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THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY ACTIVELY AWAITING CHRIST'S RETURN

**Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time
19 November 1978**

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

Dear sisters and brothers, all of you who have attentively followed the liturgical year will be aware that every Sunday we have been seeking light from one of the gospels. This year it was the Gospel of Saint Matthew that shed the light of our Lord's teachings on the life of our community, the church. Well, now with the end of the liturgical year we are also reaching the end of Saint Matthew's Gospel. We might say that this is almost the end since next Sunday the liturgy will celebrate the feast of Christ the King, which is now not the last Sunday of October but the last Sunday of the liturgical year. This feast serves to crown the whole mystery of Christ that we've been reflecting on during the year, and it allows us to reaffirm our own service as blessed members of God's kingdom.

This last part of the Gospel of Saint Matthew contains what is called the eschatological discourse of Christ, where he tells us about the end of time. That's what eschatology means: the end, the ultimate. Last Sunday we began to study what eschatology meant in the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Meditating on this mystery at the end of the year is something we Christians should do as a way of getting a clear view of our goal in life. Where are we heading in this pilgrimage of many weeks and months and years? Our history is really something marvelous, and nowadays theology is making us ever more aware of how God saves us *in our history*, not outside it.

Salvation is a historical event, not something of the past; it is the present history of every people, of every man and woman, of every community. It is important for us to keep this in mind because, even though in our homilies we examine concrete current events week by week, it is not out of any desire to avoid the Gospel message and the mind of the church. Rather, we do this in order to discover the salvation that God is working right now among Salvadorans, the salvation that is incarnate in our own history. That is where we should seek salvation: in our own historical happenings; it is in the life of the church of the archdiocese; it is in the life of every parish, every village, and every community. Salvation is also to be found in the secular history that surrounds us, even though not everything there contributes to God's kingdom. Indeed, the great realities of our faith and our hope in Christ are often forcefully opposed by attitudes that are atheist, materialist, and selfish. We must therefore understand that, because God's kingdom is being built in history, it must inevitably clash with historical realities. This does not mean getting involved in politics; it is simply seeking God's salvation in our history.

That is why I'm going to title today's homily, «The Church: a Community Actively Awaiting Christ's Return». That's what the church is: a dynamic community that works, clashes, keeps faith, stays active, and lives in expectation, hoping for Christ's return. This is what we proclaim in our creed: «From there he will come to judge»—the Lord is sure to return. We have here three concepts that I would like to develop this morning; the first is that we are a community in expectation. The second point is that our expectation doesn't keep us from being active; to the contrary, ours is an active expectation; otherwise it would not be Christian. And third: what is it that we're expecting? It's the return of Christ. And what is the nature of this return of Christ?

I said that we are community, and this is something I keep repeating every Sunday because one of the most urgent messages of the church today is that Christians need to put aside their individualist mentality. Let us stop talking about «my» salvation or «my» religion. Let us live as God wants us to live, as a people seeking «our» salvation in «our» pilgrimage through history. We travel as a people, as a community, just as the Israelite people did through the desert. That's the way we should go, and that's why one of the great joys of our pastoral work is the communities that are springing up everywhere. But in order to keep this orientation and not lose it, we must reflect on God's word, which tells us what the style of our life together should be. That's the way Christian communities have done it throughout the ages.

Today's three readings are reflections of ancient communities. The book of Wisdom, which describes for us the ideal woman, is a reflection of the wisdom of the people of Israel. This was the philosophy they lived as a people. According to the popular wisdom and belief of ancient Israel, what counted most was not a woman's vanity but her interior life, her fear of God. In the second reading Saint Paul addresses the community of Thessalonica and gives them some orientation about what it means to be community. I'm going to be bold and compare myself with Paul. For example, when I couldn't go to San Antonio Los Ranchos, I sent them a letter. Saint Paul couldn't visit all the communities personally, but he nourished them with his words, and that's why we have his wonderful letters which the Christian communities of today study in the same spirit as did the early communities. And what else is the Gospel of Saint Matthew if not a community reflection? All four Gospels are products of community reflection. The apostles told their communities about their own experience of direct contact with Christ, the communities reflected on this, and then, with the inspiration of God, they wrote down their reflections. As a result, the Christ we know in the Gospels is the product of these community reflections.

