

102

THE CROSS IN LIFE

Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

3 September 1978

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

We have come together this Sunday, dear sisters and brothers, as we do every Sunday, to express how we are the people of God. The reading lights up the path we trod as God's people in the middle of the world. I would like to add to the biblical readings this passage from the Second Vatican Council, which describes the journey of God's people with these words: «Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the church is strengthened by the power of God's grace, which was promised to her by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity but remain a bride worthy of her Lord, and moved by the Holy Spirit, may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no dimming» (LG 9).

Within the church herself there are weaknesses of the flesh, and outside the church there are many trials and persecutions. Together these constitute the church's cross. This Sunday we're going to reflect on what the word of God tells us about the cross, and at the end of our reflections we'll shine the light of that word on the realities around us and on the intimate matters of our church. As we do this, we'll be asking the Lord for what the Council just recommended to us: that, despite the weaknesses of our flesh, despite the trials and persecutions, despite the wickedness and indifference around us, we may remain faithful to our Lord as the people of God until by means of the cross we reach the light. Hold onto these words that serve as a synthesis of everything I want to say: the cross in life. This could be the title of my poor words this morning: «The Cross in Life». As is my custom, I break this title up into three ideas: first, the cross provokes crises in life; second, only the cross gives meaning to life; and third, without the cross life is a failure.

The cross provokes crises in life

But first, what does the cross mean in today's gospel? I ask that because I don't want us to have a conformist idea of religion, one that counsels, «We need to be patient and long-suffering. Eternal life will soon come». That's what our enemies call the opium that puts people to sleep, but the church is not opium. The church is stimulant. The church provokes us to live with that holy aggressiveness that God has given every person. But as I say in my pastoral letter¹, we have to know how to orient this aggressiveness wisely, orient it through Christ not for destroying but for constructing. The cross is not about patience without courage; it is not about passivity; it is not about conformity without struggle.

¹ See conclusion of *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978).

When Saint Matthew wrote down these words from the lips of Christ, «Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me» (Matt 16:24), he was trying to catch the echoes of the first persecutions. As you know, the gospel was written some years after Christ preached. It was the fruit of the community's reflections, and that community was able to reflect on their persecutions and their martyrs, just as our communities here in the archdiocese can. And those reflections helped them reach a full understanding of what Jesus said about the cross. They understood it in terms of the courage that stands up for Christ, that defends the justice of the Gospel, and that works for the building of a better world. And yes, they achieved this! There above the pagan columns of Rome stands the cross of Christ as a sign of the triumph, the victory of faith. At the base of the columns is the blood of many martyrs, but the Christians could claim that the blood of martyrs was the seed that rejuvenated society. A new world was arising from the battles of the cross.

The sign of the cross has another meaning in today's word, especially in light of the second reading; it signifies fulfillment of God's will. Let us engrave this in our hearts, sisters and brothers: the cross is the fulfillment of God's will. Let us not attribute to God's will what is really the fruit of our laziness. Let us not blame God for unjust inequalities. Let us not fault God for human underdevelopment. God wants none of these. That's why Paul VI said, when he was trying to change Christians' understanding of penance, that there are different ways of understanding penance in Christian life (Pae 28). People fast one way in the developed countries where there is plenty of food, and they fast another way in the underdeveloped countries where people are almost always fasting out of necessity. In the latter case, he said, penance means practicing austerity where there is much prosperity; it means being courageous and living in solidarity with those who are suffering; it means working for a more just world in those places where people live their whole lives fasting. This is penance. This is the will of God.

And I back up these words with phrases of Saint Paul and with church documents that convey the meaning of the cross for the world of today and that contradict a false understanding of the cross that is not the cross of Christ. When the cross of Hitler was raised on high in Rome, Pope Pius XI said, «In Rome they have raised up a cross that is not the cross of Christ». That's why that valiant pope withdrew from Rome; in the diplomatic world they claimed that this was a sharp rebuff of Hitler, who at that moment was at the peak of his power². And truly, the cross of the Lord is different from the crosses that human beings want to raise on high because the cross of Christ is different from the crosses that seek to sedate people. As I said in my first thought today, Saint Paul and Christ himself have told us that those who do not take up their crosses and follow Christ are not worthy of him. Indeed, the cross provokes the most profound crises in our lives.

