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THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION IN CHRIST

Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time

4 June 1978

Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28

Romans 3:21-25b

Matthew 7:21-27

Dear sisters and brothers and radio audience, today the church celebrates the Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time. I explained to you before that after the seasons of Advent and Christmas, the Ordinary season begins. This is then interrupted with the season of Lent and the celebration of Easter, which continues for fifty days indicating the fullness of time. Easter season culminates with the coming of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost. After Pentecost we resume the Sundays of Ordinary Time that were interrupted at the beginning of Lent. This year the beginning of Lent occurred after the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time so that after Pentecost we begin with the Seventh, Eighth, and (today) Ninth Sundays of Ordinary Time. But the Seventh Sunday was the feast of the Blessed Trinity, which we spoke about when we described the beautiful revelation the Bible gives us about God and his intimate trinitarian life. Last Sunday, which was the Eighth Sunday, was the feast of Corpus Christi. So now we have the Ninth Sunday, and with no other feasts interrupting, Ordinary Time will continue until the thirty-four Sundays end with the feast of Christ the King. Then the new liturgical year will begin on the First Sunday of Advent. The Christmas season presents us with the mystery of Christ's Incarnation; Lent and Easter present us with the great paschal mystery: the death and resurrection of the Lord.

These two great themes, the incarnation and the redemption, are basic; they are like two columns of our great Christian arch. The Sundays of Ordinary Time don't celebrate any specific mystery of our faith, but as the Council tells us: «By an apostolic tradition which took its origins from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the church celebrates the paschal mystery every week» (SC 106). That means celebrating on Sunday, or *domingo* in Spanish, from the Latin *dominica*. *Domini* is the Latin word that means «of the Lord», that is, the «Day of the Lord». It reminds us of this duty.

«On this day», the Council states, «Christ's faithful should come together into one place so that, by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God who "has begotten us again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope"» (SC 106). That is why we come to Mass every Sunday.

May this consciousness of what our Sunday Mass means grow ever stronger in the people, for much of its meaning has been lost. People have the sense that Sunday Mass is just another devotion, something that can be easily put aside. There is little sense of Christian solidarity, and that lack is a sign of little faith. But when Christians joyfully come together on Sunday to hear the word of God—whoever the priest may be who proclaims it—then it is God

speaking to his people by means of him. We come together also to participate in the Eucharist; we don't come just to hear a sermon, but we come primarily to be submerged in that sea of our redemption that is Christ present in his divine memorial of death and resurrection: «We announce your death! We proclaim your resurrection!»

This moves us to give thanks to God because he lets us be reborn to new hope. We are a people who should be profoundly hopeful despite earthly difficulties and failures. Our hope does not rely on earth! God has let us be reborn to new hope by the resurrection, by that life that has no end but is always joy, brightness, and hope. Each Sunday with its Mass, then, must be like a sun in our lives that reminds us of these great and glorious things.

In today's readings we find the title for a beautiful homily, using precisely the words of the Council: «The Mystery of Salvation in Christ» (SC 108).

Events of the week

But before giving you my concrete thought on this topic, I invite you, dear sisters and brothers, to meditate on our reality in realistic terms. For it is very easy to preach a Gospel that sounds the same here in El Salvador as it does there in Guatemala or in Africa. It is the same Gospel, of course, just as it is the same sun that brightens the whole world. But just as the sunlight is diversified in flowers and fruits according to the needs of the nature that receives its rays, so God's word has to be incarnated in concrete realities, and that is what makes the church's preaching difficult. Preaching a Gospel that does not engage with reality creates no problems, and it's very easy to carry out the preacher's mission that way. But casting the Gospel's universal light on our Salvadoran miseries—and also on our Salvadoran joys and successes—that is what is most beautiful about God's word because that is how we know that Christ is talking to us, our archdiocesan community gathered here to meditate on his divine word.

Who can forget today the suffering that afflicts three families while their three loved ones remain kidnapped in such hermetic silence¹? It is edifying to behold the gesture of the mothers of the disappeared who, when they heard that the condition for freeing a kidnapped person was the liberty of those who have disappeared², declared that they did not want to have their own suffering traded for the suffering of another. They are asking that Mister Matsumoto be returned to his family so that he can return home, just as they also hope that the hostages they want released can also return to their homes³.

