

## 103

# THE CHURCH: A PROPHETIC, SACRAMENTAL COMMUNITY OF LOVE

**Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time  
10 September 1978**

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

Dear brothers and sisters, we have heard the biblical readings not only with human attentiveness but with true faith because it is the word of God. I am pleased to tell you that the readings coincide with the basic theological and pastoral approach of the pastoral letter that you are becoming familiar with these days<sup>1</sup>. I'm hoping that the pastoral letter becomes the object of study in the communities and that people reflect on it seriously. Unfortunately this week we couldn't produce as many copies as we had announced, but by the beginning of next week we'll have the new edition. Meanwhile, the complete text of the pastoral letter is being printed in the issue of *Orientación*<sup>2</sup> that's available today. Whenever there is opportunity in your meetings or in your small groups or at home, please study the letter, and you'll see that it's mainly concerned about the church's identity, that is, the true nature and mission of the church founded by Christ. This identity is based directly on the word of God that we'll be reflecting on today in light of the biblical texts. The nature and the mission of the church is something that Catholics should have quite clear in their minds since they are the ones who form the church. If we have a clear, precise, certain idea of what the church is, we will then be able to help the world courageously with all its problems. That's what the church is for; that's why Christ established it: not to preserve herself for the sake of preservation but to preserve herself to serve the world.

The theme of the pastoral letter is the relation of the church to the people's organizations. The church must provide a service to the organizations of *campesinos*, workers, politicians, and all those who want to organize for the sake of a better nation and a better world. The church would be at fault if she just drew apart with the treasures of her doctrine and her moral force and failed to respond to the anguished questions of the modern world and our own nation with counsels based on God's word, counsels that only she can give. We have repeated often that the church is not a people's organization, but in our pastoral letter we insist that the church, without identifying with such organizations, provides them an invaluable service. We explain this in the pastoral letter as follows.

First, it is precisely in community that many Christians have become aware of how the Gospel and Christian justice demand that we help to transform this unjust world. Consequently, the church is not ashamed that people have emerged from their communities

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<sup>1</sup> *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See *Orientación* (10 September 1978).

with definite political and social concerns. The Council itself reminds us that one of the most serious needs at the present time is civic and political education and that persons skilled in this noble art of politics should receive preparation and training (GS 75). So the church is not ashamed that reflection on the word of God has produced many political activists and many organized groups. Nevertheless, the church remains true to herself; she is like the mother at home who lets go of her children once she has educated them. She rejoices in her knowledge that she has given them a critical awareness and a sense of responsibility as they go out into the world to seek concrete situations for which they can take responsibility.

On the basis of her identity and without confusing herself with the organizations, the church defends the right of people to organize. This is a human right. No one can prohibit people from organizing with others as long as the objectives they seek are honest and good—to survive, to have food for their families, to improve their living conditions. The church defends—and has defended, thank God—this right of organization.

Another vital service of the church, one we defend in the pastoral letter, is supporting the just demands that any organization might promote. It's not necessary for them to be Christian. As long as an organization is seeking a just objective, the church supports it because her duty is to defend the justice of the kingdom of God. Whenever there is some reflection of God's kingdom in any human group, the church knows that God is present there and asks us to commit ourselves to defending the justice being sought.

There is still another service the church provides. Since her singular strength is the Gospel and nothing else, the church has the Gospel-given duty and right to denounce whatever is found to be unjust, evil, or sinful in any organization, even in one called Christian. The church is not so committed to any one organization that she cannot say, «That is wrong! This is sinful! That I must denounce! This I repudiate!» And thank God, the church has done this. Here in the archdiocese the church's duty has been to defend what is just and condemn what is unjust.

Another important service the church provides is to take the concerns of those who are seeking justice and defending their temporal rights and to incorporate them into Christ's great liberation, his grand redemption. In order to do this the church tells every person and every organization seeking just and noble ends, «That's good, but it's not enough. Integrate it into Christian redemption. You need to be freed from sin, for Christ came to break the chains of sin. Your liberation will not be complete unless you develop more and become a child of God by grace and holiness; it will not be complete if you prescind from Christ and trust only in earthly ideologies. I want to serve you, to lead you by the hand toward true redemption for that is your true destiny, the ultimate vocation of all men and women». This is the great service of the church. But in order to provide this service and establish relations with earthly organizations and human groups, the church must be in full possession of herself; she must be sure of her identity as church. This is the comparison Paul VI used in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: when a doctor goes to a disease-infested area, she immunizes herself in order to stay well; otherwise she'd end up sick herself. For what use is a sick doctor to sick people? That's why the church has to go forth immunized with her own identity. The church cannot let herself be confused with any earthly organization or ideology if she is to render her true service as church for their benefit, just as a doctor provides her true service of healing sick people by immunizing herself so as not to become sick. I'm not saying that all the organizations are sick, but I'm making the comparison to show you that the church in rendering these services must first of all define clearly the nature of her mission, and that's what we do in our pastoral letter.

