

89

THE GOD OF OUR FAITH

Holy Trinity Sunday
21 May 1978

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9
2 Corinthians 13:11-13
John 3:16-18

My dear sisters and brothers and radio audience, last Sunday our celebration of the Easter season reached its culmination, and we return now to the season that was interrupted at the beginning of Lent, the season called Ordinary Time. After the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Lent began, and there followed the Sundays of Lent and Easter until we reached Pentecost last Sunday. Easter is the most luminous time of the year! Today we continue with the Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time, but since the church at this point wants to present us with something of a synthesis of the whole liturgical year, she celebrates the feast of the Most Holy Trinity on this first Sunday after Pentecost. It is as if we have gone up a river and found ourselves at the source of the stream which is our redemption, the mystery of the Christ. The whole life of faith that gathers us together every Sunday, all the religion of the human heart, all the desire to discover God finds its response on this Sunday. I repeat, we are like those who have gone upstream and discovered the place where the water springs forth into a stream bringing energy, life, and fruitfulness to all it touches. Today, then, we might call this homily «The God of Our Faith».

This God of our faith is a phenomenon that has become obscure for many people and in many societies. We therefore have a great need today to become more clearly aware of this God as he is presented to us by faith illuminated by the word of the same God, who has earnestly desired to reveal himself and who in today's three readings offers us a very clear-cut image.

False ideas about the God of our faith

But before presenting that image, let us look at the caricatures of God that people have devised. Some of these are not caricatures but abstractions or concepts that leave the heart cold and do not touch us with the tenderness of a Father who gives us life and is present with us.

Thus, we have the God of the philosophers, the metaphysical God, the God who is discovered through created reality. This is legitimate, and God is indeed revealed in creatures. When we behold the splendor of the sun, the bountiful harvest, the beauty of an ocean sunset, the majesty of a volcano, the tranquility of a lake, God is revealing himself. Abstract concepts and philosophical deductions may lead us to what the philosophers call «the first mover», the great thinker that rules creation, but this conception does not satisfy the intimate longings and hopes of the human heart. The God who reveals himself as we reflect on these arguments from creation does not seem to us to be an intimate God. For many people these philosophical and metaphysical arguments leave the mind and the heart dry, and often they even lead people to atheism or materialism.

Thus we have one of the most painful phenomena of our time: atheism or at least indifference toward God. This God who is unknown, discounted, or denied has led people to speak of «the death of God»—«God has died», they say. Certainly this is a God who does not satisfy us; he is an imagined God, a God who is sometimes the product of a moral vacuum in people. Dear sisters and brothers, atheism or the denial of God is almost always accompanied by a moral vacuum in people.

Practical atheism flourishes among those who have no sense of the tenderness of God or who prefer to believe that God does not exist so that they can act unjustly and commit sins that God might punish. That is why it is not just Marxism that is atheistic; capitalism also is atheistic in its practice. The divinizing of money and the idolatry of power create false idols which take the place of the true God. Sadly, we live in an atheistic society, either because people promote a revolution without God, seeking to resolve problems simply by human effort, or because people are too well off, making idols of earthly wealth and welfare as if these were gods. This also is atheistic materialism.

There is another false image of God, one that our Lord Jesus Christ lashed out against when he found himself in the very temple where people were supposed to encounter God. What he found there was the superficial, legalistic, and utilitarian religion of the Pharisees. The Divine Teacher lashed out against this religion by declaring, «God is not worshiped in one temple or another, but God is worshiped in all places in spirit and in truth» (John 4:21-24). For that spirit and that truth had been dissipated in a tangle of laws, casuistry, and external practices. God had become the fruit of a legal system, as if he were happy just with people washing their hands or with Pharisees dressed in strange garments proclaiming God in the city plazas. Christ tells them, «You hypocrites. You are like white-washed tombs which appear beautiful on the outside but inside are full of every kind of filth» (Matt 23:27).

So many façades of piety, but inside they are nothing more than atheist! So many forms of prayer, so many religious practices that are purely external, ritualistic, legalistic! This is not the worship that God desires! And here we do well to include ourselves in this accusation, we who are sacred ministers, for often we have made our worship a business, and any day the Lord may enter our temple with his whip and say, «My house is a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves» (Matt 21:23).

