

106

THE CHURCH OF JOHN PAUL I

**Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
1 October 1978**

Ezekiel 18:25-28
Philippians 2:1-11
Matthew 21:28-32

We are going to title this homily, «The Church of John Paul», and I suggest that we make our Gospel reflection this morning an homage of faith, gratitude, affection, and remembrance of that figure who in little more than a month won the heart of the world¹. There in the Vatican his lifeless body is the object of the faithful's veneration as they make their pilgrimage past his catafalque. We also are present and accompany in spirit that sorrowful procession of a church that has been widowed and orphaned but that like the Virgin Mary at the death and burial of her son, maintains a sure hope of resurrection. We know that even when a pope lies lifeless, the words of Jesus are still truthful: «You are rock». Even though, as mortal men, two hundred sixty-two popes have died—amazing number—«the gates of death will not prevail» (Matt 16:18).

On Wednesday the cardinals arriving in Rome will celebrate the funeral of the pope, and ten days later they will assemble in the conclave to choose a new successor of Saint Peter. We pray therefore for the eternal rest of the deceased pope because as a man he has been judged by God, and God's justice is impartial whether applied to popes, to kings, or to humble Christians. The people of God should always ask God's mercy because none of us is saved by our own merits—we have learned that lesson here from Saint Paul. Rather, we are saved by trusting humbly in the infinite mercy and infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to express my gratitude for the many expressions of solidarity that our office has received or that have been published in the newspapers. Let us hope that these gestures of condolence move us to bear witness to the sincerity of a church that appeared so beautifully in the person of John Paul—a church of faith, sincerity, simplicity, love, etc.

Five Sundays ago when we were presenting the Gospel of Saint Matthew here in the cathedral, in circumstances that only God foresees in his eternity, we preached on Christ's dialogue with the first pope: «You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church» (Matt 16:18). Commenting on the gospel in our customary way, we said that the archdiocese was offering the new pope, John Paul, a lively community. As we joyfully beheld the new pope with his broad smile open to the world, we described our hopes, our anxieties, our tribulations, and our concrete weekly history. At that moment who could ever have foretold the death of the pope as he accepted that offering of our archdiocese? And yet our archdiocese stays faithfully on track. And even though he has already reached the goal of this pilgrimage on which we all

¹ Pope John Paul I died on 28 September 1978.

are journeying, we will continue on, always trying to be faithful to that church that he lit up for us.

It occurs to me to tell you that, just as the news report said that they found the lamp in his bedroom still burning at dawn on September 29, so John Paul has left his light turned on in the church. Even if he had told us nothing else but that in his teaching program he was always going to refer to the Second Vatican Council and try to imitate his predecessors, that alone would suffice to make this John Paul present to church history and would counsel us, «Stay on that path. The lights turned on by Vatican II and the present teaching of the church are the authentic Christian paths». Even though many people have tried to manipulate the Council's words and use them for their own benefit, we can say impartially that we have seen the approach, the ministry, and the teaching of John Paul, and we have nothing to regret. We can only continue to walk in that radiance of his that guides our way. The light of the church's teaching shines like the lamp that John Paul left burning, and we find it in Vatican II, the encyclicals, and the teachings and the outlooks of the modern church.

Life of the church

What has been our history this week, Holy Father? What does the grieving church of the archdiocese offer you now? We offer you communities that are joyful, hard-working, and committed, such as the one that I had the good fortune to visit last Sunday in Aguilares when they were celebrating the first anniversary of their clinic with its three doctors and a collaborating team. Father Octavio Cruz and the Sacred Heart Sisters have wisely known how to join helping hands with the needy hands of so many poor and infirm *campesinos*.

In the fervent community of Comasagua, a team of catechists met with me last Tuesday along with their pastor, Father Chalo, to study the various problems that the pastoral agents are trying to deal with in all sincerity. At the same time, some hypocrites with no pastoral aims at all are trying to intimidate and frighten our communities.