Let us take as an example the model life which is that of Christ. The Gospel of Saint Matthew places us at a crucial moment of the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is with his disciples, far removed from the uncomprehending crowds. There in Caesarea of Philippi he has garnered from the apostles the first confession of the messianic mission which they will preach throughout the world. The Lord is satisfied. He feels that the seed of faith he has sown in the apostles is bearing fruit; their faith is maturing. Now is the time, he thinks, to make the first

² When Hitler went to Rome on 3 to 9 May 1937, Pope Pius XI withdrew to Castelgondolfo. There, in an audience for newly married couples on May 4, he said, «Sad things are happening. Among them is the fact that it is not considered inappropriate to raise in Rome on the feast of the Holy Cross a cross which is not that of Christ». See FLICHE A. and MARTIN V., *Historia de la Iglesia* [History of the Church], Vol. XXVI (2), Valencia 1980, 434-435.

announcement that will show the other side of the glorious messianic figure of the living Son of God: he is also the Suffering Servant, the Servant of Yahweh. At that point, then, he announces for the first time: the Son of Man is going up to Jerusalem, and the chief priests and the leaders of the people will stir up the people to accuse him, to malign him, and finally to kill him on the cross; but on the third day he will rise (Matt 16:21).

For the first time there bursts from the divine lips of the Lord the paschal mystery which will be himself, the same paschal mystery that gathers us together every Sunday. For that is the reason why we come and take up the Lord's words every Sunday: «We announce your death. We proclaim your resurrection». It is this that gives life to the people of God. For the first time Christ reveals the mystery, which is not just of his resurrection (Mark 13:26). It is very easy to follow the glorious Christ, the Messiah, the living Son of God who is to come on the clouds of heaven to judge all humankind. But exceedingly hard to take is the announcement that the messianic mission also has, like a medal, another very different face, one that is painful and humiliating. Christ suffers here the crisis of temptation. One of his own, in fact, the one who has just confessed him to be the Son of the Living God, will become for him a scandal and an obstacle. Peter tells Jesus, «God forbid, Lord! This must not be. Don't go to Jerusalem! No such thing shall ever happen to you» (Matt 16:22). You already heard in the gospel the harsh response of Christ who resolves the crisis of temptation by saying, «Get behind me, Satan, because you are an obstacle to me. You think as humans do, not as God does» (Matt 16:23).

The cross provokes in Christ himself a defense of his mission, which is cross and sacrifice. How easy it was to follow Christ as Peter did, by trying to escape, just as many Christians are trying to escape today. It is easier to hide and say, «We must not create conflict. Prudence is called for; we must be prudent». But Christ did not think that way. The man who told him to avoid danger he called Satan; he accused him of being an obstacle. «Scandal» is a word of Greek origin that means «obstacle» or «stumbling block», a stone that trips you when you're walking. It is a crisis in the road of life, like the crisis facing a hiker who comes upon an obstacle in his path; he is faced with the temptation to turn back, or else he can bravely try to overcome the obstacle.

The cross is always scandalous. The cross always provokes crisis. We can see that Peter is also suffering a crisis of his faith. Christ has just told him, «Blessed are you, Simon, for you have proclaimed the Son of God. You have not learned this from flesh and blood. Rather, my Father who is in heaven has revealed it to you, and I promise you that you will be my representative» (Matt 16:17). What John Paul I is this Sunday in Rome is the same as what Peter *was* at this moment in the gospel we're reflecting on: the representative of Christ. At the solemn moment when Peter received that promise—we might say that it's very much like this Sunday when the pope will be crowned—he felt his faith tempted. Sisters and brothers, none of us is secure. We all have terrible moments of crisis; even the pope does. And so we should not be disturbed by these crises of faith. Peter was afraid; he wanted to counsel Christ with human wisdom, not divine. He pressured Christ. How terrible pressures are when they seek to separate us from what God wants so that we do what people want!