This ritualistic God, this God of outer forms, this God of pious nonsense is the God of those who in their hearts claim to love him but who outrageously offend the true God by disobeying his law and making true religion and God's most holy will consist of merely legal and human practices. How careful we must be, dear fellow priests and religious and you devout lay people who belong to pious associations! How often we think we are the good folk and others are evil! How often we come before God like that man in the gospel who boldly approached the altar and prayed, «I am not sinful, unjust, or adulterous like the rest of humanity. I am not like this publican here who is beating his breast» (Luke 18:11). After listening to that hypocritical prayer, Christ says, «When the two men left the temple, the humble publican, who felt unworthy even to raise his eyes to heaven, went home justified, but not the other one, the Pharisee, the hypocrite, the arrogant pious fraud who despised others. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted» (Luke 18:14).

Another false image of God, dear sisters and brothers, is similar to the previous one. It is the spiritualistic God, the disincarnate God, the God of the priest and the Levite who passed by when they saw the poor Jew wounded on the road and paid him no heed. This is the God of those who say, «Ah! The church is involved in politics; it talks only about socialism and earthly realities». It is because they don't want such things to be spoken of that they pay no heed to the wounded man. That is not religion for them! Religion means going to the temple to pray, like the priest and the Levite, and not having time to attend to the material needs of earth. They forget that Christ did not justify this false piety that ignores the needs of people. On the other hand, he praised as a true neighbor the Samaritan, who was neither priest nor Levite; he made no claim to piety, and yet he dismounted and took care of the injured man without asking who he was. This is a true neighbor, says Christ, «Go and do likewise» (Luke 10.29-37).

This is the true God. That is why, when they asked Christ, «Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?», he joined together two precepts: «The first is this: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your being. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself» (Matt 22:36-39). When the church preaches a disincarnate God, when we who preach the Gospel say that we do not have to be concerned about earthly matters and should simply praise God, when some Protestant sects preach the Gospel and criticize the Catholic Church because she defends human rights, this is all false worship of God even when it takes place in our Catholic churches.

True worship of God must be worship that incarnates the awe, the love, the adoration, the faith in absolute transcendence and in the historical moment we are now living. With the power of God that transcends our weakness, the church's voice becomes all-powerful in speaking out against people's sins, sins that offend God. Those who proclaim a God who is not concerned because unjust people sin against him are preaching a false God. These are false concepts of the God of our faith.

Who is the true God of our faith? In today's three readings we find three beautiful concepts, so I beg you, sisters and brothers, not to focus so much on those negative, repugnant, odious concepts. I have sketched them this way, in broad strokes, just so that we don't fall into a false worship of God, so that we stay alert during this time of confusion and not let ourselves be seduced by false religious concepts that are used by some to maintain very sinful situations. Let us focus rather on the God of Moses, on the God of Christ, and on the God of Paul. These are the three great themes for today.

The God of Moses

Chapter 34 is one of the most beautiful chapters of Exodus. I urge you to read it in your Bibles today, not only the short passage we heard today about Moses but the whole of chapter 34. It describes a sublime moment when the people of Israel felt the presence of their God, the God who sometimes seemed to depart from them because of their evil conduct. In this passage about Moses at least two concepts of God are revealed and highlighted: there is only one God, and he is a living God.

What does that mean? Monotheism means believing in only one God. The Old Testament did not know about the Blessed Trinity. The Old Testament knew the one and only God. The Blessed Trinity was revealed with Christ, but the Old Testament tried to educate the people religiously since they lived in the midst of a frightful polytheism. Polytheism refers to the

system of many gods: *poly*, many; *theism*, belief about gods. A god was created for every phenomenon: the god of storms, the god of fertility, the god of wrath, etc. There were so many gods in the Roman Pantheon, where the Romans displayed the gods of the people they conquered, that there wasn't room for them all. This was the danger that Moses warned the people about. He had led the people of Israel precisely out of polytheistic Egypt, out of an Egypt where there were many forms of gods. Moses had received from the true God the charge of educating the people in monotheism, in the belief in one God. God revealed himself when Moses asked him, «If my people ask me who is the God who sent me, what do I tell them?» And for the first time in history the sacred name of Yahweh was pronounced: «You shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you» (Exod 3:13-14).

What is the meaning of this phrase? There are two different explanations. One is philosophical, which holds that the phrase expresses the very essence of God, namely, being. But there is another, more satisfying explanation that is widely held by scholars today; it is the historical-salvific explanation, which understands God to be saying, «I am the one who is active in the midst of the people. I am their hope and their protection. I am not a foreigner to you; I am in your midst». This is the God of Moses. That's why I speak here about a monotheistic God, a single God whom the Jews prayed to day and night in their famous prayer, the Shema: «Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your being» (Deut 6:4). Even the littlest Israelite knew how to repeat this formula of monotheism: «The Lord alone is God!»