I don't want to go too long, so I won't read to you pages twenty and twenty-one of the letter—you're going to study it yourselves. There, taking words from the church's teaching, the letter says that if there is a group of people who believe in Christ, accept his teaching, and manifest this by belonging to his church through baptism, then those people will nourish their Christian life with God's word and will manifest their encounter with Christ by the sacramental signs: confession and communion (EN 13; 23). That's what church is! Church is a group of people who are nourished by the word of God and by the Eucharist just as you are being nourished today in coming to Mass. This is what the church is!

Here we are in the church this Sunday, sisters and brothers, and those who have listened to me with sincerity, without prejudice, without hatred, without ill will, without trying to defend indefensible interests—such persons cannot say I am preaching political sermons or subversive sermons. All that is calumny, nothing more. You are listening to me at this moment, and what I'm saying is what I've always said. What I want to state here in the cathedral pulpit is what the church is. What I want to say is that the church supports, applauds, and encourages whatever is good; she consoles the victims of assaults and injustice; and she also denounces the atrocities, the disappearances, the tortures, and the social injustice. That is not meddling in politics. That is building up the church and fulfilling the duty the church has by her very identity. My conscience is quite tranquil, and I call on all of you to help us build up the true church! For this task we are given help by the word that has been read today.

The Gospel of Saint Matthew gives us the principal readings for the whole of this year, so let us pay attention to his thought. Sunday after Sunday we've been reading short passages from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, and in order to understand them better we also take a passage from the Old Testament which illuminates the gospel. Today the text from Ezekiel sheds marvelous light on the problem Jesus Christ is dealing with in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. Also, the letters of the apostles are like direct deductions from Christ's teachings. What we see, then, is that the gospel, seen in the light of the Old Testament and commented on in the letters of the apostles, communicates to us that this church of the Archdiocese of San Salvador in 1978 is the same church that Christ announced in his Gospel; it is the same church that the prophets announced and that the apostles taught to the first Christians. This is the great honor I feel, sisters and brothers, and that's why I am happy that there is an overall positive reaction to my preaching and that my words are heard with the sincere desire to know and to build the true church of Christ here among us, in El Salvador in 1978.

I told you that I had an outline of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, and I'm quite delighted to know that many people, on hearing this, are asking for copies. This is good since Matthew supplies the readings for this year. Do not expect a book; it's just an outline, a couple of pages. It's already there in the Jerusalem Bible for those of you who have that version. At the beginning of the Gospels there is the heading: «Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels». Look for the Gospel of Matthew there, and you'll find the precious commentary that says that the Gospel of Saint Matthew is like a drama about the coming of God's kingdom in seven acts. It describes the gospel and indicates the chapters that correspond to each act of this extraordinary drama. In its fifth act, which is chapters 16 to 18, the gospel speaks about the beginning of God's kingdom on earth in terms of a group of disciples with Peter at their head. The norms of life for this newborn church are sketched out in the community discourse. Today's passage is taken precisely from chapter 18, which is part of Christ's discourse about community.

Remember that the Gospels are not so much a biography of Christ as they are the reflections of the first communities on Christ's teachings. As a fruit of those reflections, the apostles wrote down the discourses of Christ that they remembered, but this was only after the community had reflected on them. It's wonderful to know, then, that this chapter 18 is the fruit of the first Christian community; it tells us what that newly created church was like as it burst forth from its source in Christ.

This reading speaks of the humility that all pastors should have. The apostles argued about which of them was the greatest—the same hierarchical quarrels as always. Christ tells them, «No, here those who wish to be great should become like children and servants of all» (Matt 18:1-5). Authority in the church is not commanding; it is serving. In Christianity, those who do not become like simple children cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. What shame I feel as pastor—and I ask my community for forgiveness—when I have not been able to fulfill my role as bishop by serving you! I am not the boss; I am not the one in charge; I am not an authority that imposes itself. I want to be God's servant and yours.