But the most moving example for me this morning is the one in the first reading: the prophet Jeremiah. I can't find any words in the Bible that describe more vividly the crisis that a person goes through in relating to God. «You seduced me», Jeremiah says to the Lord. «You have deceived me. You told me you were sending me to tear up and knock down, but also to construct, to plant, and to build. As a prophet I want my mouth to express only what you

declare, but from it come forth only violence, war, and destruction» (Jer 1:10; 20:7-8). Imagine, sisters and brothers, what kind of person Jeremiah was. He was a gentle prophet, a prophet more inclined to love, an Old Testament prophet with spiritual sensitivities very similar to those of the engaging figure of Christ. Well, this prophet of loving sweetness and tender goodness was chosen by God to announce the destruction which God would bring upon a sinful people if they didn't convert. And he agonized over it! «How many times», he sighed, «I have tried to silence God's voice in me, but the word of God was like a devouring fire in my bones obliging me to speak» (Jer 20:9). This is the crisis of any prophet: he would prefer not to say what he says, but God orders him to speak.

So you can see that the cross does not mean conformity. It often means demanding things of people that go against their temperament, against their way of being. This is what Christ is asking of Peter: not to become too comfortable or settled in his ways because they are on their way up to Jerusalem to suffer. This is what makes the prophet Jeremiah weep; it's what he feels as he undertakes his very arduous mission; and it's also what I would like to tell you, my dear Christians, in this first thought of mine. Christ is speaking to us—not to Peter or Jeremiah or the chosen ones of the Bible—but to all of us. This gospel passage describes what is expected of those who follow Jesus: «Those who want to come after me should renounce themselves and take up their cross. They must lose their lives for me» (Matt 16:24-25). These are words that provoke crisis.

Brothers and sisters, I can bear witness to how many men and women are in this crisis right now. And I feel pained when they are people who have been very generous and courageous but are now intimidated. At the same time, I am happy when I sense that this crisis is helping many people, as the crisis that comes with illness often does. The crisis of illness, say the doctors, is the moment when the sick person moves either toward death or toward health. Well, for many people this crisis is helping them find health, while for many it is a step toward death.

This is the Gospel. This is the cross. I urge you, dear sisters and brothers, not to live a Christianity without the cross. I urge all of you to bravely confront your lives with the cross that provokes, as in that poem «My Broken Christ»³. Every night, kneel before the Crucified and kiss his foot, not with a fleeting romantic kiss but with a kiss of conviction, as if to tell him that you're ready to love him even if it means dying like him, crucified. Tell him that you want to kiss his foot even when that Christ you're kissing represents perhaps your worst enemy—whom you have to forgive. It's difficult. Let us provoke these crises so that we surge toward authentic Christianity.

You know how silversmiths prove the genuineness of gold and silver. Using a touchstone, they touch the metal against the stone to see how it sounds, and they calculate its carats. The cross is our touchstone. Let us strike our lives against the cross and see how they sound. They may sound of cowardice, they may sound of fear, they may sound of thoughts that are human and not from God. The cross is the authentic proof of those who want to follow Christ. That's why the Lord says, «Those who wish to come after me should take up their cross» (Matt 16:24).

Only the cross gives meaning to life

³ *Mi Cristo roto* is a poem of the Jesuit priest Ramón Cué.

In the second place, sisters and brothers, the cross is what gives meaning to life. Christianity is not a form of masochism. It's not the Stoic philosophy of the Greeks, suffering for the sake of suffering. No! God has not made us for suffering. God has made us for happiness. It's like when a mother loves her child who needs an operation; she knows how painful the scalpel will be for the little body of her child, but for the child's sake she submits him to it. «Operate», she tells the doctor. «Do what seems best to you». The mother feels the pain herself, but her child is saved because the scalpel is necessary.

In announcing his passion, sisters and brothers, Christ also says, «And on the third day he will rise» (Matt 16:21)! What a magnificent promise about Calvary and the cross! Rising up is the destiny of human beings, but as members of a sinful race that has offended God, we need to pass through the crucible of the cross and suffering in order to reach resurrection. And if we suffer the cross with Christ, says Saint Paul, we will rise with Christ (Rom 6:8).