As we reflect on the word of God, who can forget this morning the sorrow of so many peasant families there in Guatemala? We have heard about a massacre through the

¹ The two businessmen Ernesto Sol Meza and Luis Méndez Novoa were kidnapped on 14 May 1978. For more than a month there was complete silence about these kidnappings until the People's Liberation Forces (FPL) on 22 June 1978 claimed responsibility and freed the hostages after their demands were met. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (22 June 1978). A third person, Fujio Matsumoto, a Japanese citizen and president of Industrias Sintéticas de Centroamérica (INSINCA), was kidnapped 17 May 1978 by the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). See *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 May 1978).

² The Armed Forces of National Resistance demanded the freedom of thirty-eight political prisoners as a condition for freeing Fujio Matsumoto. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 May 1978).

³ «We Demand Freedom for our Loved Ones», statement of the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners and Disappeared in El Salvador in *La Crónica del Pueblo* (29 May 1978).

newspapers⁴. We must unite in prayer and repudiate the violence and the pain of those who are suffering. We must also decry the causes of these massacres which always derive from injustice.

This week the recommendations of the Seminar on Educational Reform were published. I hope everyone has read them carefully. I only want to highlight a few of them because they coincide with the voice of this gospel, and I hope that they will become a reality in our schools and universities.

They state, for example, that the educational reform should take into consideration the basic possibilities and limitations in analyzing the national reality, since education is a key factor of social change in technical and ideological areas. Therefore, professors and students must become «critical agents» and not passive subjects in the educational process. But such a reform is impossible without other structural reforms aimed at transforming the unjust economic and social structures, especially agrarian reform⁵.

The recommendations also address illiteracy and ask that during the next five years, if possible, an intense effort be made to eradicate this blemish from our society⁶.

They also recommend that the educational reform remove from its philosophical foundation a naïve conception of society that hands the student over to the arbitrary manipulation of the so-called free forces of society, by which both national and foreign minority-controlled firms gain dominance and impose their interests⁷. Education, therefore, must always produce citizens who will work for change and the common good.

It also makes us happy to see that the recommendations call for action from the government's Ministry of Education. Speaking of the human rights that should be taught in education, they say, «Consequently, all those dispositions and practices which negate the concepts and postulates of human rights should be abolished; above all, the Law for the Defense and the Guarantee of Public Order should be repealed since it severely limits human rights and freedom and militates against the values and ends of a democratic educational process»⁸. So you see it is not only the church that is sounding the alarm, but the government itself, in its ministries, sees the need for laws that truly promote authentic democracy and not the opposite.

In this month dedicated to teachers, I take great pleasure in reading the following recommendation of the seminar, and I make it my own by way of congratulating the teachers in anticipation of their special day. The seminar states, «Teachers must be given incentives not only with better salaries but also with adequate pensions and insurance for themselves and

⁴ On 29 May 1978 the Guatemalan army killed more than a hundred indigenous *campesinos* who were holding a demonstration in Panzós, Alta Verapaz, to demand control of several pieces of land. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (30 May 1978) and «Communiqué of Priests and Religious of the Diocese of Verapaz», ECA 356-357 (1978) 549-551.

⁵ *Recommendations of the National Stage of the Seminar on Educational Reform*, table 1, theme A: «Sociopolitical Foundation, Recommendation B» in *El Diario de Hoy* (31 May 1978).

⁶ *Recommendations*, table 1, theme A: «Technical-pedagogical Foundation, Recommendation 10» in *El Diario de Hoy* (31 May 1978).

⁷ *Recommendations*, table 1, theme A: «Philosophical and Scientific Bases of Pedagogical Theory, Recommendation 4» in *El Diario de Hoy* (31 May 1978).

⁸ *Recommendations*, table 1, theme A: «The Aims of Education, Recommendation 5» in *El Diario de Hoy* (31 May 1978).

their spouses and children. The dignity of the teacher should not be just a pretty phrase but a reality reflected in their social status»⁹.

I don't want to tire you, but I ask you to consider especially one more recommendation. The seminar recommends that «a call be made to the leaders of religious groups, who are an important factor in the educational system, so that they collaborate in forming Salvadorans who are "non-conformist", hard-working, and realistic, and who contribute responsibly and creatively to the country's social and economic processes»¹⁰. We lament that there are forms of pseudo-Christianity that receive strong support and have considerable resources, and yet they are doing the very thing the Ministry of Education is protesting against. I am delighted that among our Protestant sisters and brothers there are many who live and breathe the same concerns as the Catholic Church. They want to proclaim a Gospel that does not put people to sleep, that is not the opium of the people, but on the contrary seeks to awaken the critical conscience that the education seminar is talking about. This is the glory of our church, namely, that we are suffering persecution precisely because we are working to bring about this recommendation that comes from the plain educational philosophy of the people.