In speaking about what community should be like, Christ is calling us to be authentic, and so from today's three readings I can draw the title of my homily: «The Church: a Prophetic Community, a Sacramental Community, and a Community of Love». That's what the church is! If we don't understand it that way, then we don't know what the church of Christ is. These three characteristics serve as a summary of today's three readings.

### **The church is a prophetic community**

First of all, I want to tell you that the church that Christ wanted is a prophetic community. Commenting on this idea, the Council stated in *Lumen Gentium*, section 12, «The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity» (LG 12). So you see, all of you, sisters and brothers, are the prophetic people, a people that God has organized to spread abroad a living witness of his teaching. The same Council, in speaking about married persons, that is, you lay people, says that matrimony and family life provide a propitious setting for developing this prophetic sense of the people of God. When the parents live holy lives in close contact with their children, they are like a small church; by their virtues they encourage society to be holy, and they also reproach whatever is evil, unjust and sinful in the world (LG 11). There is no greater reproach for a sinful society than a holy family. And so the people of God and the divine word deliver to all of us engaged in this reflection a solemn summons: as members of one family, let our homes and our relations as spouses and our relations as parents and children be models that bear witness to love, to holiness, to justice, and to charity in the midst of a world that is selfish, sinful, and violent. There is nothing more necessary in these times of violence and terrorism than holy homes that emanate love.

The prophetic mission, therefore, is a duty of God's people. That's why, when some people scornfully say that I think I'm a prophet, I respond, «God be praised! You also must become one! Every Christian, the whole of God's people, every family must develop a prophetic sense. All of us must convey a sense of God's mission in the world; we must bring to it a divine presence that makes demands and also rejects!» As Pope Paul VI said in his exhortation on evangelization in the modern world, let us suppose that a group of Christians proposes to live in an authentic way the Gospel in which they believe. This group just by itself stirs up great questions in the world: What kind of people are these? What are they hoping for? What do they

love? Who are they? (EN 21). That's the way Christianity began there in Jerusalem. As we're told by the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the people kept joining the community because they saw how the Christians loved one another and praised God (Acts 2:47). It was a community with no social inequalities, a community where those who had something shared with those who had nothing, a community where no one was ashamed of being poor and nobody boasted of being rich. They bore witness to charity and love. A prophetic community announces simply by its presence what God expects of human beings in making them social creatures. I find all these thoughts, dear sisters and brothers, in today's readings.

The first reading is marvelous. They say that few persons have entered so deeply into the mystery of God as the prophet Ezekiel—he almost seems abnormal. Do you realize that it's not shameful to be thought crazy? People thought the prophet Ezekiel was crazy, but the reason was that he had entered so deeply into God's world that ordinary people considered him abnormal. Who is really abnormal—those who have so distanced themselves from God that they think people seeking after God are abnormal, or those who attain normality in the very center of life that is God? Well, this prophet Ezekiel, who was crazy as far as the world was concerned, preached the great mystery you've heard today in the form of a parable.

Chapter 33 of Ezekiel is perhaps one of the most beautiful descriptions of the prophetic mission God wants to entrust to human beings. The parable goes as follows: When God allows a war to be waged against a nation, the people appoint a sentinel who watches out for the approaching enemy. When the enemy is near, the sentinel sounds a horn or a trumpet, as was the custom in those days, and the people in the city hear the trumpet. Those who hear the warning prepare to defend the city to save themselves, and of course the sentinel will also be saved for he has done his duty. But if the people, after hearing the sentinel's warning, pay it no mind and end up being killed, the sentinel still is saved because he has done his job. On the other hand, says the parable, if the sentinel neglects his duty and fails to blow the trumpet, then the enemy will enter the city, and the defenders cannot defeat them. In that case the sentinel is guilty of negligence, and if because of his negligence death comes upon those caught unawares in the city, then all are doomed, both sentinel and people. At this point the prophet applies the parable to his own mission, saying, «I am the sentinel». The prophet is a sentinel, a watchman, and when God says, «Be converted, you who do wrong!» the prophet must become God's trumpet and also declare, «Be converted, you who do wrong!» If the wrongdoers are not converted, they are lost, but the prophet has fulfilled his responsibility. If the prophet fails to cry out, the wrongdoers will be lost by their own fault, but God says, «I will also hold the prophet responsible because he did not cry out. He was not a trumpet. He was not a watchman» (Ezek 33:1-9).