To carry the cross makes demands of us, but if we follow Jesus, we will save our lives and receive the reward of glory. There is a paradoxical phrase in today's gospel: «Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it» (Matt 16:25). What's the meaning of this play on words? More than a play on words, it's the philosophy of Christianity. Those who want to be well off, those who flee the sufferings of life, those who want to save their lives here and now will lose their lives in the great beyond and even here and now. Even in our present life no one can be as happy as those who pledge to Jesus their loyalty, their commitment, their generosity. No one is as free, no one has found his life so completely as those who have no fear of losing their lives for Christ. Those who are afraid of losing their lives are not free; they're frightened; they make excuses: «Oh, I have this problem!» «Oh, I'm facing these circumstances!» The crisis gets resolved by rejecting the cross, but only the cross can give meaning to life.

I want to focus especially on the divine sense that Saint Paul mentions today when he says in his letter to the Romans that a Christian's life, a Christian's body, must be presented to God as a «living sacrifice pleasing to God» (Rom 12:1). Take note that the Bible here is giving our bodies and our lives the sense of sacrifice, the sense of holocaust. This is the divine sense that belongs to every person, even the humblest. I would like to say this to all of you who are listening to me now, whether by radio or in whatever circumstance you find yourselves. Perhaps you're a sick person desperate in your pain; perhaps you're a poor person who hasn't found work and has nothing to eat; perhaps you're someone who works and works and nothing comes of it; perhaps you're someone selfish who owns too much and enjoys too many comforts. I don't know who is listening to me. I'm only grateful for the wonderful attention given me in this packed cathedral. And I tell you this, dear sisters and brothers in the faith, if we offer all of this to God—the suffering, the poverty, the work, the duty of whatever sort—and we do so in order to please God, to do his will, then we are becoming pleasing sacrifices, sweet-smelling victims on the Father's altar.

Since we are at a moment of church history when we're experiencing the death and life of a pontiff, I want to recall the immortal words of John XXIII. When the doctor told him that his sickness was serious and he should stay in bed, the old man said, «The bed also is an altar and needs a victim to offer to God. So here I am, a victim on the altar of this bed». What a death John

XXIII had!⁴ It happened almost in sight of the whole world. I never saw a more public death than that one: minute by minute he told how his life was ebbing away, how the sacrifice was being consumed. How beautiful is a body at the final moment, even if it is fat and ugly like that of John XXIII! But it becomes a pleasing sacrifice through the sublime spirit enveloping that body and through the Christian ideals he had bestowed on it all his life. There is no body that is despicable for the Lord.

But sadly here also we can, like Christ, say to those who stare at the bodies of men and women, «You think as humans do, not as God does. You see with looks of vice and concupiscence and not with eyes that raise others up on high» (Matt 16:23). But if we see all bodies as worthy, from the most beautiful to the most ragged and repugnant, then we will say with Saint Paul that every body is a sacrifice when it offers to God its energy, its voice, its movement, its hands, its intelligence, its profession, its work—everything!—for God's glory (Rom 12:1). The cross means doing the will of God in life.

Baptism, dear sisters and brothers, identifies us with the beauty of our Christ. The Second Vatican Council, speaking precisely to you lay people, states, «The baptized are consecrated by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit as a spiritual dwelling and a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:4-10) so that through all those works which are proper to Christians they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them» (LG 10). This invitation is addressed to you, sisters and brothers, and I hope my word finds some echo in you regarding what I see as the main point this morning. All of us must give to our lives that divine sense of the cross, and we must courageously embrace the cross of our duty. We must make our obligations, as routine as they may be, not just a way of making a living, not just a condition for earning a wage, not just a way of winning applause—all these rewards remain on earth. The goal of our lives is the glory of God. No matter how lowly a life, this is what makes it great.

