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THE PATHS OF THE BEATITUDES

All Saints Day

El Paisnal

1 November 1977

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12a

With great love and much devotion I have wanted to come to this celebration that is taking place in the church of El Paisnal. The initiative was an invitation extended to me by our dear Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart. It is they who, in collaboration with courageous catechists and pastoral advisers of the archdiocese, are keeping alive the flame of faith in this difficult region of Aguilares, El Paisnal, and all the nearby villages. My presence here, therefore, is meant to support their pastoral work at this heroic moment, for they are not ashamed of the church during these hours of trial. As the Apocalypse just told us, this is «the great tribulation» (Rev 7:14).

My pastoral presence here is united with that of the women religious and with your own presence, dear catechists. Present also is Father Grande who died here beside two *campesinos*, Manuel and Nelson Rutilio. Father Grande, Don Manuel, and Nelson have already finished their work and are now united with the multitude of saints in heaven. May we as pastors and faithful look beyond these graves not only on All Souls Day, which we celebrate tomorrow, but also on this day of all the saints of heaven. They are there, among the great multitude who survived the great tribulation by walking the paths of the Beatitudes that were proclaimed in today's gospel. We address our words not only to the sisters and the catechists but to all the faithful, especially those who find themselves a bit cowardly and fearful and wanting to escape. Do not be afraid; it is worth the effort to follow these paths that do not end in a grave but open up to the horizon of heaven.

I come, sisters and brothers, to speak the clear language of the church to you in this situation of persecution and assault, where bloodshed and humiliation have marked the cruelty with which some have treated others. Do not confuse this language of the church, this message of hope and of faith, with the subversive political verbiage of bad laws or with the arguments of those who fight for political power or clash over worldly wealth. Do not confuse our language with that of people who speak of purely earthly liberations while forgetting the hope of heaven. Do not confuse our language with that of those who have placed their trust in their land, their assets, their capital, and their power. I tell you all, sisters and brothers, that the language of the church must not be confused with those idolatries. The idolaters and those who serve them have no reason to fear this clear language and the purity of heart that the church preaches.

There is no better day to speak to you with this clear language of the church than today, November 1, the feast of All Saints. On this day before the feast of All Souls I also want to remind you about the end of life. Everything comes to an end, and there remains only the joy of having been faithful to the law of the Lord, of having loved our neighbor, of having given ourselves to our neighbor in loving, generous service—and that includes not offending against human dignity and human rights. Thus, when at the hour of death we are presented before the tribunal of God, we will receive a warm welcome from those infallible divine lips: «Come, blessed of my Father, and take possession of the kingdom of heaven for you were charitable and you were not unkind. What you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. When you tortured people, you were beating me; when you murdered people, you were killing me. But you were also lovingly serving me when you defended me and stood up for me, when you taught catechism to children, when you cared for the sick, when you gave to those in need out of love. Even though some people tried to confuse you and make you think you were doing something else, you were serving me!» (Matt 25:40).

This is the clear language of the church. Please do not confuse this language. On this feast of All Souls, sisters and brothers, I want to speak to you the sublime language that is spoken to us from the graves of Father Grande, Don Manuel Solórzano, and the child Nelson Rutilio Lemus. What language are they speaking to us? They are telling us that everything comes to an end; what is temporal ends with the grave. But the temporal is the time when the eternal begins; the eternal is already woven into the temporal, that is, into the things of earth. The kingdom of heaven begins here on earth; it is already present. Therefore, at this grave on this feast of All Saints I include among the blessed of heaven these three dead brothers and all our beloved sisters and brothers who have died in this wave of persecution. I want to remember here our beloved brother, Father Alfonso Navarro, and our beloved catechists. It would be impossible to name all of them, but let us remember, for example, Filomena Puertas and Miguel Martínez and so many other women and men who have ministered and died. Even while they were suffering painful agony as they were flogged and tortured and riddled with bullets, they offered their lives and were received in heaven. And there they are victorious! Who has conquered? With the Bible we can ask our martyrs in heaven, and we can ask those who killed them and who continue to persecute Christians: «Where, O death, is your victory?» (1 Cor 15:55). The victory is that of faith.