We find this same parable in the gospel, where Christ says, «If your brother commits an error, don't be remiss. Go and speak to him alone. If you correct him, you have won him for God. If he does not listen, call some witnesses who will testify to your diligence and to the obstinacy of the one who is wrong. If he does not listen to them either, then tell the community, tell the church, and the church will treat him as a Gentile and a tax collector» (Matt 18:15-17). In the language of Christ these two terms were used for persons who were excommunicated; because of their stubbornness they could no longer be part of the community.

Here, dear sisters and brothers, is where I find the explanation for why the church has a prophetic mission. Why does a prophet have to intervene between God and the wrongdoers? Why is the community called to give testimony in such a way that those who don't listen to the

community are cast out? I find here two major explanations that I want you to pay close attention to.

The first explanation is how social sin can exist. Many are scandalized by this idea, saying that sin is personal but not social. Certainly that's what the Bible has told us today: «The wrongdoer will be lost by his own fault» (Ezek 33:8). But the text also mentions the co-responsibility of the prophet who makes no announcement. This applies to all of us who let injustices pass by, especially if they can be avoided. It applies to every family that panders to selfishness and fails to give a Christian meaning to life. It applies to every home that doesn't become as holy as God wants it to be but rather lives in sin. All of us have become contaminated with social sin; we have become accomplices in social sin. And when the situation, as is the case in El Salvador, becomes such that a law is decreed in order to preserve order, then we must ask, what order? The order is the order of injustice: «Don't disturb things. Let the situation remain as it is. Don't denounce anything because that is meddling in politics». El Salvador is living in what Medellin called a state of institutionalized sin (M 2,15). [Applause]

Many thanks. Your response shows that we're in agreement: the church cannot be silent. We who are her pastors must speak out. We must all be a prophetic people and issue a warning call. But understand what the aim of this prophetic stance is. If you continue reading Ezekiel, in chapter 33 the prophet tells the children of Israel, his compatriots, «Don't be pessimistic! You have said, "God has abandoned us because of our sins! Who can save us?"» The prophet then lifts up their spirits by declaring, «God also says, "I do not want the death of sinners. I want them to be converted and to live. I am a God of forgiveness. I am a God who wants what is just. I am a God who, yes, makes demands and punishes but also a God who is ready to forgive"» (Ezek 33:10-11). At this point, sisters and brothers, I want to call upon the memory of all of you who have been kind enough to follow my thinking for more than a year now. Whenever there has been an assault, whenever we have condemned something, we have always ended with a call to conversion: «Let sinners be converted!» When we were celebrating here in the cathedral the funeral of Father Grande after he was murdered, we said, «I hope that we are being heard by those who killed him, and we call out to them in their murderers' den, "Be converted for the Lord loves you and is waiting for you!"» There is never any hate, never any resentment in the prophet's denunciation. Neither can the prophetic people of God hate; they must love. The prophetic people, as today's gospel says, seeks out those who go wrong in order to win them over to God. The prophet, even as he speaks of the neglectful sentinel's punishment, also praises the mercy of the God who calls us. That's why I say to you, dear sisters and brothers, «Be converted!» I say this especially to you, my dear sisters and brothers who hate me; I say it to you, my dear sisters and brothers who think that I'm preaching violence and slander me even though you know it's not true; I say it to you who have your hands stained with crime, torture, assault, injustice—I tell you all, «Be converted!» I love you dearly, and I feel sorry for you because you are traveling the paths of perdition.

### **The church is a sacramental community**

My second thought is this: the church is a sacramental community. In our pastoral letter we state that the church has a great mission regarding earthly affairs, but she does not thereby lose herself in earthly things. If she did, the pope tells us, she would lose all her force (EN 32). The church would then not be announcing the true liberation of God, which involves the demands of the poor people asking for bread, the demands of the uneducated asking for

learning, the demands those who live in misery. The church would then become miserable herself, incapable of inspiring people to hope for forgiveness and resurrection.

Indeed, the church's mission is transcendent, for she can never forget the vision of God. And here precisely is the sign of community. I thank you, dear communities, those I've had the good fortune to visit and those I haven't been able to visit but I know are alive. This week I received some very delightful letters from Christian communities that have placed their trust in this word of God; they come not only from the archdiocese but from other dioceses. I thank you profoundly, and I tell you: Keep your hope strong. Preserve this sacramental sign of the church. Be communities that struggle for just claims, but never forget that the only one who can give us strength and inspiration is God.