Without the cross life is a failure

Finally, without the cross life is a failure. What does it mean not to embrace the cross? What is the failure of life? In today's second reading Saint Paul tells us not to be conformed to this world (Rom 12:2); that would mean throwing out the cross. Being conformed to this world means living according to the world and not according to the Gospel. The world says that money is happiness while Christ says, «Blessed are the poor in spirit» (Matt 5:3). Christ says we must forgive while the world recites the pagan adage: «An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth» (Matt 5:38-39), meaning vengeance, hatred, and violence. So we must not conform ourselves to the thinking of the world. We could go on describing ad infinitum these two lines that grow ever farther apart: the line of conformity to God's will and the line of conformity to this world.

Poor souls are those who submerge their ideas and their judgments ever more deeply in the world's way of thinking—carnal pleasure, vice, drugs, prostitution, money, robbery, kidnapping. All these are ways of the world. Do not conform your lives to the world's thinking.

⁴ FLICHE A. and MARTIN V., *Historia de la Iglesia*, Vol. XXVII (2), 320-321.

Christ expresses it differently when he says to Peter, «You think as humans do, not as God does» (Matt 16:23). This is the great task of evangelization: transforming the thinking of humans into the thinking of God. I find this morning a very precious moment because that is what I'm trying to do: transform our mentality into the thought of God.

That other phrase of Jesus says much the same thing: trying to save your life means throwing out the cross. Our life cannot be saved without the danger of losing it forever. That's why the gospel ends with those words that have converted so many sinners and made them saints: «What profit would it be for you to gain the whole world if in the end your life is lost»? (Matt 16:26). It's a legend (but many believe it) that there are people who have made a pact with the devil. When everything goes well materially for someone, they say the devil is helping that person and afterward will possess that soul. This is not a truth of faith, but it's certainly true that many people only want to accumulate the things of this life, but they're going to lose them. We see this even at the material level: what happens to the great inheritances? The heirs quickly grab all the money that has cost them nothing, and how they squander it! But even money is sacred when we know how to put it at the service of God's thought.

That's why this touches also on the life of the church, sisters and brothers. Earlier I read a passage about the Council's ideas. This church is not something abstract; it is composed of all of us. We are the church. To the extent that we Christians walk with this cross, we raise up the church, and to the extent that we shun the cross and empty it out, we leave the whole church without meaning.

My greatest desire is to build with Christ a church according to his heart. The other things I'm going to go on to talk about are incidental, such as the news and the concrete realities that are illuminated through this church. They pass on; they're the history of one week. That's why I beg you to search in my homily for the light that illuminates because a homily is more than a type of newscast. The church's prophetic mission obliges me to shed light on the news, and I ask you to focus especially on the efforts this poor pastor is making to build a church according to the heart of God. This is the affirmation I've been repeating, and I don't want this affirmation—about the church of the true cross of Christ—to be confused with any form of political opposition or with some fantasy to win fame or make hay. No! My role could be something like that of the prophet Jeremiah: «I am pained, Lord, to be saying these things. But the way things are, I am obliged to protest the sins of the world in order to bring them to naught, just as you want your people to bring them to naught».

Life of the church

And so it is, dear sisters and brothers, that as we go about building the church and shedding light on reality, I invite you to rejoice this week with the new pope that Providence has given us. Here I want to thank and congratulate the mass media. As the pope just told them, how it helps when they are at the service of goodness and truth! Thanks to television, radio, and the press, the whole world knows about the generous character, the ecclesiastical spirit, and the truly pastoral heart of Pope John Paul I. Within the hour, more or less—at ten to ten, you have time, don't worry!—you'll be able to go and see on television the coronation. The pope doesn't want it called a coronation. This is one of his most striking traits. He's a man who has broken centuries of tradition and presented himself in public in all humility. There are many tiaras in

the Vatican, and there are many *sedia gestatoria*⁵ also, but he says, «No. We're not going to use them. I'm going to enter with the people, walking like a pilgrim of this earth. And we won't call the ceremony a coronation. It will be simply the Mass that the bishop of the world celebrates with his people, the first Eucharist to consecrate his work to God». What a beautiful gesture!

