

6

THE CHURCH BEFORE GRIEF AND VIOLENCE

Funeral Mass of Mauricio Borgonovo¹ 11 May 1977

My dear sisters and brothers.

In this most solemn gathering, our faith discovers that the protagonist, the central figure in our coming together, is Christ our Lord. I invite you then to lift up your eyes toward him because only he can speak the word of God that is so necessary at this moment. Only by great faith do we believe that the church speaks words of heaven, not words of earth, and that she extends Christ's message to humankind. We can understand the church's language, which is the eternal language of Christ engaged in an eternal dialogue with humankind. Yet many people see everything as absurd and thus find no explanation for our situation. They are like Martha who speaks to Jesus, almost reproaching him: «Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died» (John 11:21). And Jesus calms her with the serenity of one who holds in his hands eternity, people's hearts, and life itself. He says to her, «I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will never die» (John 11:25).

How great is the word that Christ wants to speak at this moment. This word is great because of the pain felt at the death of our beloved foreign minister, Mauricio Borgonovo Pohl—may he rest in peace. Great is the word that Christ wants to speak because great is the crime and great is the violence represented by this dead body. This word has to be great because no human person, no power, no sister or brother can now speak the words of concord and love that the Salvadoran people need at this time.

A word of comfort in the face of pain

Truly, this word has to be great because of the pain. We understand, dear Doña Sarita²—and with her we feel for the whole family—because we have been very close to you all. For the church it is gratifying to have been able to share the pain of this terrible, bloody agony. It would be difficult to find anyone who has died in an agony that anticipates that of a whole people. What a tragedy!

We understand this anguish, and only Christ can speak an adequate word of consolation. Thanks be to God, this Christ lives in his church even though her intentions are misrepresented. The church is Christ who continues to console, who continues to bring comfort to painful situations. The church has no other word than that of Christ, and she can speak this word because she is immortal, composed of frail human beings, to be sure, but bearing within herself the Spirit of Christ. How much hope is awakened by this eternal Word! A hope from above invites the beloved family of Borgonovo Pohl

¹ The corpse of Chancellor Mauricio Alfredo Borgonovo was discovered early in the morning of 11 May, twenty-one days after he was kidnapped. See *El Diario de Hoy* (11 May 1977).

² Sara Pohl de Borgonovo, mother of Mauricio Borgonovo.

and all who feel this pain in the depths of their being to lift their hearts toward that supreme goal where Mauricio now lives. There, beside the risen Christ, he has left the hiding place where they kept him—we don't know where—and he now realizes that there were a thousands hearts with him, there were many souls in anguish. His consolation in heaven flows down in a torrent of light and consolation for his family who hear these words of eternal life.

This hope is not alienation, as communism holds. In preaching hope, our religion does not alienate people. The church is not communist; she hopes in God and hopes in eternal life. She preaches to humankind the meaning of hope and joy in what is hoped for. She tells people that it is worthwhile to engage in struggle, to be honorable, and to die, even though one is the victim of these cruel assaults. In such a death one has the satisfaction of having served with honor one's family, one's country, and all humanity. God is unsurpassed in generosity. Mauricio's reward will be great, and the consolation for his family must also be very great.

The rejection of violence

I insist that only Christ can speak a harsh word, a great word in face of this crime. The church, who continues the teaching of Christ, rejects violence. She has repeated this a thousand times, and none of her ministers preach violence. The church preaches as Jesus did: «All who take up the sword will perish by the sword» (Matt 26:52). The church repeats what is heard in the Bible: «Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil» (Gen 4:10). God our Lord cries out against injustice and crime and violence. Thanks be to God, the church has been very decisive in the case of our beloved foreign minister.

The church has been with those who suffer, and she has rejected violence. At this time, in front of the body of our beloved foreign minister, I repeat once more: violence is not Christian; violence is not human; nothing violent can long endure. The church has also said that people are above all life and human feelings; that human beings are not for the law but the law is for human beings (Mark 2:27); that we must view things in a human, Christian way; and that only when these considerations are forgotten can such horrendous crimes as murder be committed, whatever the reasons given. The commandment, «You shall not kill» (Exod 20:13), is a cry from God to the human heart. Those who carry out violence in these horrible extremes cannot continue to live in tranquility.

A call to harmony

Finally, sisters and brothers, the greatest plea I make right now is this: it is a call to live in harmony. Only Christ can tell our country at this moment, «Love one another» (John 15:12). Only Christ living in his church can say that the force of Christians is love; it is not hatred or vengeance or resentment. Let us keep far from us, sisters and brothers, the wave of crime and revenge that many expect. We must say no! Responding violently to violence will never bring about peace in the world. We best do what Saint Paul says, «Do not repay anyone evil for evil» (Rom 12:17). Drown out evil with good, with a wave of goodness, a wave of love, and a milieu of understanding.

Beloved Mauricio, after such a terrible purgatory, may your heaven be this: ask our Lord who is love (1 John 4:8) to pour forth his love upon the people of your country, upon all Salvadorans, so that we may know how to forgive and thus leave vengeance to the only one who can justly avenge, God our Lord. Ask God to help us dedicate ourselves to building up this country that is split apart. May all of us in this church which bears a message of love know how to give the world the solid support it needs.

Dear sisters and brothers, let us pray for our beloved minister, Borgonovo Pohl. Prayer is necessary for every soul that emigrates to eternity because we do not know the mystery of people's faults or the need they have for God's mercy. But we are sure that God beholds this outpouring of prayer and suffering and these hearts disposed to goodness.

Let this prayer be not only for the eternal rest of our dear brother; let it be also a prayer that is fruitful for our country. May it be united to Mauricio, who looks down on us from heaven. How beautiful the world would be if we all loved one another, if there were no violence like that which took his life, if we understood better our relations to one another! Let our prayer make us feel more like sisters and brothers. Let it be prayer that gives rest to our brother. Let us not disturb his rest. By hating one another we can prevent his rest, but by loving one another we hasten his arrival in heaven. We do not know the mystery of the great beyond, but we know that it is related to the here and now. To the degree that the world here becomes an antechamber of heaven through love, through understanding, through hope, and through faith, heaven itself opens up to happiness and reward. There is a mutual relationship. My sisters and brothers, may our land, after witnessing this crime, become truly an antechamber of God our Lord's forgiveness.

Let us celebrate our Eucharist. May this divine word, even though it is pronounced by a human person who is no more than a crude instrument of the eternal Word of God, find echo in your hearts. May this same Word, united to the Creator who becomes present in the Eucharist, in the Body and Blood which is given up for us, be a prayer that makes us feel more closely united as sisters and brothers. May God give Mauricio eternal rest and grant his family Christian consolation.