We also offer you, Holy Father, the community of Guazapa. When I was there, celebrating the feast of Saint Michael Archangel with the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Joseph and the priests of the vicariate, I told the people, «The words I want to speak I'm not going to take from books but from the sorrowful news that the radio just announced: the pope has died». We then applied the figure of Saint Michael, patron of the church there, to the ministry of the church and of the pope. As the Bible tells us, the archangel, the pope, and the entire church offer the people's priestly homage to God in the form of incense, whereby all the faithful offer to God their own works as small grains of incense (Rev 8:3). In a prophetic sense, Saint Michael and the pope are the angels who guard the church's true doctrine. In the face of so many mendacious campaigns they defend us in the struggles against evil, against falsehood, against deceit. The pope has also guided the church's history in a pastoral sense as well, just as the archangels of God so often guided the steps of individuals and nations.

There is also, Holy Father, the community of Nejapa, which on the following day celebrated the feast of their patron, Saint Jerome. There is also the community of the vicariate of the department of La Libertad, which yesterday gathered in Santa Tecla to study the pastoral letter. As a result, we could focus on new problems with a probing depth and interest that truly make us feel that the Holy Spirit is leading the communities of our archdiocese.

There is also—I tell you this with emotion, Holy Father—the community where I was born, Ciudad Barrios, where as a child of the soil united to my people, we paid homage to the head of that diocese, Bishop Rivera, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his priestly ordination.

There is also the community of Plan de Pino, where the Carmelite Missionaries—who help us pastorally in the Polyclinic, in La Laguna of Chalatenango, and in Plan de Pino— have prepared a community of young people who will receive this morning their Pentecost: the coming of the Holy Spirit. This week on Friday those dear sisters will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of their arrival in El Salvador.

There is also the religious life of our archdiocese. The Redemptorists are completing fifty years of missionary work in El Salvador. The Sisters of Charity have prepared another group of young people for confirmation in the Escuela Walter Deininger. On Tuesday this week in Cojutepeque the Belgian Sisters of Saint Nicholas made a precious offering to the Lord as two young *campesinas* made their profession as religious of Saint Nicholas. The Belgian sisters also work, you see, in vocational promotion.

There are also the Oblate Sisters of Divine Love, who celebrated this week the tenth anniversary of their ministry in the Escuela Catalina Dimaggio, which is doing so much good there in the Colonia La Luz. We are given hope also by the Franciscan communities of the Immaculate Conception, who have offered to found a parish-oriented community in our archdiocese and will do so soon. We think also of the Sacred Heart Sisters; they have been attacked by selfish persons who, acting out of their own mean interests, want nothing to be changed. The sisters are being valiantly defended by the teaching body of their school, and the ploys of the maligners are being revealed. Around this time when final exams are beginning, some people are also beginning to defame the prestigious schools for perverse reasons even though they know what is being taught in a school like Sagrado Corazón. It is not Marxism, nor is it ill-intended criticism of the national hymn. It is simply the cultivation of the critical capacity of the students so that they know how to judge history and to live independently. The schools teach the students not to be just numbers in the crowd, even though mean interests would like to keep it that way to prevent them from developing themselves and offering criticism.

Our sense of community is also revealed in all the activities of the diocese. With great delight I attended the roundtable at the Universidad José Simeón Cañas, where I was invited to dialogue about the pastoral letter. I found very interesting that environment of culture and science where *campesinos* were also present. Everyone was engaged in dialogue about a topic of much current interest, even though there is the risk that it will be badly misunderstood if it is not seen in the light of the Gospel.

There is also the activity in the Centro Ana Guerra de Jesús, which fills me with great consolation. That is where a group of men and women from the markets have taken part in a course being given throughout Central America. They continue to do marvelous development work, mainly for the sake of women.

There is also the work of the Catholic schools, which are now holding their lovely commencement ceremonies in order to offer to God the educational work of the church.

We offer you all this, Holy Father, and since you are already in heaven, we name you as our intercessor for the three days of prayers for Nicaragua that took place this week here in the cathedral. We prayed in an ecumenical spirit since several members of non-Catholic Christian communities also took part. Our church, in solidarity with the bishops and the people of Nicaragua, reiterates her support for the Nicaraguan hierarchy. In this way, as the pope has said, we are respecting the autonomy of the individual churches. We cannot propose criteria for those pastors who are living close to the problems; all we can do is support the decisions of Archbishop Obando, the bishops, and other responsible persons of the church in Nicaragua as they search for peaceful solutions. Like them, we desire that the will of the majority of the people be respected, that all parties be invited to dialogue, and that conditions conducive to dialogue be created. We hope that in this way the people's will can be realized in the governing of Nicaragua, for that is the meaning of authentic democracy.