John Paul's first message to the world⁶ stressed the importance of establishing a social order that is more just, a peace that is more stable, and international cooperation that is more sincere. He also confirmed the bishops' meeting in Puebla. He told journalists to work with love for the truth and with respect for human dignity; he asked them to focus less on trivialities and more on essential matters⁷. He sheds a very beautiful and opportune light! In his meeting with diplomats the pope also spoke about the mission of the church and her relation to governments. The church is always evangelizing, always following the line of Jesus; she is always the church of the cross. He stressed that the church wants to help to mold people's awareness and to shape broad public opinion regarding the basic principles that guarantee authentic civilization and true fraternity among nations⁸.

I am truly happy to see the new pontiff walking on the paths of John XXIII and Paul VI. The previous popes were not off the track; they were on the right path, and John Paul will continue on the same way. There have always been deviations, and it is the task of all of us to straighten them out. But the essential path of the church is traced out by the pope. We see where it's going, and thank God, we'll meet up with the pope since we walk on the same path. Blessed be God!

I want to express my gratitude for the enthusiastic reception that the people of God—and also those who are not the people of God!—have given to the pastoral letter we wrote with Bishop Rivera. The title is «The Church and People's Political Organizations». It is an invitation for us to reflect. Since these are new themes, we do not pretend to offer an authoritative word. We only invite people to reflect and to dialogue in the light of the Gospel, as Paul VI recommends in *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA 40).

At the same time our pastoral letter came out, four other bishops published another declaration on the same theme but with a different focus⁹. Since this declaration of the four bishops¹⁰ has been presented in the media¹¹ as a statement of the bishops of El Salvador, our communications office quickly made the clarification that not all bishops signed the statement, only some bishops of the episcopal conference; our office also offered a summary of the pastoral letter of the other two bishops¹².

⁵ The *sedia gestatoria* was the ceremonial throne on which popes were carried until 1978.

⁶ JOHN PAUL I, «First Message to the Church and the World», 27 August 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (3 September 1978).

⁷ «Meeting of John Paul I with Journalists», 1 September 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 September 1978).

⁸ «Allocution of the Holy Father to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See», 31 August 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 September 1978).

⁹ «Declaration of Bishops of El Salvador on Certain People's Political Organizations», 28 August 1978, *ECA* 359 (1978) 774-775.

¹⁰ The declaration was signed by Bishops Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio, Benjamín Barrera, José Eduardo Álvarez, and Marco René Revelo.

¹¹ «Bishops Warn against Organizations FECCAS-UTC» in *El Diario de Hoy* (29 August 1978).

¹² «Bulletin 44 of the Social Communications Secretariat of the Archdiocese of San Salvador» in *Orientación* (3 September 1978).

It is true that, at the insistence of the Holy See, the bishops' conference decided to declare that FECCAS and UTC are not organizations of the church. I have been repeating this in my homilies all along, and it is stated clearly also in the pastoral letter. But the other pronouncement, which was signed only by the four bishops, evidently goes beyond what was agreed on in the conference. That matter was not brought up for plenary discussion, as was proper, before they signed their document. Because of that serious procedural defect, one that any collegial body can notice, that document cannot be attributed to the college of bishops of El Salvador. Unfortunately our own clarification was either distorted or mutilated or silenced in the media, thus creating more confusion and denying people the service of truthful information such as the pope himself recently asked of journalists. I am sorry for this poor witness and ask pardon since I am in solidarity with the hierarchy of El Salvador. I earnestly beseech my beloved priests and the communities of the archdiocese to judge with mature criteria what good there is in both statements and not to encourage commentaries that deepen our divisions. The people have a great instinct given to them by the Holy Spirit. That's what Christ says with these beautiful words: «The sheep know the voice of the shepherd who loves them and is willing to give his life for them» (John 10:14-15).

We are thankful for the enthusiastic reception being given to this pastoral letter. The first edition ran out sooner than expected, but next week we'll have a bigger printing, and the newspaper *Orientación* will publish the complete text. I want to remind you that I'm not asking you simply to read it, but to study it and reflect on it in community. And please send me your reactions and commentaries, as well as your criticisms. Our radio station YSAX has already been offering some very interesting commentaries.

This church of the cross is also celebrating today ten years of her benevolent work in the Salvadoran Foundation for Development and Low-cost Housing. To Father Ibáñez and his collaborators go our congratulations and prayers.