How wonderful it is, then, to know that we are reflecting here in the Cathedral of San Salvador on this Sunday, the nineteenth of November 1978, along with all our sister communities scattered about the whole archdiocese. I know that at this hour there are many people with their ear turned to the radio; they are reflecting in community, or they are attending Mass with their pastors and reflecting on these same things. As a community we nourish our faith and discover our true spirit and way of life by drawing on the same source as the Old Testament communities and the communities of every century. God has revealed to us his will. Being God's people means knowing that will in community and moving forward as community in accord with that will. That is what it means to be covenanted with the Lord, and that is why we come to Mass on Sundays.

A community in expectation

My first thought is that this community is a community in expectation. What does that mean? Hopeful expectation is the characteristic of all Christians, and that's why we are called an eschatological community. Eschatology is the science of the ultimate, and we are a community that lives in hope of developing to the ultimate. Where is history going? Where is my life going? Where is the church going? Toward the eschatological, toward the ultimate!

The «Day of the Lord» was often announced in the Old Testament, and we have commented on its meaning before in our homilies. When the prophets spoke of the «Day of the Lord» (Ezek 30:3), they meant the day when God waits for us with open arms to reward our good works, but they also meant the day when God awaits us with his anger to punish our bad deeds. In early times, before the time of Christ, that Day of the Lord was something vague and undefined. Unlike us Christians, the prophets did not have the good fortune of knowing the coming of Christ twenty centuries ago to initiate the Day of the Lord. We are now living in the final phase of history. As we will see later, Christ is the key, the finale, the goal, the one who initiates the Day of the Lord. When Christ and the apostles announced that the Day of the Lord was near, there arose many questions—as they arise even now in certain Protestant sects—about whether the Lord was coming in such-and-such a year, and people were expecting him to come soon. The fact is that Christ wanted to leave Christians uncertain about the time of his coming; it is part of the mystery. Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, «The time is coming when I won't be able to write to you. The date is uncertain. I tell you only what the Lord announced: that he will come like a thief in the night. Since you are not children of the night but children of the day, stay alert and sober» (1 Thess 5:1-6). Saint Paul was responding to the Thessalonians who were saying, «The final judgment is coming soon», and using it as an excuse not to work; some of them had become layabouts, making religion an «opium of the people». Paul told them that they have to work and that «those who don't work should not eat». So we don't know the day when the Lord will come to take us up (2 Thess 3:10).

Still another doubt arose among the Thessalonians: «Paul announced to us the nearness of the Day of the Lord, but some people have died and others continue to die. What will happen to those who have died, and what about those of us who are alive when the Lord comes?» Saint Paul resolved this problem for them in a letter which is sometimes read in the Mass for the dead: «Concerning the dead we do not want you to be ignorant. They will also rise, and we who are living will be transformed» (1 Thess 4:13-18). Even if we don't pass through death, we will be transformed because God wants us to participate in this eschatological phase which is the final, definitive phase of God's kingdom; it is the eternal life which begins already on this earth. Therefore, the dead must rise. Those who did good will rise to eternal life, and those who did evil will rise for punishment and ignominy. Those who are still alive will also be transformed—both those who have done good deeds in accord with God's will and those who have not. The good will be taken up with the Lord in his glory, but the wicked, even if they are still alive, will not escape the wrath of the Lord. God will transform them from mortal life, which ends with death, into eternal life where they will suffer eternally. He will give them an immortality of pain, what the Bible calls «the second death», which means dying without being able to die (Rev 2:11; 20:6). The Day of the Lord is truly something tremendous. It is not just some fantasy, dear sisters and brothers. It is what gives our religion its eschatological character, and that's why we must live ever in expectation of that final culmination.

I want to ask you: how are we living right now? How are we living in this reality of November of 1978? One of the young saints of the church was once asked by his fellow students, «If you knew that today was judgment day, what would you do? What should we do?»¹ Some of them were saying, «Well, I would run to the church to pray». Others were saying, «I would go to confession so as not to be in sin». But the saint told them, «No, I would just continue playing because I know that I'm doing God's will, and if God find me so, then he finds me doing his will».