In the church of the archdiocese our prayer for Nicaragua is ongoing. This afternoon at five o'clock, in the chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital, there will be an hour of prayer. We invite everyone to be there to pray for the needs of our church, especially in Nicaragua. The diocese also holds out its hand to all the parishes, asking them to contribute economic aid for our needy sisters and brothers of Nicaragua.

Finally, among other things, the church of our archdiocese is approaching—or I should say is already beginning today—the month of the Holy Rosary. We recall one of John Paul's most beautiful testimonies, telling of the love he had for the Virgin as a child. We speak of a child's love because on this day the diocese also wants to join in the Universal Day of the Child, and she does so not with pompous homage but with a gospel saying that is the best praise of children, «If you do not become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven» (Matt 18:3). In his photographic album John Paul leaves us several photos where he is seen in affectionate exchange with children during his brief pontificate, but even more than the photographs, it was his own childlike spirit that helped him understand the confidence that children have in their mothers. He compared it to the confidence that the people should have in their God, for God loves us more than a mother. Indeed, people have more need of God than children do of their mothers.

In his discourse when he assumed leadership of the church, the pope said that just as the Virgin had accompanied him in his childhood, in his seminary days, in his priesthood, and in his time as bishop, so would she continue to accompany him as a mother during his pontificate, and he would continue to be her child². Sadly, his pontificate was short, but he has still left us these words. We therefore tell you as we begin the month of the Virgin of the Rosary: let us trust in her, and let us pray hard, sisters and brothers. If the rosary has dropped from your hands, another victim of the secularist tide, remember that as powerful as the tide of worldly secularization may be, the world will always be in need of prayer and of Mary. And the more autonomous the world becomes with regard to God, the more compelled those who believe in God will feel to reconnect this world with God, and there is no chain more beautiful for joining the world with God than the chain of the holy rosary.

That's why I tell you, sisters and brothers, that through these humble activities the church can serve to capture and sum up so many other parish or family events in our diocese.

² JOHN PAUL I, «Homily in the Official Inaugural Mass of his Pontificate», 3 September 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 September 1978).

As we shed light on this pilgrim church in the archdiocese, this church that is mourning for the death of the pope all around the world, we ask: what church is this? And the answer to the question I give you now with the title of my homily: it is «The Church of John Paul» because it is the church of John the Baptist and the church of Paul the apostle.

Nowadays it seems that people no longer think much about apostles or precursors, but still there arise among us figures who insist on calling themselves John, such as the unforgettable John XXIII and the unforgettable John Paul. And there also arise intelligent figures, who are far more intelligent than certain detractors of the church, such as the brainy Paul VI. John Baptist Montini decided to take the name Paul fifteen years ago to betoken the fearlessness with which he, despite his weaknesses, his illnesses, and his aches and pains, would carry the church to the heights of the General Assembly of the United Nations and, like Saint Paul, along the highways and byways of the entire world.

John and Paul—why did they want to be called by those names? And why did our beloved deceased pope want to join the two names, John Paul, in his own person? I find the answer in today's readings. Excuse me for saying this, but there's a reason why the Lord gave us the readings we just heard: so that we might grasp the spirit with which John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul went about preaching. For they did not preach a doctrine of their own invention or a doctrine that lets itself be manipulated by worldly interests; rather, they preached the authentic doctrine that God revealed to the precursor of Christ, John the Baptist. And today Christ has told us, «John came to you teaching you the ways of justice» (Matt 21:32). What words could be more opportune! It is as though Christ, pointing to the body of John Paul, were speaking directly to us and recalling the Baptist's words: «John came to you teaching you the ways of justice».

In the second of today's readings Paul describes for us two unmistakable characteristics of the church, both of which were preached in our times by popes named John and Paul. Following Saint Paul, all the pontiffs—John Paul, Paul VI, John XXIII—have preached that this church is first of all one of communion. «Be of one mind», Paul tells us (Phil 2:2), and in those words we seem to be hearing the voice of John Paul, who so often during his brief pontificate called people to love: «Be of one mind, joined in love, united in heart, thinking one thing» (Phil 2:2). This is the church of communion. But it is also the church enlivened by the mystery of Christ, which Saint Paul describes for us at the end of today's reading. Using the most sublime language to be found in the Bible, he speaks of the Christ who is pre-existent, the Christ who humbles himself even to the cross, and the Christ who is exalted for all eternity. That is the Christ who walks with the church (Phil 2:6-11).