Those who were killed for the cause of justice have won out, and those who killed them are the ones who are defeated, humiliated, and ashamed to show their face. We do not hate them. From the altar we pray to God: «Lord, give them repentance. Let them walk once again on the paths of virtue. Make them aware of the horror of their crimes so that they too may one day be saints like the blessed in heaven». A Christian does not hate, sisters and brothers. I can imagine Father Grande and the other martyrs of this persecution in heaven, earnestly praying to the Lord for their executioners, asking that they be converted so that they will one day share the joy that comes from being faithful to the Lord. As I said at his funeral in the cathedral, we cannot imagine Father Grande hating, asking for vengeance, or inciting violence, as they falsely accused him of doing. Those who knew him know that it was impossible for him to harbor in his priestly, apostolic heart those feelings of hatred that his crude assassins imagined. I make mention of our beloved dead not only so that we pray for them and their eternal rest, but also so that on this day of the saints we may think of them and pray the words I

just said here at the altar, «Father, you have brought together in a single feast the merits of all the saints»—that is, of all the priests, Christians, and catechists who have been martyred or who are suffering pain and persecution. We take joy in celebrating their presence in that great multitude there in heaven.

My sisters and brothers, as we reflect here in the beloved church of El Paisnal, a church that has become a much-visited sepulcher, our meditation leads us to think about the gospel of the Beatitudes that I just read to you. These are the paths along which true Christians travel. I promised to speak to you here today in this confused setting of Aguilares and El Paisnal, in this environment of spies and surveillance and false informants. I want them all to understand the very clear language of the church. People are becoming aware that I am not inciting anyone here to violence or hatred or revenge. You have heard the reading I just proclaimed about the paths on which I want all of us to walk on this earth, in El Paisnal, in Aguilares: the paths of the Beatitudes.

These are the paths that I preach. These are the roads on which the church leads her children. This is what we teach in our reflection groups. This is what the catechists teach in celebrations of the word and in catechism classes with the children: «Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven» (Matt 5:3). If they should teach something other than the ways of the Beatitudes, they would not be Catholic, nor would their gatherings be Catholic. I want you to be aware, sisters and brothers, of the paths by which the church is teaching her children even though you are free in your personal options to join any group that you wish. But if you want to bring the Christian name to these groups, then you must carry deep in your hearts these sentiments of the Beatitudes.

This was the case with Father Grande and his companions who worked in these lands. They were teaching what was recently stated by the Holy Father and many Latin American bishops in the synod on catechesis: the catechism that must be taught to our people today should not be a catechism that forgets about the great social problems that Christians face. It must be a catechesis that makes Christians aware of the historical dimensions and elicits their commitment here and now in these problematic lands. True catechists, such as the Jesuits who passed through Aguilares, must teach this language of faith commitment, and they must make options in the concrete life of their people. But they must do so always as Christians, never with violence, never with hatred, never with anything but the gospel we just heard, the path of the saints. There are saints among the groups that struggle for the liberation of our people. Not all of them, of course, are saints. There are many who preach hatred and violence and do not believe in the path of love. If any of those persons are listening to me, I want to invite you to be converted to Christian paths.

I remember quite well that during the funeral for Father Grande I cited some thoughts of Paul VI in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. I said that the church offers persons like Father Grande so that they can collaborate in the liberation of the present-day world (EN 38). The church must struggle for this liberation from slavery and above all from sin, but the liberation that the church preaches has three characteristics that I found in Father Grande and in other liberators who, like Father Grande, have joined in this struggle for the liberation of our people: first, an inspiration of faith; second, an

inspiration of love; and third, prudence and action based on the church's social doctrine. These three things are what make today's Christians true liberators of their people.

An inspiration of faith

Their struggle is enlightened by faith. What else does All Saints Day mean? Faith opens up horizons for all those who struggle righteously. Enlightened by faith, they work for human dignity, and they liberate people from enslavement, from illiteracy, from hunger, and from the misery in which most of our people live. The church cannot be indifferent to so much suffering, to such great injustice. The church struggles but with her eyes fixed on faith. True Christian liberators collaborate with the true language of the church as expressed in the Beatitudes and in our hope for that heaven illuminated by faith.

My sisters and brothers, I hope you do not let yourselves be confused by other ideologies, by atheism, or by a purely worldly struggle to gain political power. Ours is a struggle that places its greatest hope in the tremendous reward that Christ has proclaimed today: «Blessed are those who hunger for justice for they shall be satisfied» (Matt 5:6). «Blessed are those who weep now because of poverty, misery, and marginalization for they shall be consoled» (Matt 5:5).