We can't forget that this week marks the beginning of the new legislative assembly for the period '78 to '80. We hope that these fathers of our nation will consider all the anxieties of the country they represent and that they will truly seek the common good. We were happy to see that one of the first actions that they've been asked to discuss is the abrogation of the Law of the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order¹¹. This is a wonderful opportunity to win the confidence of the citizens they represent.

The time of planting has begun. The *campesinos* are happy, those who have land to sow. But besides those who do have land and can sow, let us not forget that many remain idle because they have no fields to work. This year has been very cruel. This is the moment to remember that people are still feeling the consequences of the repression in San Pedro Perulapán and in Cinquera. I have witnessed the hunger, the sickness, and the malnutrition of the children. I have seen people who have to sleep outdoors as a consequence of that situation. Psychological warfare is a reality that has made many people ill. I want to commend the charity that has already been shown. May it keep growing so that we can relieve the people's needs. This is not demagoguery but a matter of urgent need. Let us help our sisters and brothers.

On a happy note, let us not forget the soccer fans; they're delighted with the beginning of the world football championship this week¹². We're also happy that ANDA is concerned about providing water for our people. There is suffering not only in the neighborhoods of San Salvador but above all in rural areas. Our *campesinos* lose so much time and energy, even in the small towns, hauling the precious liquid in jars and barrels. We hope that ANDA can resolve these serious problems.

⁹ *Recommendations*, table 3, theme C: «Professional Training of Educators, Recommendation 1b» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (1 June 1978).

¹⁰ *Recommendations*, table 3, theme C: «Other Cultural Factors Affecting the Educational Process, Recommendation 1» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (1 June 1978).

¹¹ «MNR Requests Abrogation of the Law of Public Order» in *El Mundo* (3 June 1978).

¹² On 1 June 1978 the world football championship started in Argentina.

Life of the church

Considering this community of which we are a part, a church immersed in this reality, let us also consider some signs of our effort to be light to the world and to save humankind in Christ. Last Sunday there was the meeting of the Legion of Mary. It was wonderful to see that army of Mary ready to work under the Virgin's banner for the integral salvation of our society.

In San Antonio Abad there was a meeting aimed at clarifying once again the relation that exists between the church and the popular organizations and to repeat once more that the church must not be manipulated for political motives. I'm preparing a pastoral letter for an opportune moment—or better, for the near future—in which I will say the following: «Let me be very clear that the church does indeed defend the right of the *campesinos* and the people to organize, for this is one way in which justice can be made to reign in the world. The right to organize is an inalienable right. Christians also have this right, and they should also seek effective means at the social and political level to make our country conform to the ideal of justice. They must search for the appropriate options, means, and instruments, and the church will embrace whatever noble cause comes forth from this desire for greater justice. The church will always support the people in the rural areas for they are ones who are most in need today».

The church respects the autonomy of the parties and the organizations as such, but she also asks the organizations, especially those that claim Christian inspiration, to demonstrate this inspiration explicitly since they regularly request her Christian services. The church should not be used as an instrument to further their objectives. In other words, the church demands her autonomy, and she wants to declare once again that she has no concrete relations of commitment with any particular organization. No organization should ever invoke the name «Christian» in order to tell Christians that they must organize in that sector, because Christians are free to work for justice in the way they see best. No one is obliged to belong to anything except by their own free choice. Even then, Christians must try to make their Christian ideals prevail; if Christian members of an organization subordinate their Christianity and their church to worldly ideals, then they are betraying their faith.

I also want to mention at this time of familial rejoicing that I received two beautiful letters of solidarity this week: one from Cardinal Silva, archbishop of Santiago, Chile, and the other from Cardinal Hume, archbishop of London, England. I thank these brothers because their encouraging words give strength to this voice that seeks to be fully the voice of the Gospel even though others try to confuse it with other ideologies. That is why I insist that the voice of the church be clearly defined and not be manipulated or contrived for other objectives.

I am also happy with our community's devotion to the Virgin. This week the month of May came to an end. In the seminary there was a very nice celebration, and many communities came here to the cathedral as well, despite the rain, to honor Our Lady. I am also deeply delighted with the profound devotion in this capital to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This was shown on Friday, the feast of the Sacred Heart, when we saw an unusual event: the immense basilica of the Sacred Heart was completely filled with the faithful in an attitude of love and devotion to honor the Sacred Heart.