The church of John Paul is the church of John the Baptist

Let us try to analyze briefly, sisters and brothers, the richness of this doctrine that the church of John Paul offers us. We receive this valuable inheritance from his hands still warm with life and death.

What is the church of John? In today's first reading and in the parable of the two sons one thing becomes apparent: individuals are personally responsible before the will of God. The father of the parable says to his two sons, that is, to humanity, «Today I want you to work in my vineyard; today I want to give you a calling in life» (Matt 21:28). All of us sharing now in this

reflection have received a calling, a vocation. Naturally, we have a vocation simply to live, but we also have a vocation in terms of intelligence, personal qualities, professional skills.

Moreover, the Lord commands us by his will which is inspired by his justice. John came to teach us the justice of God and the commandments of the Lord (Matt 21:32). Pope John Paul, who was a great catechist, peppered his most solemn audiences with catechetical lessons. Like all catechists, he told people about the law of God that bids us be good. This is the will of God; this is the mission of women and men.

We can respond to this God who commands us in two manners, as the parable indicates. «I don't want to go» is the cry of Lucifer. «*Non serviam*. I will not serve you» is the cry of sinners, the cry of rebellion, and unfortunately it is the cry of the many people who think they have been given freedom to reject God rather than to seek God in freedom. What a great many spoiled children God has! «I don't want to!» screams the child who throws a tantrum before his mother; that's how we often are before God: «I won't do it!» (Matt 21:29).

The other son, polite and well behaved, tells his father, «Yes, I'll be glad to go», but he doesn't go. The first son then repents and says to his father, «I will go», or else he says nothing and simply goes to work and does what his father wants. Christ asks, «Which of the two did the will of his father?» All of you—and I as well—could respond the same way Christ's audience responded, «The first one, the one who said he wouldn't go but then went, but not the other son, the one who's polite but disobedient» (Matt 21:30-31).

Christ then applies the lesson, and it's a hard lesson indeed! Remember that we're dealing with the section of the Gospel of Saint Matthew in which Matthew is reflecting on conflicts in the first Christian communities. He is presenting for us the tension that must always exist in the church between the will of God and the desires of human beings. In this instance Christ had before him the leaders of Israel: priests, rulers, politicians, professionals of his time. Totally intrepid, Christ addresses some hard words to these men: «That is why the publicans and the prostitutes will precede you leaders on the road to the kingdom. They will go ahead of you leaders of the people» (Matt 21:31). Believe me, sisters and brothers, it gives me great pleasure to recall these words of Christ and to tell all who are sinners, myself first of all, that we should trust in the Lord, even if at some time we've had the audacity to tell him, «I will not serve you». Even if we've wandered on paths of forbidden pleasure or illicit gains, as was the case with the prostitutes and the publicans, Christ tells us that we can go before those who think they are on the path to the kingdom of heaven. Who knows who truly obeyed?

That's what Christ says: «John came preaching penance and telling sinners, "Be converted", and many tax collectors and many prostitutes believed in John. But you leaders did not believe in him. Instead you maligned him. John came to preach justice, and you said he was possessed by a demon» (Matt 21:32). If the term «communist» had existed then, they'd no doubt have said, «John is a communist!» All those who preach justice will find themselves up against the stone wall of people who don't want to change their ways, who don't want to orient their relationships with others by the ways of justice. These people will then brand John the Baptist and all who try to imitate him with this kind of epithet. They refused to believe in him; as Christ says, «John came, and they did not believe in him». The sinners, however, heard words of hope and thought, «God can forgive us».