In this regard, today's gospel gives us some insight. What does Christ say there? «Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them» (Matt 18:20). Thank you, Lord, because wherever there is a community that sits down and reflects on your word with religious sincerity, there you become present, blessed Christ, Liberator of humankind. How can my heart not be filled with hope by a church in which base communities of faith flourish! And why should I not ask my dear fellow priests to help these communities to flourish everywhere—in the neighborhoods, in the villages, among families? «Because wherever two or three are gathered in my name», there is the sacramental sign (Matt 18:20). Here in the cathedral Christ is now present. The protagonist here this morning is Christ our Lord. He is bearing witness to us that Christ is present not only in the consecrated host, but in all of us who form one community. Christ is present in every group of Christians gathered around a radio and meditating on this word of God. Here is Christ! Blessed be God that we aren't going it alone!

Thus we can see that the church community is sacramental. What is a sacrament? It is a visible sign of an invisible reality. What is visible are your faces, many known to one another from the cordial greetings we exchange as we leave. All this is the visible community. But what is invisible is the face we don't see but believe in, and we discover it through the faces of one another. It is Christ our Lord.

There is another reality in this sacramental community. Christ tells us, «When two of you agree in asking something of my Father, my Father in heaven will grant it to you» (Matt 18:19). What a beautiful thing! The community is a sign of God's will because God grants only what is asked for according to his will, and God's will as reflected in community is very different from what many people would like to think is God's will. Many people would like poor people to keep on saying, «It's God's will that I live this way». But it is not the will of God that some people have everything while others have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children should be happy. When two or three agree in asking something of God, God grants it. That is the community of love, the will that unites in God. How marvelous it is to know that this morning also our prayer and our Mass will be heard by God because there are more than two of us! The cathedral is full, and so, united with Christ, we can ask the Father for what our society needs. Let us therefore make our Sunday Mass, as I said at the beginning, a time of hope.

In the third place there is the presence of God who accepts or rejects. «If after you speak to the sinner, either alone or with witnesses, he pays you no mind, then tell the community; and if he pays no heed to the community, let him be excommunicated and set apart» (Matt

18:15-17). This is where Christ uses the words he spoke to Peter, «Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven» (Matt 18:18). Pay close attention to this, dear sisters and brothers: what was given as a prerogative of the pope is not something exclusive to the pope; it is something God gives to the whole people of God, even if the pope is the supreme expression of this privilege. Christ told Peter in an exclusive sense, «Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven» (Matt 16:19), and now he tells the community: «Whatever you in union with your pastors consider to be error, is error». The infallible judgment will be pronounced by the pope, but the whole people of God also enjoys these prerogatives when they are in communion—in community—with their pastors. This must be kept very much in mind so that we realize that in each diocese the bishop in communion with the pope is the sign of this unity and truth.

### **The church is a community of love**

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, let us say a word about today's second reading, which speaks about the church community as a community of love. The Council expresses it beautifully when it speaks about the characteristics of the people of God: «That messianic people has Christ the Redeemer for its head. ... The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the children of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Its end is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God himself on earth» (LG 9). It would be hard to find more beautiful words. The identity of our church should be characterized by love. In El Salvador we say that the Constitution should be respected because it is the soul of nationhood. The constitution of Christians is a single word: love.

That's why Saint Paul says, «The one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law because the commandments, "You shall not steal", "You shall not kill", "You shall not harm another", are all summed up in a single word: "You shall love your neighbor"» (Rom 13:8-9). If there existed true love of neighbor, there would be no terrorism, no repression, no selfishness, no cruel inequalities in our society, no abductions, and no crimes. Love is the synthesis of the law, but not just the synthesis; it is what gives a Christian sense to all human relations. That's why even those who are called atheists, if they are humane, are fulfilling the essence of the relations that God wants among human beings: love. Love is the fullness of all human obligations, and without love justice is only the sword. With love, however, justice becomes a fraternal embrace. Without love, laws are arduous, repressive, cruel, controlling; but where there is love, security forces are superfluous; where there is love, there are no jails, no torture, no will to beat people down.