Yesterday the directors of the Catholic schools met to consider the aspects of the educational reform that I mentioned before. The Catholic schools are truly acting as

instruments of the church's evangelization, which means that they are preparing young men and women with a truly critical sense so that they will not simply be instruments of a system that wants to maintain the present situation.

Finally, sisters and brothers, I want to ask you to pray hard for the Puebla meeting for which preparations become ever more intense. In October the bishops of Latin America will meet in Puebla to study the problematic Latin American situation, which needs to be evangelized with the authentic voice of the church. We all want this voice to be heard loud and clear so that it is always a voice of hope.

So it was that Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, a pagan people. Writing from a pagan land in the east before going to Rome, he tells them that the only thing detaining him is an obligation he must fulfill. He is traveling to Jerusalem to deliver the collection gathered among the pagan peoples as a symbol of communion with the mother church in Jerusalem (Rom 14:25-29). From being once a persecutor, Paul was called by Christ to be the apostle to the Gentiles, that is, the apostle to those who are not Jews. He begins his preaching with this letter that prepares for his journey to Rome. In this precious letter to the Romans that was read today, Paul says that there are two human situations, that of the Jews and that of the Gentiles. The Jews have the law given by Moses, and the Gentiles have their natural reason. Through the law of Moses and through natural reason the Jews and the Gentiles are able to know God, but the sad historical reality is that neither the law of the Jews nor the natural reason of the Gentiles has managed to create morality among humankind.

The path of curses and the path of blessings

I want to focus my homily first on the Jewish people. The first reading is from the book of Deuteronomy. Notice that Deuteronomy is like a great homily in which Moses recalls God's legislation and reminds the people that it is a present reality. (It is like what we're doing here—it is as if God were speaking to us here and now, asking us for something.) At this solemn moment Moses tells the Israelites, «Before you are two paths; one ends in a curse, the other in a blessing. One is obedience to the law of God; the other is infidelity to the Lord's commandments» (Deut 11:26). That makes us think of another gesture related in the same book of Deuteronomy. Recall when Moses divides the pilgrim people into two groups: one group on Mount Gerizim and the other on Mount Ebal (Deut 27:11-28:8). The tribal representatives are divided into two groups, and in the center is the mass of the people. Those on the side recite the curses: «Cursed be the man who despises God and adores idols». And all the people respond in a great cry: «Amen. Cursed be the man who robs. Amen. Cursed...». And so they continue with the law of God, cursing those who do not believe or who disobey the law. At the same time, on the other side the blessings of God are heard: «Blessed are those who adore God; blessed are those who respect the rights of their neighbors, etc». It is like the moment when Christ on the mountain of the Beatitudes disclosed those secrets of human happiness that even today we do not want to understand (Luke 6:20-26).

What is interesting is that these two paths ending in either blessing or curse are not simply fantasy. In the Bible the words «blessing» and «curse» represent a definitive sanction. When God says «accursed», it is not like when an angry mother calls her son «accursed» for the child can be forgiven; the repentant boy often goes crying and asking his mother for pardon: «Don't curse me, mom». In our priestly ministry one of the most painful things is when a child comes and asks, «Will I be accursed because my mother cursed me?» The minister responds,

«No, she will forgive you. It was an outburst of anger. Your mother always loves you». But when it's God who pronounces a «curse» on those who disobey his law, the sanction is definitive: «Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fires» (Matt 25:41). That means that we must take seriously obedience to God's law. In the same way, the blessing is not simply some nice wish—«God bless you»—but a definitive sanction, a reality. To those who are «blessed» by God he gives the kingdom; he gives them a share in his own life.

Sisters and brothers, Christ uses two distinct images to make the same proposal to us in today's gospel (Matt 7:24-27): the house built on sand and the house built on rock. The houses of those who build on deep foundations will not be destroyed even in stormy times; the houses are firmly built on rock. But the houses of those who foolishly build on sand will be washed away and completely destroyed when the flood comes. Christ then gets concrete, and that is what interests us: how it applies to us. All those who hear the word of God and put it in practice are building on rock, but those who hear the word of God only out of curiosity or literary interest—or even worse, to find out what the bishop is saying so we can ensnare him—are building on sand. And when the fearful hour of God's judgment arrives, those who want to judge me for what I am saying here will also be judged. I do indeed fear God, and so I try to say only what he wants me to say, even if people don't want me to say what I'm saying. To build upon rock is to fear God and act according to his will.