In this regard, since we're reflecting on John Paul, one of the episodes that touched me deeply, among many things of his brief pontificate, was when a woman approached his pontifical throne during a general audience and said to him, «Holy Father, I feel so empty and sinful. Will the Lord save me? Will he forgive me?» The pope asked her, «How old are you?» She said, «I'm thirty». The pope then said, «Why are you so anxious? You are young. You still have before you forty years, more or less. Why not take advantage of your life to repent and walk on the right path?» The path of that prostitute was then illuminated by the same light that John the Baptist set ablaze, and it is the same light that the church is shining forth. I sincerely hope, sisters and brothers, that I never feel ashamed that my humble words had the immense honor of being a tiny ray of light and hope that reached into dark spaces—perhaps into brothels, perhaps into the dens of criminals, perhaps into the lairs of the vice-ridden. I know that they're listening to me in many places. May the words of Christ reach today those who most have need of them: «The publicans and the prostitutes will go first into the kingdom of God for they listened to John who came to preach repentance and justice» (Matt 21:31-32). They will go before those of you who are proud and dishonest, you who know only how to disparage and distort the words of the Gospel. May the Lord grant that it not be too late when you repent of your mistakes.

The other day somebody claimed that I had asked people to applaud in the cathedral for the death of the university dean. When did I do that? As I've told you, I've traveled through many communities, and I've been told everywhere about ORDEN's sad campaign of going about telling the *campesinos* not to listen to YSAX, not to listen to the bishop because he's a communist, not to read *Orientación*, not to read the Bible, and to sign up as members of ORDEN if they really want to be saved. And there are courageous Christians who have responded, «We'd prefer to die, and in any case we're going to die someday³. But we know that the bishop is our pastor, and he is leading us along the path of the Gospel». Many have spoken absurdities and claimed that I've made stupid statements. I ask them, «Did you hear me say that?» They respond, «No, but people say...» This is the height of foolishness, criticizing someone without putting on the witness stand the person who is to be judged. «John came preaching the ways of justice, but you did not believe in him» (Matt 21:32).

Today's first reading ratifies the idea of the parable. Ezekiel lived at a time when Israel was being punished by God with exile. The people thought that their ancestors were sinners and that they were paying for the sins of their ancestors. The prophet Ezekiel stands out for preaching the personal responsibility of the one who sins. Remember when the apostles asked Christ about a blind man: «Who sinned, this man or his parents?» Christ told them, «Neither he nor his parents sinned; this is happening for the glory of God» (John 9:2-3). But even in cases where there is sin, says the prophet Ezekiel, each person is responsible before God in his or her own conscience.

Let us not forget this, sisters and brothers. It is true that the bishops in Medellín affirmed the existence of structural sin, which is the social or communal sin that inheres in society (M 2,1). But even though there are the structures of sin that inhere in the social situation, God does not call the structures to account. Rather, he calls to account every man and woman who lives in the structures. The judgment of God, says the prophet Ezekiel, will be according to each person's conduct. If wicked persons have converted and are now doing what

³ The transcribed Spanish reads, «*no vamos a morir* (we're not going to die)» but perhaps should read «*nos vamos a morir* (we're going to die)».

is right and just, they will live; God saves them because they have converted. And if good people, as holy as they may have been, become perverted and do things that are wrong, then they'll be lost because of their works, and they will die. «They go about saying that this is unjust», declares the prophet, «but God says: “Are not you the ones who are unjust?”». God is just, for he rewards each person according to his or her works (Ezek 18:30).

Sisters and brothers, all of us are responsible for our own destiny. There are many people who believe in a destiny that is blind, as though some force were moving it so that it can only end up bad. It is wrong to believe this; it would be like telling God, «You have not made me free». The human person always has the last word about being good or being bad. It is not God who sends us to hell or to heaven; we send ourselves there by what we desire. If you want to be evil and persevere in evil and die in your injustices, then you will die for sure. That means that you end up condemning yourself if you find yourself in evil ways. There is mention today of publicans and prostitutes, but we could add many other types of sinners, even the people responsible for the structures of sin. Those who misuse economic power are on a sinful path. If they don't convert and seek the path of justice, they will not live, and they will have only themselves to blame.

In light of these basic principles of God's true morality, it is rather comical for us to be waiting to see what the pope is going to do, so that we'll know whether he agrees with us or disagrees. With John Paul many people didn't take time to catalogue him or figure out what side he was on because it didn't suit them. Some were hoping that he would support one position, and others were hoping that he'd support another position, as if morality depended on the pope and not on each one of us. To be sure, the pope is the teacher who educates us, but following his teaching is the task of each person. We didn't have to wait for John Paul to say that greedy, materialist capitalism is evil and so conclude, «The pope is with the communists». Of course, when the pope announced, «There can be no collaboration with communism», people said, «Ah, so you see: the pope is with the capitalists». How easy it is to misinterpret statements when people are prejudiced and seeking personal interests!