This is what the church is, dear sisters and brothers, and our job is to build this prophetic community, this sacramental community, this community of love. That is the essence of my preaching. But my preaching would be pure theory if we didn't look hard at the world outside the church and examine it precisely from the perspective of the reality and inner life of our church. We must understand the situation within which the church's mission must be carried out in order to see if we are truly building our prophetic church, our sacramental church, our church of love.

### **Life of the church**



In this regard, as I look at the interior life of our church, I rejoice because of the concelebration that took place in our archdiocese last Tuesday, and I want to thank the beloved priests and the communities that took part because we expressed in this way our solidarity with the new pope.

We must also be in solidarity with the intentions the pope is indicating. For example, this week the pope asked for many prayers so that the meeting of Middle Eastern leaders with the president of the United States will lead to peace in that land of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>. We don't know what was achieved, but the prayer of Christians, this sacramental people of God, can obtain graces to help those leaders of the United States and the Middle East to find the paths to peace.

We want to rejoice also, within our church, with our dear brother, Bishop Rivera Damas, who is celebrating twenty-five years of priestly life. On September 16 at ten o'clock in the morning, in his Diocese of Santiago de María, there will be a Mass of thanksgiving. I will have the pleasure of taking part in it.

I want to rejoice also because of the tenth-anniversary celebration last Sunday of the Foundation of Development and Low-cost Housing. This work is part of the new church of love, of prophecy, and of sacrament. I didn't realize that the sense of community of the people working there was so advanced. As Father Ibáñez told them, their work is not just a matter of resolving the housing problem. Just as we make houses, he said, we could be making hats or shoes. What matters is creating love and community. There was truly a sense of community there; the people were happy to have their little house, but more than anything, they were happy because of the mutual love they felt as part of a new community. These are testimonies of our church. Blessed be God!

I want to rejoice also with the testimony of the Catholics of the parish of El Rosario de la Paz, who write to say that Father Rafael Barahona is totally dedicated to his pastoral ministry. Those who know him realize he has never been a subversive, as they've tried to label him.

I want to thank the group of Christians who are listening to me there in the town of Santa Fe, Department of Ocotepeque, Honduras, and who came here last Sunday. Also, the nice letter of Don Rafael Humberto Pinto, a celebrator of the word, gave us a new sense of the mission of our church in this archdiocese.

As church we cannot feel indifferent to the problems of persecution in our sister church in Nicaragua. The government there expelled Father Pedro María Belzunegui and Father José María Pacheco. A soldier brutally beat the army chaplain, Father Donald García. The National Guard violently invaded the church of Santa María de los Angeles in Managua. They also opened fire against the façade of a school of the Salesian Fathers, and they arrested two men of that order. The church has already threatened to excommunicate those responsible.

People shouldn't laugh at the idea of excommunicating someone who doesn't believe in the church, because as we just said, the church has that power as one of its sacramental signs. When a community expels a Christian, then God also considers that person expelled. The

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<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL I, «Pray for the Middle East and the Whole World», Sunday allocution on 10 September 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (17 April 1978).

people feel that they are sanctioning those who offend in this way by expelling them from their midst, and we have said the same thing when we've had similar cases.

### Events of the week

The journal of the International Commission of Jurists has published the conclusions of the commission's investigation of violation of human rights in El Salvador. Their testimony is sincere. Among other things they state, «During 1977-78 the International Commission of Jurists has received numerous denunciations from reliable sources recounting hundreds of cases of the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms. In almost all the cases, the victims have been union and political leaders, *campesinos* and workers, men and women equally. The accusations range from assassination, rape, and torture to the arrest and disappearance of detained persons (the authorities claiming they made no arrests)»<sup>4</sup>. The report is long, and for lack of time I won't read other details here, but they are of great significance for our country's welfare.

The Minister of Justice has declared the government's unwavering determination to guarantee freedom of expression, leaving it to the judgment of the directors of the media to censure themselves<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps we could say with the poet, «What a great shame that something so beautiful is untrue!» [Applause]

A report from the Ministry of Education points out that there are more than a million and a half illiterate persons in the country, which is equivalent to thirty-seven percent of our population.

How can our church remain indifferent in face of the rains that have caused flooding this week in the neighborhoods of Montserrat, América, San Esteban, Costa Rica, San Juan, Centro América, Barrio San Miguelito, Concepción, Santa Lucía, Urbanización Universitaria, Reparto Santa Fe, and San José? If we claim that the church is a community of love and charity, I urge my dear fellow Christians and all the communities to make themselves present in these suffering zones to help their sisters and brothers who are in urgent need of aid. I also invite you to read the «Solidarity» page in *Orientación*, and you'll see there our intention to be united to all those who are suffering.