But this one and only God is also a living God, a God who lives in history, a God who is not some distant absolute being. He is a God whom the people experience in the vicissitudes of history, and as they experience their own history, these people know that God has chosen them as a father chooses his firstborn. That is what Israel is called in the Bible: the firstborn people, the most beloved, the people who experience God as a father accompanying them in all the difficult and glorious moments of their history.

Consider, sisters and brothers, how this whole concept has passed down to our present time. The Second Vatican Council states that the God of Christians of 1978 is no more and no less than this same monotheistic, living God. That's why I would like this homily to awaken in the hearts of all people—especially those who are most alienated, most pessimistic, most unjust, most sinful—the same awareness that Moses awakened when he exhorted the people to love and adore and obey and be grateful to this God who is not a stranger but someone who accompanies us on our journey.

The Second Vatican Council states, «The people of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this people has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design over man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human» (GS 11). What a marvelous theology of the signs of the times! We are all experiencing the same signs of the times, both those who have faith in God and those who do not. El Salvador, this tiny nation, is composed of people of faith and people without faith. Yet both believers and non-believers see the same signs of the times; both experience the same realities that I'll speak about later; both have felt this week the horror of the kidnappings, the assaults, and the injustices. For those without faith all this seems to be a dead-end street and a failure of

history, while those who have faith, says the Council, are led by the Spirit of God to interpret the events of history in a more human way.

This is the true God, the living God, the God of Moses, the God of history who works salvation not only in the history of Israel but also in the history of El Salvador. And he has established a church to proclaim faith in the true God and to purify history of sin and sanctify history so that it becomes a vehicle of salvation. This is what the church wants in El Salvador: to make our land's history not a history of ruin, not a history of atheism, not a history of assaults and injustices, but to make it a history that corresponds to the ideals of the God who loves Salvadorans.

If Moses were a Salvadoran in 1978, he would hear from the burning bush the same voice of Yahweh that he heard when God sent him to deliver the people from Pharaoh's tyranny: «I will be with you» (Exod 3:14). Let us be filled with great confidence, sisters and brothers, on this day when the church invites us to go to the sources of our hope and our religion in order to encounter the true God, the God who loves us as a father loves his family.

The God of Christ

It is not difficult, then, to proceed to my second thought. Saint Paul uses a marvelous, picturesque phrase: «The God of our Lord Jesus Christ» (Eph 1:17). Let us repeat this phrase a thousand times in our meditation, and let us realize that this God of our people is «the God of our Lord Jesus Christ». That is why Christ came to the world. Here we have today's third reading, the gospel in which Christ himself tells us about the great revelation: «God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life» (John 3:16). That is the reason for the coming of the messenger of eternal life, the only Son of God, the One who in his divine essence has received the quality of Word, of Son. He is the whole eternal nature of God, the whole of life without end, the light that disperses all shadows, the solution of all problems, the love of all who despair, the joy of all who are sad. Whoever possesses this Son of God lacks for nothing.

«The kingdom of God is among you», said Christ, if you accept it (Luke 10:9; 17:21). From this follow the powerful words that conclude today's gospel: «Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe. . . » (John 3:18a). Listen to this very carefully, sisters and brothers. Those who do not believe in this Son of God, those who do not believe in this Christ, those who do not believe in this church that is Christ's spouse and prolongation—what about them? He is not talking about future condemnation; he is talking of a present condemnation that anticipates the future. «Whoever does not believe has already been condemned because he does not believe in the name of the only Son of God» (John 3:18b). The heart of the unbelieving person is already a hell. I don't know how people without faith can live. I don't know how materialists can live. I don't know how the idolaters of this earth can live, or those who stop loving and believing in order to defend these paltry, passing things of the world that are left behind at death. They stop believing in the One who brought us eternal life and who asks us, as a condition for receiving this eternal life, to believe in him and give ourselves to him, just as the Father so loved us that he handed over his only Son to us. Consider this sacrificial term «hand over». God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, and Abraham was willing to «hand over» his son to God (Gen 22:2). It is like when someone who's in love asks the beloved, «If you love me, give me such and such a thing»—or sometimes even, «If you

love me, hand yourself over to me». God has accomplished this handing over, this giving of self, «for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to save the world» (John 3:16).