Every human person has a conscience, and the pope is the teacher who in God's name enlightens our conscience. But how blind people can be when consumed by passion! How often we've seen a good wife weep because her husband is in love with an adulteress; he is consumed by passion so that it's hard for him to believe God's voice that is telling him that the affair is wrong. This was the case with John the Baptist as he confronted Herod, who was passionately attracted to his own brother's wife. When John the Baptist told him, «That is wrong», Herod sent him to be executed, and they chopped off his head (Matt 14:1-11). That is the destiny of prophets because they must point out the most painful and burning sores; they have to run risks with those who don't want to hear them.

Who will be pope now? What stands will the new pope take? Whoever he is, his voice cannot be other than the voice of John, who came to preach justice (Matt 21:32). Whoever the pope may be, we humans have to seek out the paths of justice, love, goodness, and holiness. As holy as the pope may be, those unjust persons who refuse to be converted will be condemned, even though the pope is saved. This is what morality is all about. This is the church of John Paul. This is the church of John the Baptist. This is the church of Saint Paul.

The church of John Paul is the church of Saint Paul

My second thought, then, is taken from Saint Paul: the church of John Paul is the church of Saint Paul, the church of communion. In today's second reading Saint Paul encourages us to stay united in heart, and he teaches us the causes of disunity. This is a wonderful examination of conscience for us, dear sisters and brothers, as we consider what will come after Pope John Paul. During his short pontificate, John Paul worked for church unity and, going even beyond the church, he sought ecumenical unity, something he envisioned with a great smile.

Let us listen to Saint Paul, who tells us that disunity results when we act out of envy or ostentation and when we focus just on our own personal interests (Phil 2:3). Today's letter makes crystal clear what is causing the great problems of our society. There is nothing noble about acting out of envy. Envy makes us trip up those who are doing good; it makes us rejoice when others suffer. There's a lot of tripping up going on now; there is a lot of envy.

Dear sisters and brothers, as we hear Saint Paul urging us not to let our faith consist in ostentation, I want to recall here especially the figure of John Paul. Hardly a week ago, when he was taking possession of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, the pope said, «The poor are the true treasure of the church. They should therefore be helped by those who can help them without their being humiliated or offended by ostentatious riches, by money squandered on useless things instead of being invested whenever possible in mutually advantageous ventures»⁴. Do you see how the pope supports the idea that the authentic church cannot be anything else but a church concerned with and identified with the poor? The poor are those who truly represent the presence of the Lord: «Whatever you do for one of them, you do for me» (Matt 25:40).

Saint Paul also spells out for us the basis of unity in this church of communion. What is it that will unify us amid all the great problems that divide us? Saint Paul points to humility and concern for the interests of others (Phil 2:3-4), and he's exactly right. Those who are proud, those who submit to no one, those who want to be the big bosses—they don't fit in anywhere, and that's why they have no room for other people. In contrast, there are people who are humble and who—as Saint Paul tells us today—seek their true happiness in serving others. That was John Paul, the man who reached the highest post of humanity in becoming pope, and from those heights he still remembered his origins as the child of a humble worker. In this way he called us all to opt for poverty and simplicity. That man who did not want to be crowned with the pontifical tiara, that man who did not want to use the *sedes gestatoria* except in case of need, that simple, humble man was a model of what people should be today, instruments and architects of peace.

Between the readings this morning the choir from Tejutla sang the beautiful hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi, «*Laudato sí, Signore*—May you be praised, Lord». That man, Saint Francis of Assisi, summoned all creatures to praise God because he was a poor man.

Christ, our Lord

My last thought is about the church's most magnificent foundation, Christ, our Lord. Saint Paul ends today's precious reading by urging us to have the same sentiments as Christ Jesus, and he goes on to describe Christ for us (Phil 2:5). This is what holds all our reflections together:

⁴ JOHN PAUL I, «Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration in Saint John Lateran», 23 September 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (1 October 1978).