I also want to congratulate and ask for people's cooperation in the initiative undertaken by the pastors of the vicariate of La Asunción, which comprises the parishes of Flor Blanca, San José de la Montaña, San Benito, Colonia Roma, Corazón de María, Cristo Redentor, and La Ceiba. They have set up a theology institute in that vicariate to promote education in the faith and to assure that the sacraments are administered with a better Christian understanding of them.

I also rejoice with the vicariate of Chalatenango because the religious who work in that department—Carmelite Missionaries, Bethlehemites, Sisters of the Assumption, Guadalupeana Sisters, Oblates of the Divine Love, the Oblates of the Sacred Heart—spent two days evaluating their work. They have also strongly supported their episcopal vicar, Father Fabián Amaya, by defending him from calumny since some people were trying to accuse him of aiding seditious activities. According to the sisters, Father Fabián, is working full-time in pastoral ministry, and all the communities of that department testify to that.

In the Ayutuxtepeque neighborhood we celebrated Mass to make amends for the sacrilegious robbery that was perpetrated there.

A group of young people from the Instituto Ricaldone gave me great joy when they arrived at my office. They said they were «on pilgrimage to the bishop». I was surprised by that expression, but it has made me reflect a lot. To go on pilgrimage to a place means to go there to find strength, unity, faith. They made me feel that I was recovering that responsibility of the

bishop, as the one to whom the whole diocese makes a pilgrimage because he has to be the center that makes manifest this unity and this truth. I thank you, then, for this meaningful visit of all you who came to Mass today; it expresses even greater affection than that of the little group of young people from the Ricaldone.

I also want to thank the Legion of Mary who came to offer their reflections on the thought of the hierarchy. And I rejoice with the community of Ateos, which will be the parochial seat for Tepecoyo and Sacacoyo. Yesterday we celebrated the Eucharist there to inaugurate this new pastoral initiative.

The community of San Ramón near Cojutepeque also caused me great delight; it is a glory of this church of the cross and this church of Easter. The Carmelite Sisters of Saint Theresa are developing a very lively community there in San Ramón. The moment of the offering was very impressive: to show the fertility of those lands, the people brought fruits, vegetables, grains, etc., to give thanks to the Lord. I offer greetings in passing to the mother superior of the Carmelites of Saint Theresa; she is in El Salvador these days, visiting the communities of her congregation.

We also want to unite ourselves with the sorrow of Father Eduardo Orellana at the passing of the person who was like a mother to him during her life. We also remember with affection, four months after his death, a friend from San Miguel, Don Carlos García Prieto. I ask you also to pray for him today.

Yesterday was the birthday of Father Pedraz, and I want to congratulate not only him but all the staff of YSAX. They are offering a marvelous service by broadcasting the thinking of our church.

I want to announce to the priests and all the communities that next Tuesday at 12:15 midday we are going to concelebrate a Mass for the new pope. I will have the good fortune to preside at this celebration with my beloved priests. I hope that the communities will be present to express here in the cathedral the solidarity with John Paul I that we've already expressed to him by means of a telegram from the archdiocese.

The meeting of the clergy will take place at nine o'clock Tuesday morning, and the meeting of the religious will be the following day. I ask those in charge to have the religious arrive at Domus Mariae at 8:30 o'clock on Wednesday the sixth, and the priests should be there on Tuesday the fifth at nine o'clock.

Events of the week

I also want to tell you—or you may already know—that we have information about the release of Mr. Monedero¹³. We rejoice, and we wish him the best. At the same time, as a member of the commission responsible for distributing the money that the Monedero family gave for the persons indicated by his captors, I inform you that we're finalizing the details for equitably distributing that money, possibly this week. I want to ask the government for guarantees that the families being benefited will not be subject to reprisals. Many of the families have expressed their fears in this regard.

¹³ Armando Tomás Monedero was freed on 1 September 1978. See *El Mundo* (1 September 1978).

I also want to denounce that two young women who were distributing food and clothing to *campesino* families on my behalf were captured and brought to the National Guard, where they asked them to turn over the money. So there is the danger that this money that the Monedero family gave to meet the demands of the captors will suffer similar interference. Please help us to make sure it reaches the families for whom it's intended.