And so Christ also speaks of «those who believe in him» (John 3:18a). To believe means to hand oneself over; it is not simply a matter of the head. Yes, we must believe the eternal truths, but that is not enough. Saint James says, «Even the devil believes that God exists, yet he will never be saved» (Jas 2:19). Believing is not just something theoretical. Believing is an act of the will. Believing is Mary telling the angel, «Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word» (Luke 1:38). That is faith: handing oneself over. Faith is what a child has when her father puts out his arms and says «Jump!» and the child leaps into space with the assurance that the father's arms will not let her fall. This is faith. This is what Christ says: «Those who believe in me will not be condemned» (John 3:18a). Those who surrender and do not distrust, those who even in the hardest times believe and hope—they will not be condemned. But those who do not believe, those who do not want to take the leap into Christ's arms because they are more attached to their earthly possessions, those who have no faith, those who have no confidence in God, those who do not believe that God accompanies our history and will save us—they are already condemned, for their life is already a hell. Perhaps that is why there's so much hell all around us, for what we're seeing every day are so many diabolical acts that come from the lack of generosity and faith in the hearts of Salvadorans.

What more can we say about the God of our Lord Jesus Christ? The God of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a solitary, remote God. This is the great revelation that gives its name to today's celebration, Blessed Trinity Sunday. Christ came to tell us that he is the Son of a Father and that after his death and resurrection the Father would send us a Holy Spirit who would teach us the truth and strengthen this church (John 14:26). This is truly a great revelation. God is not a solitary being; God is three; God is family; God is communion; God is love shared among three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When John the Baptist baptizes Christ there at the Jordan, the gospel tells us about this grand revelation of the Father's voice: «This is my beloved Son» (Matt 3:17). Then the presence of the Holy Spirit, exhaled by the love of the Father and the Son, appears as a white dove that rests upon the head of the divine baptized Jesus (Matt 3:16). The same thing occurs on Mount Tabor: the voice of the Father sounds, and the bright cloud of the Spirit enfolds the Son in love and glory—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present (Matt 17:5).

To Christ we owe this great revelation that God is love because he is not a solitary, egocentric God. God is love because he communicates and hands himself over. The Father gives the Son and the Holy Spirit his whole divine nature but without losing it. And also without losing it, the Son gives it to the Father and the Spirit; and similarly without losing it, the Spirit gives it to the Son and the Father. We will understand this great mystery only when God grants us the glory that the theologians call *lumen gloriae*, the light of glory; only then will we understand supernatural realities and see how great is this source of light and joy and love that we called the Blessed Trinity. Perhaps the name because of its feminine gender doesn't fully express for us the majesty and beauty of this triune God, this God of majesty and power, this God of love and wisdom, this God who created all that exists. In the light of this trinitarian love, we would do well to reflect on the beauty of creation. Only when we see the God of our Lord Jesus Christ illuminating our dawns, our seas, and our volcanoes will we understand that God has created a world out of love to give it to his children, with whom he wants to enter into the communion of family. In this way we understand how the earth groans beneath the weight of

sin (Rom 8:22) because humanity has not understood that the whole of creation exists for the happiness of all human beings and not for us to be comfortably settled here on earth.

The God of Saint Paul

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, let us talk about the God of Saint Paul. Let us feel united with Paul, that great Christian who speaks of the God of our community. Today's second reading contains one of the clearest passages about how the Blessed Trinity relates with human beings. If our God is a living God, a God of our history, a God of our church, then we must go deeper into the question about what this God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is doing. The Divine Persons are not just conversing and being happy there in heaven while forgetting about earth, like three great, supremely contented lords who are unconcerned about this caravan of pilgrims they have created. No, quite the contrary. This God turns all his attention to making this community into the church he desires so that she will be leaven for the community of all humanity.

Look at what Saint Paul says: «The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you» (2 Cor 13:13). These words remind me of the words we heard in the first reading: «Having come down in a cloud, the Lord stood there with Moses, and Moses pronounced the name of the Lord» (Exod 34:5). This is the church, a Sinai where God has descended and remains with us. Ah, if we could only feel this, sisters and brothers! If we could only feel that divine presence as Moses felt it on the peak of Sinai! The church is the Sinai on which the Blessed Trinity has descended with the three great gifts Saint Paul mentions today: grace, love, and communion.