Christ. Even if the modern popes have inspired the world by their good example and their wisdom, it is only because they dedicated all their talent to expressing this great truth: Christ is alive in the church. The church is nothing else but the prolongation of Christ's mission.

Paul VI in particular had a very special gift for speaking about this fusion between Christ and the church, and in today's epistle Paul tells us what this Christ is like who is giving life to this church. First, he is a Christ who pre-existed in eternity and so has the nature of God. Before the Virgin conceived him in her womb, he already existed. «In the beginning the Word already was», says Saint John (John 1:1), and that eternal God had no beginning and will have no end.

Second, he became man. This is what Saint Paul calls *kenosis*. That's a Greek word I would like to you to learn because it expresses the beauty of our faith in Christ. *Kenosis* means «emptying oneself». Christ stripped himself of his divine rank. It's as if a sovereign ruler put aside her crown, her throne, her royal cloak—and then clothed herself in peasant dress in order to walk among the peasants without her regal demeanor disturbing them. In like manner, Christ clothes himself in humanity and appears «like an ordinary man» (Phil 2:7-8). If Christ were here today in the cathedral, sitting among you people who are so kind as to be listening to me, I would not be able to pick him out. And yet I know that he is the Son of God in human garb! Moreover, Christ was not satisfied with just looking like other humans; instead, he humbled himself and took on the form of a slave in order to die the death of slaves, crucified on a cross. He died like an outlaw, like rubbish, like the outcasts of Israel who had to be crucified outside the city walls. This is Christ, the God who humbled himself to the point of *kenosis*, emptying the very depths of himself.

But that's why Saint Paul ends this beautiful hymn by declaring, «Because of this, God glorified him and raised him up to the highest heights so that to honor him every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and in the depths, and every tongue should confess: "Christ is Lord!"» (Phil 2:9-10).

Dear sisters and brothers, this is the glory of the church: to bear in her inmost self the essence of the *kenosis* of Christ, and that is why she must be humble and poor. An arrogant church, a church supported by the powers of earth, a church without *kenosis*, a church full of pride and self-sufficiency—that is not the church of the *kenosis* Saint Paul preached; it is not the church of John Paul; it is not the church of the authentic popes. The true church is the one that confesses, as John Paul said in his inaugural discourse, that she feels the fear that Peter felt when he set out to walk on the water; he was tottering with fright until Christ told him, «O you of little faith, why are you afraid?» (Matt 14:31).

This is the power of the church, which is not the power of humans. Hardly one month ago you saw on television the ceremony of the pope's installation as pontiff in Saint Peter's Square. He seemed almost like a beggar, asking each cardinal for the kindness of his friendship, collaboration, and assistance. We never imagined that someone who scaled these heights would say to others, «Help me». That is humility. That is the *kenosis* of the church: the conviction that the poor and humble Christ, emptied of the grandeur of God, accompanies this church that must also bear the mark of the divine *kenosis*.

But at the same time, the church has great hopes of glorification for she is the church of Easter, the church of resurrection, the church that will have no end because God has made her the spouse of the One whose «name is above every name» (Phil 2:9). It is he whom we are

going to honor in our Eucharist today, but we also want to bring to our Eucharist the anguished voice of our country. This church of *kenosis* and glorification, this church of communion and conversion, this church of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Paul of Tarsus, this church that has become modern with Paul VI, John XXIII, and John Paul—this church wants to be alive with her own identity here in the archdiocese, and she also want to share in the conflicts that are part of our own history.

Events of the week

And so it is, sisters and brothers, that we have enjoyed the confidence of students and anguished families who have come to denounce and to clarify the true causes and events that have led to the closing of our university.

The students have stated their intentions and expressed their unhappiness at the massive failures in third-year mathematics. They have also complained about what they say is the brutal repression unleashed by the university police, which is under the control of the Armed Forces. The students also denounce the disappearance of Guillermo Iraheta and the death of the student José Armando Vega García, who was shot in the back and hospitalized for a week in the Social Security Hospital. They also deplore the death of Doctor Carlos Rodríguez, dean of the economics faculty. This is the sad balance of events, and sad also is the situation of those being held in the prison of the university police. What a contradiction in terms! What are the lawyers saying? What are the professional associations saying about this humiliation of the alma mater? What can be said of this mockery of police and prisons, of prisoners and disappeared, of students killed in El Salvador's highest center of culture? Most deplorable of all are the patent lies of the security forces regarding Guillermo Atilio Iraheta Valle, who has been working for ANDA for eleven years⁵. His wife and his six children saw the barbaric way in which they beat him. The Red Cross affirms that they did not allow her to enter to attend to him after he was beaten. What is ANDA doing with its employees, even though its president is a colonel?