Such is the tranquil life of Christians: being where God would want to find us at the hour of death. That's why I want to ask you, sisters and brothers, and I ask myself as well: where are we at this very moment? Are we where we would want God to find us if today were the day when we were suddenly surprised as by a thief and had our life taken from us? How many tragedies and deaths do we weep over week after week? Think of all those who have been killed or who have died in accidents or fires or earthquakes or airplane crashes—there have been so many this week! Did the Lord find them experiencing his eschatology? Were they prepared for the finale of their lives? Are all of us Salvadorans where we ought to be?

That's why I like to shed light on the present moment of our historical reality. I don't do it to disturb anybody but simply to fulfill my prophetic mission, as Saint Paul said to the Thessalonians, «Just be where you should. I cannot tell you the day or the time» (1 Thess 5:1). No one can predict when a person's going to die, but as Christians we can say, «Walk where you should walk so that the Lord finds you on the right path». Speaking about a community in expectation, sisters and brothers, I am mindful that this week we have experienced a great deal of wonderful community life in our archdiocese. Many people are truly where they should be, but sadly many others are not.

Expectation that is active

Let us pass, then, to my second thought, active expectation. Today's first reading speaks to us about women who are characterized by their fortitude and don't seek glory in their beauty or worldly vanity but rather in the fear of God. That's the kind of women we should praise, says the Sacred Bible (Prov 31:30). What a marvelous message for women! Beauty is fragile, and good looks are vain. The prophets compared mortal beauty with grass, which in the morning is fresh and green but by night is no more than dry hay that can be yanked up by the handful. The diligent woman who fears the Lord is the glory of her husband; she has no fear of winter or bad times because she is always well prepared. The woman with an eschatological sense is worthy of all praise. It is difficult for a woman preoccupied with vanity to understand that her true greatness lies not in being admired for her visible qualities but rather in being praised by God in her innermost spirit. Her true greatness is not in external splendor but in being truly the glory of her husband and her family, in being a woman known for her Christian virtue. And this is where today's gospel leads us.

Last Sunday we reflected on that beautiful parable in Christ's eschatological sermon, the one about the ten maidens who were waiting to accompany the bridegroom. The five prudent ones were well prepared, and they were received into the wedding feast. The other five fell asleep unprepared, and when they left to buy more oil, the doors to the feast were closed. They arrived late, and when they knocked, the Lord told them, «I do not know you» (Matt 25: 1-13).

¹ Reference to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

How sad will be that hour for those who haven't kept watch in eschatological vigilance! They will be like people surprised by thieves in the dark of the night!

So we come to today's gospel, which urges us to wait in expectation (Matt 25:14-30). A man entrusted his farm and his possessions to his workers and left for distant lands. «After a long time, he returned». That's where the waiting comes in: «after a long time». We don't know when the time will come, but Christ wanted Christians to know that they might have to wait a very long time before the realization of their hopes. We have some very old people among us. Blessed are those elderly folk who keep on hoping! They are like the old man Simeon who, when he held Jesus his Redeemer in his arms, uttered his swan song: «Now you may dismiss your servant in peace because I have lived faithful to this hope!» (Luke 2:25-29).

The teaching of this parable of the talents, dear sisters and brothers, is expressed in a modern form by the Council. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World says that the progress of this world prepares the material for God's kingdom (GS 34). That is why we cannot neglect the work to be done in this world. Nevertheless, the Council insists that Christians are not to live according to this world's way of thinking; rather, they must live with eschatological hope (GS 37). There are many people today who run the same risk as the Thessalonians: they think that the things of earth are worthless, and so they dedicate themselves just to heavenly things. They live a disincarnate piety and are scandalized when the archbishop preaches about earthly duties; they say he is preaching communism because he is demanding social justice of Christians; they complain that he is meddling in politics when really he is only asserting what the Christian duties are of politicians, government officials, the National Guard, and the security forces. If these people are Christians, they shouldn't forget that there is an eternal sanction. The judges who demand bribes and all those politicians who toy with the laws of the nation and the earth should remember the eschatological message of our religion: the Judge will come, a Judge who cannot be bribed, a Judge who will bring to light the legal aberrations that have been committed in this country. By preaching this, sisters and brothers, we place ourselves in the situation of Christ, who truly wants an authentic, integral Christian faith. It's very nice to have a piety that consists just of songs and prayers, just of spiritual meditation and contemplation. The time for that will come in heaven, where there will be no injustices and where sin will no longer be a reality that we Christians must dethrone. But for now, as Christ told the apostles who wanted to remain in contemplation there on Mount Tabor, «Let us descend. We have work to do» (Matt 17:1-8).