First, «the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ» (2 Cor 13:13a). The Son comes first because he was the messenger, and through him we know what is primary. He gave us grace, and grace means forgiveness of our sins. Grace means we have been made children of God. Grace means the baptism that made your child of the flesh into a child of God. Grace means the hand of the confessor that relieves you of all the burden of sin: «I absolve you of your sins». The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is my hand when, within a few moments, I give out Communion, the Body of Christ, the life of God. My words are not mine; they are God's words. And if they touch the hearts of many who need light and comfort and hope, it is not by any virtue of mine; it is God who through me is communicating the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, «the love of God» (2 Cor 13:13b). Everything originates in the love of the Father. «God so loved the world» (John 3:16). My sisters and brothers, we were not redeemed because some individual existed who was so worthy that he was able to attract God's pardon and reconciliation. Everything originated from a divine initiative, let us never forget that. When we feel that we are better than others, we should not become proud because everything proceeds from God. If you have not fallen into the crimes you criticize, then you owe it to God that he did not let you fall. And the sinners who have fallen into the deepest abysses should realize that their redemption depends on God and not on them. Ask for God's mercy. That is why we say at the beginning of Mass, «May God have mercy on us». God takes the initiative by sending his Son. Everything was an initiative of God! It was the Father's love.

And after the Father sent the Son and the Son redeemed the world by dying on the cross and returning to heaven, then from that same heaven, says Saint Paul, comes the «communion of the Holy Spirit» (2 Cor 13:13c). Communion, life in common, a bond that unites the life of

God and the life of humankind, a current that flows from God to humanity and from humanity to God—this is religion; this is the church.

That is why these energies exist: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Consider how the Blessed Trinity is then able to create fellowship and community among human beings. This is the church. In its very first lines the Council states that «the church is the sacrament of communion with God and of unity among all people» (LG 1). Now, sisters and brothers, when I think about this community of the faithful and concretely about our beloved archdiocese, I feel it as something so divine that I experience in it God's initiative gathering us together. I experience the grace of Jesus Christ giving us faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit binding us together, lifting us up, and filling us with joy and consolation. I think of this present moment of our archdiocesan community on pilgrimage in the four departments; it is so beautiful, so enchanting in its base communities where men and women and young people come to know one another more intimately and feel in their hearts the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. That is why I insist so much, sisters and brothers, on there being more and more base communities. This is not some invention of recent times; it comes from the great need Christians have to know and love one another and to live together in full awareness of this divine energy.

Life of the church

Here I want to rejoice with this community which this week has known some very happy moments, such as Seminary Day. The result has been much prayer for the seminarians and also much financial assistance, though still not all that is needed. I want to express my gratitude especially to the Voluntary Sacrifice Group, who through Miss Refugio Alvarez gave 1,000 *colones* to the seminary as the fruit of their sacrifices.

In this regard, this temple—the cathedral—is being lifted up as a visible sign of the community that is the diocese. Precisely because it is the sign of the church, it must be the target of contradictions, the object of much murmuring, but also the object of very generous collaboration. When you leave Mass this morning, I invite you to look up and notice how much work has been done on the cupola. Let us be encouraged to help in this work since the construction of a church has to be the product of everybody. It should not be simply an official work that receives outside support and subsidies; it should be the effort of all of us, even the little ones, who feel that we are members of this church represented in her cathedral.

In speaking of this community that the Spirit of God has created in our land, I want to express the joy I experienced in my unforgettable visit to three remote but picturesque communities in the department of Chalatenango: La Laguna, Comalapa, and La Junta. What love of the Father there is in those hearts, what grace of Jesus Christ there is in the holiness of those people, and what communion in the Spirit there is in the love that made them feel united in heart and soul during the Masses I celebrated there and above all in the meetings I later had with the pastoral ministers.

Similarly, I experienced this communion in the Spirit last night in Colonia Morazán when I visited the Assumption Sisters and those who support the co-family of God there. This is a very poor area, but love makes it a happy place. Speaking of the missionaries who are the heart of the ministry in that area, I also want to commend the Carmelite Missionaries.

Congratulations also to the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who yesterday celebrated their fiftieth anniversary of ministry here in El Salvador. Bishop Beloso y Sánchez brought them first to Zacatecoluca, and now they are flourishing in all of Central America with many vocations.

Our archdiocesan community also advises that next Sunday we will celebrate with great enthusiasm the feast of Corpus Christi. Thursday is the actual feast day, but as we've said before, these important feasts are often transferred to Sunday. Therefore, next Sunday at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon I hope to see all of you here in the cathedral so that we can celebrate our solemnity of Corpus Christi as homage to that Christ who is the soul of our church.

