Luke 10:27). So true is this, sisters and brothers, that our main occupation in eternity will be just that: loving, glorifying, and being happy with God our Lord.

That is why even here on earth there is no greater joy on earth and no occupation more noble than that of the saints who work with their hearts set on God. By this I do not mean a sanctimonious piety that thinks only of God and not of earthly responsibilities. Indeed, in the parable of the Good Samaritan we have a condemnation of all those who think they can honor God while forgetting their neighbor (Luke 10:29-37). No one can forget the neighbor's needs by claiming they are thinking of God—neither the priest nor the Levite nor anyone who goes to Mass to adore God. The church is presently stressing social development, but there are many who believe that the church is deviating from her eternal destiny when she speaks about the human person. The pope responded to this accusation just as the Council was concluding.³ If we reach out to those in need and in anguish, to those in poverty and misery, it is because our hearts are set on God.

To the extent that we fulfill our obligations, we somehow earn a living with the work we do or the wages we receive, but let us not work only for the wages or to gain people's favor. Let us do everything for the love of God. One of the most beautiful expressions revealing the essence of the human person is heard from the humble beggar who with an outstretched hand says, «Give alms for the love of God». What a lesson in holiness that beggar gives us! When you do things for the love of God, then the action is holy. People's intentions determine their way of being. If a man gives alms to a young woman to seduce her and sin with her, that man is perverse. But if the man places the same alms in the hands of this young woman who is needy and does so for the love of God, then he is a saint. That is why the eyes of the perverse cannot see the

³ Ibid., 6.

good intentions of those who act for the love of God, but that is true holiness, sisters and brothers. That is why holiness is not on the other side of the sea or high up in the sky; it is within your own heart. When you do what you do for the love of God, all that you do is holy.

A cathedral was under construction, and an observer was asking questions of the workers while they were carving the stones for this beautiful Gothic cathedral. He said to one, «Why are you doing this work?» The worker gave a materialist answer: «Because if I don't work I don't eat. The wages for carving these stones help me to buy food and eat». The observer asked another, «And you, why do you work?» He answered, «Because there is nothing more beautiful than a Gothic cathedral, and I believe that each stone I carve is contributing to a work of art». This man was a little more spiritual, but he wasn't at the peak of spirituality. The observer asked still another humble worker, «Tell me, why do you carve these stones? Aren't you bored doing this work all day?» This devout worker responded, «I do this work because it is for a cathedral where many people will offer prayers to God. In my work I already anticipate those prayers. I pray while I carve these stones». This is holiness. Three men doing the same work, but one is losing the merits of this work while another is earning everything for God.

My dear sisters and brothers, this reflection should make us think about the work that we do. All of us—myself as pastor of a diocese, my dear brother priests who collaborate in this pastoral work, the religious women who sanctify their lives, and you who are workers, spouses, parents, professionals, students—we could all be asked, «Why do you work?» Right now I could be asked, «Why are you preaching?» If I did this to win applause, I would be lost. But if I do it, sisters and brothers, with the sincerity with which I want to do it, then this word of God will touch people's hearts so that they will be lifted up to God, and all of us will put aside our hatred, rancor, and ill will and build a world in accord with the heart of God. If each one of us according to our particular vocation works for the love of God, as humble as the work may be—selling brooms, sweeping streets, heating ovens, it is all noble work—then we would have a country of saints, and there would not be so many criminals. Our hearts would put aside hatred and there would be more love. God will hold Salvadorans fully accountable because he has given us so many beautiful things and made our hearts more heroic, but we so often place ourselves at the service of hatred, division, repression, outrage, and torture. How much more severe will be the reckoning, for we could have loved, but we hated!

«In the evening of life, they will ask you for an account of love», says a beautiful poem of Saint John of the Cross.⁴ Let us not forget this: in the evening of your life, when your life is declining like the setting sun, God will ask you for an account of your love—not of how much you did, not of your external achievements, which often are inclined to vanity, but of the love you put into each thing you did. This is today's message, sisters and brothers. That is why we have said repeatedly that violence is neither evangelical nor Christian. The power of the church is love.

⁴ The original expression of St John of the Cross is: «In the evening they will examine you in love; learn to love as God wants to be loved». It is from his work *Sayings of Light and Love*. Cf. *Obras Completas*, Madrid 1988, 94. Read or listen to the homilies of St Oscar Romero at romerotrust.org.uk

Yesterday I shared an unforgettable afternoon with more than a thousand primary and secondary school teachers, but what was most unforgettable was the statement of one teacher that is still vibrating in my heart. She told me, «Because you have planted love among the teachers, you are harvesting love». I have done nothing extraordinary, but if I who have hardly sown a little bit of love am lucky enough to reap such great quantities of love, sisters and brothers, then I want to tell you the same thing. What is not sown cannot sprout; what is not sown cannot be reaped. How are we going to harvest love in our republic if we sow only hatred? Let us sow love! Let us take advantage of all occasions, even the most difficult ones such as forgiving enemies; let us also take advantage of the smallest occasions such as doing the most ordinary things. Let our lives be inspired by love, and we will see how the world is transformed without an abundance of material things, because the kingdom of God is not on the other side of the sea or high up in the sky, but in the intimacy of your own heart. And now we will make our profession of faith.