Because of what's happening in Nicaragua, people are talking about the communist threat, which I admit we cannot ignore, but I would also remind you, dear sisters and brothers, that we are certainly not Marxists. We are anti-Marxists by reason of our Gospel principles, but we want to remind you also that the real struggle against Marxism consists in eliminating the causes that engender Marxism. That means changing the breeding ground in which it develops and offering an alternative to take its place. It's easy to cry out against Marxism and point to its influence everywhere—and certainly the danger in Nicaragua is great—but I also tell you, sisters and brothers, that «this mud comes from that dust!» We possibly still have time to apply medicine to the root of the problem: the best anti-Marxism is a more just society that does away with the situations that give rise to Marxism. [Applause]

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<sup>4</sup> «Review of the International Commission of Jurists, No. 20» in *La Crónica del Pueblo* (8 September 1978).

<sup>5</sup> *El Mundo* (5 September 1978).

We suffered and we also rejoiced at the kidnapping and reappearance of Gloria Magdalena Querlet Batarsé in Santa Ana<sup>6</sup>. The police rescued her, but her parents had to pay 15,000 *colones*<sup>7</sup>.

We want to express again our solidarity with the anguish of Mrs. Matsumoto, who for religious reasons is offering 50,000 *colones* to anyone who can give her information about her husband's body. According to her faith, the body must be burned—cremated—in order to be considered dead. She also explains, «I don't want to return to my country without the ashes of my dear husband»<sup>8</sup>. Let us understand her situation, and let us hope that people won't be so cruel. Because somebody knows! Perhaps the person who knows the mystery is listening to me—make it known!

This is the way things are as we draw close to our independence celebrations. On its «Solidarity» page, *Orientación*<sup>9</sup> has published ninety-nine cases of disappeared persons, and five more should now be added to these. The Committee of Mothers of Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons wants to celebrate independence by requesting an amnesty. The church has already done so, and she is in agreement with celebrating independence in a way that is truly a sign of freedom for the many homes that lack any form of well-being.

I also want to make a clarification because a news item in *La Prensa Gráfica* has caused alarm<sup>10</sup>. It concerns the distribution of the 100,000 *colones* that the Monedero family has given for the families of disappeared persons and political prisoners. The commission responsible for distributing this money is about to finish its study on how to share it out in just proportion to each of those named by the kidnappers of Mr. Monedero. A declaration came from the Committee of Mothers saying that they were going to create a common fund with the proportion they receive, but that doesn't mean that all the money will be given to them. I think that should be made clear.

With regard to amnesty, we rejoice with the people of the Dominican Republic, where this week an amnesty was granted that will benefit 200 prisoners. Three anti-communist laws were also repealed, and the country's doors were reopened to those living in exile. The president of Mexico has also proposed a law that will benefit one thousand political prisoners, disappeared persons, and citizens living in exile who have been denounced in Mexico. Since the time of the football championship in Argentina, twenty-six thousand people have signed a petition asking the pope to intercede so that an amnesty will also be granted in that southern land, Argentina.

Labor conflicts continue to result in assaults on the right of free association.

Dear sisters and brothers, it is not for reasons of scandal or spectacle that the prophetic church must expose the social conditions where she is working; rather, she does so because it is her duty. She does so because if the prophet fails to cry out, «Be converted, you who do wrong!», the wrongdoers may perish, but the prophet will also perish for not speaking her prophetic word. And now, so that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Prophet, will give us the

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<sup>6</sup> In some publications the surname is Querlat, in others Queralt.

<sup>7</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 September 1978).

<sup>8</sup> «Statement of Asako de Matsumoto» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (5 September 1978).

<sup>9</sup> *Orientación* (10 September 1978).

<sup>10</sup> «Common Fund to be Created with the Monedero Money» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 September 1978).

strength we need to live as a church ever more inserted into the present reality as a truly sacramental community of our people, as a community that prophesies about these realities, and above all as a community of love that binds us together in the Lord, let us celebrate the Eucharist. That is where we find the nourishment of this community that is not to be confused with other organizations but that serves all organizations by preserving its own identity as prophetic, sacramental, and loving! Let it be so. [Applause]