Events of the week

Now, sisters and brothers, we are a community enlivened by the Spirit of God, but like Israel in Egypt or on its pilgrimage through the world, we also feel that our own journey is passing through some very difficult times. I want to point out here the terrorist attacks of this past week. The Supreme Court of Justice was attacked with machine guns¹. Don Ernesto Sol Meza, Don Luis Méndez Novoa², and Mr. Fujio Matsumoto³ were kidnapped. Once again we raise our voice and say, «No to violence!» In solidarity with these three individuals and these three families who are now suffering this injustice, we call to mind once again the words of Pope Paul VI who precisely in these days has declared another «No to violence!» in response to the kidnapping and murder of the politician and Christian, Aldo Moro. Due to lack of time I'm not going to read you the whole of the extraordinary message that the pope wrote in his own hand to the kidnappers, but he told them⁴, «I do not know you, but I know that you must have some human feelings toward a person who does not deserve that fate but rather merits our respect». We can say, sisters and brothers, that violence cannot be justified; it is always useless; it always causes great evil. Yes, it is true that Catholic morality allows for just wars in certain situations, but only after all reasonable and peaceful means have been exhausted.

In this recounting of repression and violence, we must also mention the occupation of the Red Cross by the Committee of Mothers of Political Prisoners⁵. We mention also that the army repressed a demonstration of *campesinos* in Zacatecoluca, after which two people were pursued as far as El Espino and killed⁶.

¹ The attack, carried out on 15 May 1978, caused material damage and was attributed to the guerrilla organization Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP). See *El Diario de Hoy* (18 May 1978).

² These were two important businessmen kidnapped on 14 May 1978 as they were leaving the El Salvador Sheraton hotel. Ernesto Sol Meza was involved in several firms, including the La Tropical bottling plant, and Luis Méndez Novoa was a prominent merchant.

³ A Japanese citizen and president of Synthetic Industries of Central America (INSINCA). He was kidnapped 17 May 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 May 1978).

⁴ «Letter of the Pope to the "Men of the Red Brigades", Seeking the Release of the Statesman Aldo Moro» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 April 1978).

⁵ On 17 May 1978 the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners and the Disappeared in El Salvador occupied the central office of the Red Cross and began a hunger strike to demand freedom for the political prisoners and clarification of the fate of the disappeared. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (17 May 1978).

⁶ The victims were Oscar Gabriel Caminas Rójas and José Natividad Arévalo Rodríguez. This demonstration was carried out by FECCAS and UTC on 17 May 1978 to mark the first anniversary of the military occupation of Aguilaes. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (17 May 1978) and *El Diario de Hoy* (18 May 1978).

Let us remember also that one year ago the town of Aguilares was occupied and ravaged. The parish church was profaned, and three priests who ministered in that zone were expelled from the country.

Given this violent atmosphere, I must also mention the outrageous abuse committed against our beloved Father Francisco Mejía⁷. I remind you that all those who lay hands violently on a priest are excommunicated by their very actions. Even if they don't believe in excommunication, it is a fact that God separates anyone who commits such grave sins from the communion of his love in the Spirit.

Also this week the last phase of the seminar on educational reform was completed, and I want to congratulate the representatives of the church who made their voice heard about the criteria that should guide this reform. I hope that a representation as conspicuous as that of the church here in El Salvador is taken into account by the educational authorities, for the church speaks with a sincere love for the people for whose sake this seminar was held.

As was promised, our beloved Archbishop Chávez y González received the award of Distinguished Citizen. I could not be with him since, as I already stated, I had to travel on mission to those villages of Chalatenango. In my homily of two weeks ago I expressed my thoughts on this matter.

I also want to tell you that Bishop Revelo blessed the initial construction of a building that will be used to help the victims of the recent fires. In this way the church has been able to accompany a group of people who deserve the church's support. I ask you to see in this gesture the presence of a church that cannot ignore the needs of those who suffer.

This, my sisters and brothers, is the reality of our present pilgrimage through life. In view of all this, let us not forget that in this pilgrimage of our history through so many vicissitudes we are accompanied by the God of Moses, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who is present in our community because he is «the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit».

Let us now proclaim our faith, a faith purified of all false ideas of God, so that we truly believe and lovingly thank God who is present in our people. Today the credo will be sung.

⁷ Father Francisco Mejía was captured and tortured by the National Guard in Cinquera. See «Marginal Notes. The Persecution Continues» in *Orientación* (11 June 1978).