That's why the Council states, in *Gaudium et Spes*, number 39: «The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this present earth. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some foreshadowing of the new age» (GS 39). This is our calling as Christians: we must reflect the new age by living even now with an eschatological sense. «Reflect»—what a beautiful word! We are called to reflect as does the dawn, which announces the sun even before it can be seen. Christian life should be like the dawn of the new age. Christian life should be full of hope, full of faith, full of holiness; it should be a sign to people in history that everything does not end here on earth, that there is a kingdom of God toward which we are traveling. There we will be happy because justice and love will be consummated and there will be no danger of profanation. But in the meantime we are only a dawn, a foretaste, a glimpse of things to come.

Christians who do not announce this sun that is coming are not authentic Christians. Christians who offer only earthly redemption, only political and economic liberation, and

forget to announce the great values of eternity are not offering people true liberation. That's why I said in my pastoral letter that the church supports the liberation efforts of all organizations as long as those efforts are just². But the church does not identify herself with those organizations; rather, she opens up a broader realm for those organizations and for all people working on behalf of justice: she opens up the realm of true liberation and proposes the goal of true freedom.

My thoughts in this regard are continually illuminated by Paul VI, a man who knew his own time well and never betrayed his eternal perspective. He said, for example, that if any Christians were to join some popular political group—they could even be priests or bishops—and were to betray our eternal liberation by failing to announce liberation from sin and the true liberation that Christ has brought to the world, then they would be mutilating the Gospel. If they limited their liberating efforts just to the social, economic, and politics matters of earth, then they would not be giving people the true force that Christian liberation makes possible (EN 32). Try to understand this, sisters and brothers. Try to understand this, especially you dear Christians who belong to the people's political organizations. Don't sell your faith and your eternal hope for immediate interests. And listen to this also, you who defame me: I am not preaching revolutionary liberation. I have never preached violence. To the contrary, as I have spelled out in my pastoral letter, I detest violence when it becomes a mystical force, when it is viewed as the only means for resolving problems³.

I uphold the Christian idea of peace, but I have a message for all of you who are working for liberation of the earth and for all of you who are seeking better wages and better treatment for workers during these days of the coffee and cane and cotton harvests: all that is very good, but don't concentrate exclusively on those struggles. Work hard at that, but consider also the distress of our people who are now leaving their homes and their villages and painfully migrating to the estates in search of the only income they'll have for the year. Instead of finding work they meet up only with maltreatment and trickery; they find that even in their misery they are robbed and deceived. How can there be any sense of eternal justice in such relations? Well, to both workers and employers I say: remember the eternal!

The Council goes on to state, «While earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, the former is of vital concern to the kingdom of God to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society» (GS 39). As Christians we are not reactionaries. We know that nations must progress, as the president has said⁴. We would like to tell him, however, that the material progress of the nation is not enough. That progress must be based on a solid foundation of justice. Otherwise, national security will end up being security just for the rich, and progress will be only for the benefit of a minority. Progress must be for the benefit of everybody. To that end, as the president himself has pointed out to those reactionary elements that want to allow no social reforms, the laws and the moral power of the state should not be used only to repress the just struggles of the *campesinos* and the poor, as if they were fit objects of repression, nor should those struggles be confused with terrorism. What must also be repressed, and with force, are those reactionary elements that refuse to allow any social change and transformation in our society. We love progress but not just any progress. We don't love progress when it means national security for

² *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 27-28.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴ ROMERO C., «Discourse at the Inauguration of the Eighth International Fair of El Salvador». See *La Prensa Gráfica* (4 November 1978).

a few people and growing misery for the majority. We need real progress based on just laws, progress that benefits all needy persons, for the Lord has given us the riches of our land for the benefit of all Salvadorans.