We also bless and pray to God for the thirty-five workers who left for Saudi Arabia this week and whose number will soon rise to five hundred. This only reveals how sad it is when workers have to leave the country because there's no just social order in the country which allows them to find work. We have said that if such emigration were more definitive, it would be a great solution for our demographic problem.

The judicial police inspected the building of the Catholic University Center and confiscated the personal effects of Father Juan Deplancke, who is absent from the country.

By higher orders, many prisoners being tried under the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order have been transferred from one prison to another. This anomaly has caused considerable distress for their families, especially when they're not informed or when they're kept in the dark as to the whereabouts of their loved ones. In this regard I have respectfully asked the Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for the prisons, to correct these anomalies according to the regulations.

In the village of Mogotes, in Tacachico, they arrested Martín Cartagena Sánchez on his sick bed. They beat him and took him to an unknown destination.

The case of Alejandro Beltrán Peña remains a mystery. His mother knows that the police have him and that he has a broken collar bone. She asks for mercy for her son and for information about him.

Take a good look at this Sunday's *Orientación*, which contains a study that debunks the calumny which has tried to implicate Father Fabián Amaya, Father Rafael Barahona, and Professor Morales in seditious activities. You'll learn in the article, for example, about the various techniques being used to discredit people¹⁴.

We also deplore the assault of the National Guard against Elvira Fuentes and her children as they were searching for two catechists in Talnique. When the soldiers found a Bible and two texts of Medellín, they seized them and said they were illegal. Those who told me about this commented, «If only the Bible and the Latin American church documents would get them to think about how unjustly they're acting!»

We also lament developments in the area of labor relations. The Union of Workers of the Mechanical and Metal Industries has denounced anomalies committed by the owners of CORINCA, CONELCA, Arco Ingenieros, and Corcho y Lata. The union of the INCA factory in Santa Ana has been demolished over the last three months because unionized workers have been fired, and yesterday they killed the last union worker, Guillermo Rivas González, along with his companion, Julio Padilla, near the Plaza Colón in Santa Ana. More bloodshed! And with

¹⁴ «New Calumny against the Church and a Professor» in *Orientación* (3 September 1978).

the arrest of Rolando Walter Ramírez, secretary of the unions of INDECA, we are seeing how this right of free association, which we try to defend in our pastoral letter according to church thinking, is being violated more every day. There is a wholesale assault on the right that all persons have to organize to defend their just demands and rights.

We also want to ask your prayers and moral support for the people of Nicaragua. Let us pray that this extremely dangerous and bloody confrontation does not end up in more bloodbaths¹⁵.

We are happy that the government of El Salvador contributed to the re-establishment of relations between Panama and Guatemala. Hopefully what El Salvador has achieved for other countries it will also achieve in its strained relations with Honduras¹⁶. This senseless rupture has already lasted too long.

So this, dear sisters and brothers, is the church of the cross, as the Council tells us: «Since this mission continues to unfold in the course of history the mission of Christ himself, who was sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, the church, prompted by the Holy Spirit, must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience. It is a path of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which he came forth a victor by his resurrection. Thus did all the apostles walk in hope, and by many trials and sufferings they filled up those things lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body which is the church (Col 1:24). For the blood of Christians was often a seed»¹⁷ (AG 5).

We have spoken about the church of the cross, of that cross that gives meaning to life, for without the cross life has nothing to offer but failure. Dear sisters and brothers, let us now celebrate in our Eucharist the living memory of that cross of Christ. Let us identify with it, and let us leave from this Mass in the *cathedra*—or from the communities where we are reflecting with the bishop—with renewed strength to be ever worthy of the cross of the Lord. Let it be so. [Applause]

¹⁵ On 22 August 1978, a commando unit of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, led by «Comandante Cero» took control of the National Palace in Managua. A week later a general strike was called, and there were battles in all the main cities of Nicaragua.

¹⁶ After the «hundred hour» soccer war in 1969, El Salvador and Honduras broke off diplomatic relations.

¹⁷ TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum* 50,13: PL 1,534.