We also deplore the kidnapping of Doctor Alfonso Castro Sam. What were the motives?

In any case, we certainly want to voice a demand in the name of the family of the ANDA employee, Guillermo Atilio Iraheta Valle. We ask that for the sake of his distressed wife and his orphaned children that the authorities pay heed to the cries of this poor woman who has gone begging for justice to the Supreme Court of Justice, to the military officials, and to the director of ANDA, and everywhere she's told just to conform and be patient, as if the resolution of these injustices were not in their hands.

Our church would not be authentic if she tolerated all these injustices, but since she is authentic, we must also deplore the case of a young woman who was shot near the zoo. On Monday she was kidnapped from the Rosales Hospital where she was still recovering from her wound. The judicial authorities have informed that the young woman was taken into custody

⁵ Guillermo Atilio Iraheta Valle was an employee of ANDA (the National Administration of Aqueducts and Drains) and was responsible for the water pump opposite one of the entrances to the national university. On 18 September 1978, after two university watchmen were killed, other watchmen captured Iraheta, beat him, and took him into the university compound. Nothing more was known of him. His family looked for him and made a public protest, but no authority gave information about his whereabouts. See *El Diario de Hoy* (21 & 25 September 1978).

by agents of the National Police who refused to identify themselves. Her family fears for the fate of this poor girl. We ask that justice intervene to avoid another cruel transgression.

There have been other arrests. For example, in Comalapa they captured the *campesina* María Evangelina Galdámez, nineteen years old, and no one knows where they took her. There has been repression against the *campesinos* of Cinquera and San Pedro Perulapán. That zone had already been ravaged. Have some mercy on them! At least twenty-three *campesinos* have disappeared in that zone already; twenty-five have been killed by ORDEN or by the army and other security forces. The last one killed was an old man seventy-three years of age, Jesús Villeda; members of ORDEN killed him with nine machete blows on September 27. Twenty-two other people are being held for political motives. The people are being systematically harassed; the houses of the *campesinos* who have organized are being burned down, and even their lives are being threatened.

Along that same line we have to mention the bodies found on the road to Apulo: Mauricio Mendoza Flores and Manuel de Jesús Campos. They were catechists who had been meeting with other Christians. The perpetrators of the crime already have those other Christians on a list, and they've told them that they can be protected only if they become members of ORDEN. This is unjust pressure.

The church cannot be silent in face of these attacks on the right of our workers to organize. The unionized workers of the CEL company denounce that the plants in Soyapango, Acajutla, and Ahuachapán are still under the control of the National Guard.

Also, the FUSS denounced the capture of José Julián Ramírez Barrera. They fired six union leaders at the plant of Industrias Metálicas Prado, which means they have decapitated the union organizing effort. And let us not forget, even though we haven't mentioned it for a while, that more than 200 *campesino* families are dying of hunger near Minas de San Sebastián; they aren't given any work, and their labor dispute has not been resolved.

The church must also feel the suffering of the victims of El Bambural. We want to cite the valuable testimony of the president of ISTA. Referring to the lopsided distribution of land, he stated that «in El Salvador there's a powder keg with the fuse burning, and it will soon explode»—those are his words⁶. I recall here the comparison that somebody made for me: «ISTA has also become a circus lion. It has no fangs».

Sisters and brothers, let us celebrate our Eucharist now that we have reflected on the divine message of the prophets, a message that is made contemporary in the modern popes and even in the death of John Paul. The church of conversion offers a word of hope for sinners and a word of terror for those who don't want to change their ways. The church of communion offers a word of love and open arms to help us transform our selfish sentiments into the saving sentiments of Christ. Let us be the church of *kenosis*, the church of self-emptying, the church of humility, the church that hopes in the glory of the risen Christ. That is what we are going to celebrate now: «We proclaim your death! We proclaim your resurrection! Come, Lord Jesus!»

⁶ *El Diario de Hoy* (28 September 1978).