For this reason the Council says something very beautiful, dear sisters and brothers; it tells us that we should never tire of doing good. We're in a period of waiting, but that doesn't mean just lazing about. Our waiting is active, and therefore, the Council tells us, «After we have disseminated the gifts of human dignity, fraternal unity and freedom; in a word, after we have disseminated all the wonderful fruits of nature and human labor throughout the land in accord with the Lord's spirit and the Lord's command, we will find these gifts purified from every stain and illuminated and transfigured at the moment when Christ hands over to the Father the eternal and universal kingdom: the kingdom of truth and life, the kingdom of holiness and grace, the kingdom of justice, love, and peace» (GS 39).

What a beautiful hope we have! Even when the work we do now seems to be against the grain, even when our preaching seems to be plowing the sea, we know that someday we'll find it producing much fruit of conversion and holiness. Most of all, I truly hope with Christian joy that all of you who are in solidarity with this doctrine of the church—it is not mine, it is the modern church's!—will continue working for true human dignity and bravely preaching Christ's true doctrine. Don't be afraid to denounce the world's sin. Let us make our religion take on flesh in the realities of our history because that is the promise of Christ: we will find him after we have worked to make his Gospel take on flesh in our world.

I imagine it's something like the ore that is taken from a gold mine: the nuggets come wrapped in earth, but a chemical process removes the slag, leaving the pure gold. Blessed are those who have made their lives mines of labor; it matters not that they are still mixed with some of the slag of earth! The Council reminds us that sin is also hard at work. The kingdom of Satan is also in expectation, for the emissaries of the devil must also rise up. Even now there are many of them among us, waiting for the definitive kingdom when they will be resurrected for ignominy. The Council says that the world's progress has been «disfigured by the sins» of humanity (GS 39). Therefore, worldly progress is not the same as the kingdom of God, for such progress can be purely selfish, as I just said. It is possible for progress and national security to benefit only a few people, and that is sinful. Consequently, progress is something ambivalent—be very careful! It should not be identified with God's kingdom. When you get a certain job or a post with better pay, give thanks to God, but be very careful. When you make progress socially, politically, or economically, give thanks to God, but be careful because that progress is ambivalent; that is, it can be for good or for evil.

No two people have the same destiny. We are placed on this earth like the servants whose master left them five talents or two talents. The church does not preach absolute equality. What she preaches is justice and fraternal love in the midst of inequalities. No two brothers or sisters are the same, but when they love each other, they share together their concerns, their possessions, and also their afflictions. Recalling a phrase from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, the Council tells those of us who live in the world and promote the world's progress: «Do not be conformed to the present world». That is to say, we must renounce the vanity and the malice that take the human activity that should be ordered to service of God and love of neighbor and make it an instrument of sin (GS 37; Rom 12:2). We are involved in many kinds of development work, blessed be God, work that seeks human progress. That is what we work for. Recently I visited some academies for seamstresses and tailors. And today as I

entered the church I received a precious Christmas memento made in La Palma, Chalatenango, where the «Seed of God» project gives evidence of this kind of progress. Let us hope that these projects always remain very Christian. As I've often told you on these occasions, the church does not sponsor academies and workshops and the like only for the material progress of the people. She also wants to instill in people's hearts true wisdom and a mystical spirit so that they'll realize that material progress should not be confused with God's kingdom even though it helps God's kingdom.

Life of the church

Are we truly a community that is actively waiting? Let us examine ourselves, sisters and brothers, in view of what has happened this week. The day after tomorrow is the feast of the Virgin of Peace in San Miguel. We offer a warm greeting to the Mother of all Salvadorans and remember that precisely on November 21, 1966, Pope Paul VI proclaimed her the patroness of our whole nation. Hoping that there are no difficulties, I hope to visit there tomorrow, Monday the twentieth, around noon.

Our community here in the archdiocese rejoices because we find ourselves in harmony with the thought of the present pope. Recently he repeated what he said in his inaugural homily about opening political and economic systems up to Christ. That's what I was just saying. The pope says these systems are fear-ridden. They are afraid of responsible human freedom, and this fear often aggravates their links with violence and repression⁵. Who here does not find harmony between what the pope is saying and what this humble archbishop is preaching to you? Repression doesn't help! There is no need to mistrust the responsible freedom of our people. We must open our doors to Christ and allow all Salvadorans greater participation in working for the common good of the nation.