Blessed are the liberators who do not put their trust in arms, in abduction, in violence, or in money, but who know that liberation must come from God—that it will be the marvelous combination of God's liberating power and the Christian efforts of men and women. Let them be converted and not adore the idols of wealth and political power for the sake of which they are capable of committing any outrage. Let them be converted so that all of us—laborers and employers, rich and poor, *campesinos* and landowners—may together create this new world, this new heaven that Christians long for.

An inspiration of love

Second, sisters and brothers, we need not only the light of faith but the inspiration of love. True Christian liberators, who will one day enjoy the heavenly homeland, are those who struggle on earth with the power of justice but also with the inspiration of love. They do not hate; they do not kill; they do not do evil. Rather, they love others and hope in God who is a God of love and hears the cries of his people. In his own time he will come to give the world this love that it lacks. Let us long for that love, sisters and brothers.

From the grave of Father Grande let us lift a prayer to heaven: «Lord, send love to this earth. You who brought fire so that it would burn in the hearts of men and women, behold all the hatred, the meanness of heart, the materialism, the selfishness, the envy! Lord, let your love burn up all this debris in our hearts and make us holy». The holiness we celebrate today, this feast of All Saints, is the holiness that comes from the work each of us dutifully performs according to our own vocation—I as bishop, others as priests or as religious, catechists, workers, farmers. All of us accomplish our tasks with love, serving our neighbor for the love of God.

The social doctrine of the church

Besides this inspiration of faith and this inspiration of love, we must know the social doctrine of the church. The archdiocese has published a little pamphlet that contains social guidelines drawn from the teaching of the popes and the Gospel. I entreat you, sisters and brothers, especially those concerned about social problems, to study the social doctrine of the church. Learn how the church tries to unite respect for human rights and respect for the duties that flow from these rights.

This, then, is the lesson we draw from our reflection today and from our pilgrimage to the grave of Father Grande and his companions in martyrdom for this celebration of the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. Before this grave of Father Grande we are going to pray, sisters and brothers, for all the priests who have died, for all the religious who have died, for all the catechists, for all the Christians, and for our relatives who are already asleep in peace. We are not going to visit cemeteries, but before this grave of Father Grande and his two companions, a tomb that symbolizes all the dead, we are going to pray for all those who have died. We are doing this now. We think of those who have died, and we think of them as saints. As we do this, we also want to be saints with the holy restlessness of Christian liberation. Let us become holy!

Now, brothers and sisters, we will not become holy unless we enter into the demands of the Gospel at this time. Therefore, do not fear the conservatives, especially those who refuse to hear anything about the social questions or other thorny topics that must be discussed. Do not fear that those of us who speak about these issues have become communists or subversives. We are simply Christians who draw from the commands of the Gospel the consequences that our people and all humankind need at this time. The Gospel path leads that way: through poverty of spirit, through the struggle for justice, through the sowing of peace. The paths of the Beatitudes are today very dangerous paths, and that is why there are so few people willing to walk on them. Let us not be afraid! Let us keep walking on this road that will one day lead us to death so that people can pray for us, but so that we will also be saints in heaven participating in the glory of the risen Christ!

Let us celebrate this Eucharist, sisters and brothers! This morning this little church of El Paisnal is converted into a cathedral because the cathedral is where the bishop, the center of unity for the whole diocese, lifts up to the Lord the host and the chalice which are Christ, a sign of the unity of all the people and the whole archdiocese. And we pray that God accept this sacrifice of Christ on the altar to which are united the sacrifices of all those who work for the kingdom of God. We ask God to bless us and make us holy with that modern holiness of Christians who are committed to the situation in which they live. May we leave here more encouraged, sisters and brothers. And may those who are still at a distance—perhaps listening to my voice on the radio—know that from the grave of Father Grande has gone out the cry of the archdiocese: have courage, Christians! It matters not that times are difficult because we also, if we are faithful, will hear that voice of the Apocalypse that was just sung in the Liturgy of the Word: «These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress and now bask in the joy of the Father's chosen ones» (Rev 7:14-15). Let it be so.