How tremendous a thing is human freedom! Moses says that you have before you two paths, and Christ says that you can build a house in two ways. If there is anyone who respects freedom, it is God. God made us truly free and leaves us free. He proposes to us his law, but then he tells us, «There are two ways. One goes toward the law, and the other goes toward condemnation. You are free to choose». Freedom, dear sisters and brothers, does not consist in doing whatever we want. Freedom consists in walking by the path that God shows us and doing so freely. God rejoices here in his cathedral this morning because none of you has been tied up and brought here. You have all come here freely. That is what freedom is for: to come with love, with liberty, and not by force. The crowds that are brought together by force are not voluntary. No one violates human freedom as much as the fanatical promoter of earthly causes. But God leaves us truly free because he wants to have the joy of a father whose child runs to greet him without being obliged; the child embraces him and gives him a little gift with all the tenderness of freedom and love.

How can it be, then, that human freedom is seen as limited by God's law? That's where Saint Paul comes in, with his marvelous message in his letter to the Romans. There he tells even the Jews, «The law is not enough» (Rom 7:19). The law tells you what is good and what is bad, but you feel that you do evil even though you should do good. I think we've all experienced this: we feel that we shouldn't do what is evil but we still do it because some pleasure or passion or caprice leads us to disobey God. And we know how hard it is to fulfill God's law and how much violence we must do to ourselves in order to do the Lord's will. So the law is not enough, and neither is reason. Both the book of Deuteronomy and the letter to the Romans contain gloomy catalogs of the terrible things people do.

When you read chapter 18 of Deuteronomy¹³, you will see very vile things explicitly condemned there because people are capable of doing great evil despite their knowledge of the law (Deut 27:15-26). And read in the letter to the Romans Saint Paul's long catalog listing all

¹³ The list of curses is in chapter 27 of Deuteronomy and not in chapter 18.

the deviant and crazy things we human beings do (Rom 1:22-32). We feel disgust even at the mention of this passage in the letter to the Romans. To what an extreme the people's aberrations reached! Even the most intelligent people offended because it was not enough just to have a law and know it.

Neither faith without works nor works without faith

Now we come to Jesus Christ in today's gospel. Summing up the three readings, we might say that preaching is not enough. I can say now with Saint Paul, «It is possible that even as I preach to you I become a reprobate». It is not enough to use the charisms God gives us for the service of the people. That is why Christ says, «Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven» (Matt 7:21). It will be even more terrible when on judgment day Christian leaders say, «Did we not cast out demons in your name, and did we not preach in your name?» And Christ will frightfully declare, «I do not know you, accursed ones» (Matt 7:22-23). Judgment will come also for us preachers, for us bishops and priests, and for other Christian leaders. We must be fearful because those words can be for you and for me. This is what I want to tell you to sum up: there are works without faith and without love. Just as there is faith without works, there are works without faith. There may be much activism, much coming and going, but the works are not done out of love, nor is there faith. Saint Paul says, «If I give my possessions to others, if I speak in human and angelic tongues, if I do marvelous deeds so all the world applauds me, but I do not have love, I am nothing» (1 Cor 13:1-3).

Works without love, works without faith are dead. So also the reverse: «Faith without works is dead», says Saint James (Jas 2:17,26). Saint James in his day, the first age of Christianity, could already envision the exaggerated proposal of Luther in the sixteenth century that «faith is sufficient». Luther's problem was that he put one little word in his translation: faith *alone* is enough. He held that faith alone, without works, is what saves us¹⁴, and that is very dangerous. The letter to the Romans has caused many problems for theology precisely because of this point we're reflecting on today. When Paul says that faith saves without works, he is referring to the works of the old law: it is no longer necessary to get circumcised; it is no longer necessary to keep the Sabbath, but rather Sunday; it is no longer necessary to live among the Jews of the Old Testament, for we are in the Christian era. The apostle is referring to those works when he says, «Faith saves, not the works of the law» (Rom 3:28). On the other hand, Christ says, «Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do works according to the will of my Father» (Matt 7:21). And James refutes the Christians of his time when he says, «Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from my works» (Jas 2:18).