The pope has declared that defense of human rights is the great task of our time, and in this regard I want to thank Mr. Napoleón Navarro Oviedo for making posters we can place on our doors. These posters reproduce a news item from *La Prensa Gráfica*⁶ where the pope is saying, «We cannot consider people to be at the service of the system; rather, the system should be at the service of people. Everyone therefore must struggle against the hardening of the system»⁷. People are going to say that the pope is subversive, and he really is! In a situation where the system wants to use people as pawns, the pope tells us, «No! Human beings are not made for the system; the system exists to serve human beings». He made it clear that he was referring to social, political, and cultural systems. His speech was interrupted several times by applause. Do you suppose he was seeking applause out of vanity? Or are the people expressing their full agreement with the thinking of the church's sacred orator, as they did with the pope on this occasion?

He also advocated ecumenism as a pastoral and spiritual obligation, and so I rejoice to tell you that we've already spoken with our evangelical brothers and sisters. We'll soon be getting together with them to make plans and to work for authentic ecumenism. I ask for your prayers because this effort requires a special force that only God can give.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Pontifical Commission for Peace and Justice», 11 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (26 November 1978).

⁶ *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 November 1978).

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «Catechesis at the General Audience of 8 November 1978» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (12 November 1978).

Another very great source of joy for me was the telegram I received from the priests who are making their spiritual exercises. It reads: «We are thirty-one priests gathered together in retreat. As practical fruit of our careful reflection on priestly identity, we want to reaffirm our communion with you, with your pastoral ministry, and with your preaching. We realize that our priesthood has meaning only when we are in communion with the bishop». Blessed be God! I thank them, and I would ask all of you who truly want to be Christians to be in communion and to trust in your pastor.

I've also had the pleasure of taking part in several vicariate meetings which have brought together priests and the key lay ministers in the various sectors of our dioceses. They met, for example, in Mejicanos, and yesterday in Chalatenango the people carried out a truly in-depth evaluation of the work of that episcopal vicariate which is under the direction of Father Fabián Amaya. Taking part were priests, religious, and lay people. Two new priests, Fathers Rafael Urrutia and Héctor Figueroa, have been added to the team, so the people are hoping that the pastoral ministry will be even more animated.

One thing to which I'd like to call attention is the pro-seminary association that has been organized by the vital forces in Chalatenango. We're going to locate a major section of the minor seminary in that department. I want to unite this idea with something I encountered as I entered the cathedral. A dear friend from the Serra Club was posting on the door some posters which you can see as you leave. The idea of the posters was this: how can we help God's kingdom make its way into the world? And the answer was this: by promoting priestly and religious vocations. The members of Serra Club, just like the pro-seminary association in Chalatenango, have put their finger on the wound. This is what is most urgent in our church: promoting priestly and religious vocations.

There was also a meeting of the priests' senate, which is made up of representatives of the priests, along with the vicars. We had a very positive meeting, and I'd like to give you a report on it. Several months ago, this body of senators carried out a request of mine to do a survey concerning the relations between the priests and the bishop. Yesterday the survey was tabulated, and the results will now be submitted to a sociological, theological, and pastoral interpretation. We will make the conclusions known to you, but I can tell you right now that I feel very optimistic because this survey is mostly very positive. I'm very happy that all my priests, or at least the immense majority, are in complete solidarity with the pastoral approach that the Archbishop of San Salvador is humbly trying to follow.

I also want to congratulate the vicariate of La Asunción, which comprises the whole sector of Flor Blanca, San José de la Montaña, Colonia Escalón, San Benito, and La Ceiba. They have undertaken two marvelous initiatives. One of them is a course in theology. I attended the graduation of the first cycle, in which about seventy persons have been faithfully receiving instruction about dogmatic, moral, and pastoral theology and about the recent documents of the church. The participants expressed their satisfaction because they have learned much about matters that are often criticized out of ignorance. The participants included lay people who are professional leaders. Since they wield social and political influence, I asked them to use their knowledge of the church's mind and spirit to bear witness to others and not allow our poor church to be so vilely defamed, especially as a result of ignorance⁸.

⁸ The archbishop said that he wanted to speak about two initiatives but mentions only one.

The students of the major seminary have also given me great satisfaction. Despite being on vacation, they met together for three days to reflect on the meaning of their vocation in the present situation. I'm also happy to tell you that in the Universidad José Simeón Cañas, starting on November 15, there will be month-long theology courses on current topics, especially ecclesiology. If you have the opportunity, I invite you to attend these courses which are much needed in our time.

I also visited the parish of Cristo Redentor in the sector of El Carmen. There I was delighted to celebrate the confirmation of a number of youngsters who came together from various communities. In the parish of La Luz there was a joyful graduation of ninth graders in the Escuela Madre Catarina DiMaggio and another graduation in the Academia Madre Scaglietti, where one can see how the church in modest ways is working for the advancement of our poor people. In Ilopango we celebrated the patronal feast of Saint Christopher with the confirmation of young people, and a very interesting dialogue took place between the youth and the bishop! This afternoon at four o'clock I hope to be in the community of Chiltiupán. Today also the laity are having a day of reflection in the parish hall of San José de la Montaña.

I want to remind you that on December 3, that is, within two weeks, a new norm will take effect regarding confirmation; young children will no longer receive that sacrament. If you want to study the topic of confirmation in depth, I recommend that you read our journal *Búsqueda*, all of which is dedicated to the sacrament of confirmation. Very soon I will also publish some instructions about the sacraments in our archdiocese; they are badly needed and will be obligatory.

In a letter that arrived October 13 Archbishop Obando of Nicaragua asked me to thank you all for the generous donations he received. He wrote me, «I can assure you, dear archbishop, that your words have encouraged me in these difficult times we are going through»⁹. The newspapers have informed us of the many difficulties being experienced by our Nicaraguan sisters and brothers. Many are now living in exile in Honduras, and many also live here among us. I beg you not to close the doors of charity to people in this situation. Let us pray hard; it seems that international mediation has not worked in Nicaragua because of the dictator's willful refusal to resign. There is danger of a new civil war. We need to pray earnestly, therefore, for the return of peace and tranquility to that country.

Events of the week

I recommend that you study the pronouncement of the Universidad José Simeón Cañas concerning the situation of the University of El Salvador¹⁰. I agree completely with their honest analysis. Repression is not the answer, nor is «softening» the repression. The answer can only be in responding to the true causes of the evil. I make my own this call that the UCA is issuing to the institutions and to people working in universities: we need to seek these answers.

I have received a letter from Arcatao, and I mention it here because it comes from Christian communities that are in solidarity with our brother Cecilio Ramírez, who was captured in Honduras in July 1977. He had gone there to look for his grandfather, and then

⁹ *Orientación* (19 November 1978).

¹⁰ «Pronouncement of the University Council of the Universidad José Simeón Cañas (UCA) Regarding the Situation of the University of El Salvador» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (16 November 1978).

nothing more was known of him until Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar mentioned in his declaration that he had seen him agonizing in the secret prison of the Treasury Police. The community of Arcatao repeats its petition that Ramírez, if he is still alive, be freed as soon as possible or that he be placed at the disposition of the courts. Also, sisters and brothers, I want to express my sympathy with the reflections of a teacher who was a companion of José René Franco and Carlos Zelaya Rosa, the two teachers who were gunned down in San Miguel.

We regret that this week has been such a violent week in our community, even as we try to bear witness to the Gospel and live the mystery of active expectation. The FPL destroyed three helicopters in San Miguel. The ERP seized several radio stations from which they broadcast news about the government's refusal to allow the conditions to be met for freeing the kidnapped Mr. Monedero. The detective Elpidio Aquiles Aguilar Chacón was killed; no motive has been stated, and it is not known who was responsible for the murder. There was a prolonged armed confrontation in San Miguel in which three alleged guerillas died. It is reported that members of the security forces also died. Two youths were killed in Cuscatancingo. The FPL killed José Arnulfo Vides, the judge of San José Las Flores. The FPL also exploded bombs in a restaurant in San Salvador and at the Treasury Police offices in Metapán. The ERP exploded bombs in an electrical sub-station, causing a blackout of several hours in the western zone of San Salvador.

I also feel the pain of those who suffer assaults, and I want to express my solidarity with them. Even your archbishop finds himself among those attacked by the executive power, which has arbitrarily and illegally changed the statutes of Caritas. What concerns me most about the Caritas case is that it sets a very dangerous precedent for the church; it constitutes illicit intrusion of civil power into church law. We also deplore the fires that have occurred this week in the Tipografía el Planeta and in other workshops and warehouses of the city of San Salvador. There are also the various labor problems that I've mentioned at other times; I ask God that these situations be resolved soon.