This balance is necessary, sisters and brothers, not just faith alone and saying to God, «Lord, Lord». God has no need for us to say «Lord». He is always Lord! Saint James utters a chilling phrase, «Even the demons in hell know God and fear him but cannot be saved» (Jas 2:19). Faith is not enough. «Faith without works is dead» (Jas 2:17,26). That's why I'm happy to read that recommendation of the Seminar for Educational Reform requesting the religious

¹⁴ In the Schmalkald Articles (1537-1538) Luther declares, «This has to be believed and is not achieved by any type of work or by the law or by any merit: it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us». Archbishop Romero in his homilies is simply reflecting the negative attitudes between Catholics and Lutherans that had existed since the sixteenth century. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, reconciling voices have increased, and under Pope Benedict XVI, Lutherans and Catholics have found basic agreement on the importance of both faith and works in the doctrine of justification by faith.

sects not to preach an alienating type of Christianity or a religion that does not engage with history¹⁵. And I'm also happy that we are preaching this commitment to history in light of the Gospel. Salvadorans of today, you will not be saved if you don't work intensely for a better world, beginning with your own homes and radiating grace through your daily labors, as humble as they may be. You may be making bread, working from dawn to dusk with a machete, or hoeing, but do it all with love. Show by works of honesty and faith that we truly love and fear God.

The power of the Gospel

Who can give us this balance? This is my third and final reflection, sisters and brothers: the power of the Gospel. That is Saint Paul's great thesis when he writes to the Romans: «I am coming to preach to you the power of the Gospel. Natural reason is not enough, either for you, or for the great Romans who have conquered the world, or for the Greeks in Athens, where I have visited the great sages. Their intelligence is impressive, but they have not come to know the true God with all that that implies. And for you Jews, from whom God chose me to go and preach to the Gentile world, the law is not enough, nor are the works of the law. What Christ now asks of us is faith in the great saving event; that is, faith that Christ died for me and rose for me» (Rom 1:14-16) This is what Saint Paul calls in today's letter «the justice of God revealed in Christ» (Rom 3:22). We should have this phrase engraved as an epitaph.

Today there is much talk of justice, and perhaps we misinterpret this word. Justice, according to today's scripture, means God's merciful action; it is Christ's revelation of how God intervenes to blot out human sin and make people capable of behaving as children of God. This is true liberation. There is much concern for liberation all around us—blessed be God!—but it is unfortunate that many liberation struggles stay only with earthly realities: economic liberation, political liberation, social liberation. These are good, but all this will be added on if we seek true liberation (Matt 6:33).

In *The Evangelization of the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI states, «Christian liberators, Christians who truly desire to liberate their people, must understand all these different forms of liberation in order to incorporate them into the great plan of Christian liberation. The starting point of this liberation must be justice» (EN 38). This is the justice Saint Paul reveals to us today. The justice of God is first of all the liberation of human beings from their sins so they can fulfill the law of God. Only those who have been freed from sin and who are trying to be holy by fulfilling God's law have a right to speak about authentic liberation, including earthly forms of liberation.

But if Christians forget about this eternal perspective of the grace of Christ and liberation from sin, then liberation has lost its power and its mystique. And often this is what happens. That's why I was telling you: don't confuse the church and her great proclamation of integral liberation in Christ with the minor liberations of the world. Don't identify the liberation the church preaches, which is from sin and death through the justice of God who gave us his Son, with those earthly types of liberation, which often don't even think of asking God's forgiveness and so are creating more injustices and disorder and violence. May we come to understand, sisters and brothers, that the church has the key to true liberation.

¹⁵ *Recommendations*, table 3, theme C: «Other Cultural Factors that Affect the Educational Process, Recommendation 1» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (1 June 1978).

And so I conclude at the point where I began, telling you that we come to Sunday Mass to reflect on the great mystery of salvation. But we don't do so starting from our weak human power. We cannot save ourselves; we can't fulfill the natural law. Theology states that human beings, as intelligent as they may be, have many moral defects, but when we accept with humility God's grace and the power of God's justice revealed in Christ, then we can say, «Lord, I am a poor sinner. Free me from my sins. I recognize my misery; my passions weigh me down; free me from this body of death». When we take hold of God's hand in this way, then we are truly strong, as Saint Paul says, «The power of God is made manifest in my weakness» (2 Cor 12:9).

Sisters and brothers, let us live this beautiful hope of our faith. It is the faith that saves. It saves not by the works of the law of the Old Testament but by those of the New Testament, the works of our people, the concrete works asked of us here and now: the honesty of lawyers, the justice of our judges who refuse to take bribes, the justice demanded for so many offenses committed, the honesty required of market vendors, the honesty of those who earn a wage and faithfully do their work, the honesty of those who pay wages without extortion and without exploiting their workers. These are the works that will bring true liberation to our country. Let us be filled with this hope. Let us begin with ourselves and be truly just with the divine justice that God revealed to us in Christ our Lord.