I want especially to mention the case of a seventeen-year-old boy named Julio César Velázquez; he has still not been presented despite a petition of habeas corpus. He is the son of Santos Velázquez, a man who was concerned about the miserable conditions in the slums and who was killed by unknown persons. I express my solidarity also with the Human Rights Commission; they visited Isabel Rodríguez Barrera in the hospital and stated that, even though there is no legal case against him, he is being closely guarded by the security forces and has not gone before any court.

But still there is one note of optimism, sisters and brothers, for our pastoral ministry also involves bringing light and joy to the hopes that can be found among our people. On Wednesday this week the law concerning administrative litigation was approved¹¹. This law means that in the Supreme Court of Justice there will be a special tribunal dedicated to resolving conflicts between public officials and other authorities or individuals who want to contest particular resolutions of the public administration. We congratulate the Assembly for this effort on behalf of justice. Let us hope that it's not frustrated according to that famous dictum, «The law is passed, the trap is set».

¹¹ «Law of Jurisdiction of Administrative Litigation» in *Diario Oficial*, (19 December 1978).

We await the return of Christ

Let us conclude our homily and draw near to the altar with the beautiful thought found in today's readings: a community actively awaiting Christ's return. In the Mass we will soon be saying before the consecrated host, «Come, Lord Jesus!» Let us not forget, sisters and brothers, that we are truly living in expectation of someone who is alive and who is coming. He will not deceive us!

This waiting has been described in the church with very beautiful words. Last week I spoke about the *parousia*, a Greek word that meant the presence or the appearance of a governor or an emperor visiting a city. We are awaiting the great emperor, Christ our Lord! The waiting is also called «epiphany», another Greek term that refers to God's manifestation. God is going to make himself known, and his reign is going to be made manifest to the world. Blessed are those who await him and remain active while they're waiting.

The waiting is also called «apocalypse», the name given to the last book of the Bible. Apocalypse means «manifestation» or «revelation», and that's why the coming of God is described in apocalyptic terms. We shouldn't let ourselves be led astray by the rather fanciful images of the Bible, such as when Saint Paul says that Christ will come on the clouds and we'll go out to meet him in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17). Those are apocalyptic terms. What is important is the reality: he will appear, and all Christians who are actively waiting for him will receive their reward, as today's gospel tells us, «Well done, good servant. Enter into your master's joy» (Matt 25:23). How wonderful it will be to hear this greeting of the Lord!

But this eschatology of the epiphany, of the *parousia*, and of the apocalypse must be experienced today, sisters and brothers! I already explained to you that eschatology is not just waiting for some future event; there is also an eschatology of the present moment. If you want to get a clearer idea of this reality, then read the Gospel of Saint John and the letters of Saint John. He was the man who best knew how to live the future eschatology in the present moment. I told you once before that we Christians are like pendulums that swing back and forth between the already and the not yet. This is the rhythm of true Christians. Yes, I am already in God's grace; I am already in the kingdom of heaven; I am already actively awaiting the Lord. As the Council says, the kingdom of God is mysteriously present in history; the kingdom of God is already among us (LG 5). That is what Christ tells us: «The kingdom of God is in your heart» (Luke 17:21). Let us enter into our hearts and come alive now, this very Sunday. Let us be converted and experience the joy of eschatology. Christ initiated eschatology from the moment he rose from the dead. He has already confirmed the promise he made to Martha before the dead body of Lazarus: «Those who believe in me, even if they die, will live» (John 11:25). Christ is already alive, and that is what is so magnificent about our Sunday worship. Coming to Mass on Sunday means coming to encounter the Lord. The day will come when the consecrated host will no longer be in the hands of some poor priest, and we will no longer need Masses. There'll be no need of hosts or sacraments, for the sacraments are meant to help us in our weakness while we are on pilgrimage in this visible world. In heaven there will be no pilgrim church; in heaven there will be no institutions exposed to sin as there are on earth. God's kingdom will be fully consummated. Going to Mass on the day of our death will mean meeting face to face the One who will say to me, «Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord». That is what I wish for everyone: the intimate joy of the definitive eschatology. [Applause]