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THE POPE: THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
2 July 1978

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a
Romans 6:3-4, 8-11
Matthew 10:37-42

Dear sisters and brothers, at this moment when the cathedral is filled with the faithful and with representatives of the clergy, of the seminary, of religious life, and of the diverse communities of the archdiocese, I am feeling much the same as I've felt during these days since I traveled to Rome¹ and as I felt there, above all, so close to the common pastor of the universal church. And now that I have returned, I find that the invitation we extended to pay honor to the pope has brought about this massive gathering which gives us some idea, within the small dimensions of our cathedral, of that immense basilica of Saint Peter. There the pope celebrated his fifteen years of being pontiff. As I thought of that great crowd and of the universal church spread about the world, I felt pride, satisfaction, the joy of not being all alone. I felt that with me were all my beloved priests, the religious communities, the parish communities, the base communities, and all those who experience the wondrous unity of this church.

That is why on returning, sisters and brothers, I feel thankful to you because what was an international spectacle in Rome becomes here among us an intimate family gathering, but always enlivened by the same heartbeat for it is the same church. When I saw pilgrimages and excursions from all over the world visiting the tomb of Saint Peter and passing by the *cathedra* of the pope, it seemed to me like a torrent of humanity's blood passing through the heart to carry oxygen to all the church. Because that is what the pope is: the heart of the church. And everyone whose blood, whose life, whose devotion is oxygenated in that unity with the pope is a healthy, vital member of this church that we are experiencing this morning not only in this Cathedral of San Salvador but in the many distant communities listening by radio and in many homes alongside the sick and the many loved ones who have not been able to come but who experience this moment of prayer that, jointly with their pastor, we are raising up to the Lord *pro pontífice nostro Paulo*, for our pontiff Paul, on the fifteenth anniversary of his election and coronation as Roman pontiff.

I therefore want to thank all the persons who have made this solidarity possible with their prayers, their moral support, and their spiritual presence. Also, I want to thank especially those who shape public opinion—newspapers, television, radio—for their reporting on the journey of this pilgrim to Rome, the center of catholicity. I know that the bulletins, the

¹ Archbishop Romero left for Rome together with Bishop Arturo Rivera on 17 June 1978 to make his *ad limina* visit. Pope Paul VI received them in audience on June 21. Archbishop Romero returned to El Salvador on June 30. He records the details of this trip and of the audience with the pope in his personal diary. See *Mons. Oscar A. Romero, su diario*, San Salvador 2000, 38-49. The Spanish edition of the *L'Osservatore Romano* for 16 July 1978 published a photograph of Archbishop Romero and Bishop Rivera with Pope Paul VI.

dialogues, and the other means by which I've tried to stay united with you have been arriving, and I'm pleased that our own means of communication are so efficient and so loved by our dear people of God.

There in Rome we held quiet dialogues and shared information with the representatives of the church's central authority. There was clarification of certain misunderstandings arising from false or biased reports, and my own presence there seemed to me so providential that I give thanks to the Lord because there in Rome they now know how much I love and support the successor to the chair of Saint Peter. They could not doubt my fidelity to the pope, and I have affirmed once again that, God willing, I will die faithful to Peter's successor, the vicar of Christ. I told them that it is easy to preach the pope's teachings theoretically; to follow his magisterium faithfully in theory is very easy. But when it comes to living, when it comes to embodying, when it comes to making those salutary teachings reality in the history of a suffering people, that is when conflicts arise. It is not that I have been unfaithful. Never! To the contrary, I feel that today I am more faithful than ever because I experience the testing, the suffering, and the intimate joy of proclaiming a doctrine that I've always believed and loved. And I proclaim it not just with words and lip service, but I am trying to make it come alive in this community the Lord has entrusted to me. I beseech all of you, dear sisters and brothers, if we are really Catholics and followers of an authentic Gospel—and therefore a very difficult Gospel—if we really want to do honor to our name as followers of Christ, then let us not be afraid to transform into life and blood, into truth and history, this doctrine that comes from the pages of the Gospels and becomes a present reality in the teachings of the councils and of the popes who try to be true shepherds amid the vicissitudes of their times.

I will never forget the beautiful moment when the pope spoke to me; it was after he had received synthesized information from all his officials about what he should say in the brief audience he had with each bishop during the *ad limina* visitation. He spoke words of encouragement to me; he spoke heartening words of consolation that were felt in the heart of this pastor as proof of the charism God has entrusted to Peter and his successors: «Strengthen your brethren!» (Luke 22:32). This is what I now bring back, sisters and brothers: confirmation, ratification, a word of encouragement, kindness, and comprehension from that sweet Christ on earth, the pope.

As he held my hands with the warmth and the strength of one who knows he is the support of all pastors and of the universal church, he counseled me and helped me to continue to be faithful to this ministry of service to this people. He spoke very affectionate words about our people, and I'd love to tell you what they were, but the emotion of the moment makes me forget his exact words. But what he said basically was that he has known our Salvadoran people for fifty years now, since when he was working as secretary of state, before becoming pontiff. And he was constantly hearing news about the vitality, the industriousness, and the problems of this people. «They are a people», he told me, «who fight for their rights and seek a more just social order. They are a people who must be loved and helped. Be patient, be strong, and help them! And tell them that the pope loves them and cares for them and is aware of what they're going through. But they should never seek solutions through irrational violence. They should never get caught up in the currents of hatred. They should work to build unity, peace, and justice on God's foundation of love». I was then very pleased to tell him, «Holy Father, this is what I preach. I've never preached hatred though calumny says I have. Your message for the first of January 1978 has been the key to my preaching: No to violence! Yes to peace!» The pope smiled and blessed our people, for whom he wishes happiness on the paths of the Gospel.

And so, sisters and brothers, as we gather together this morning to honor the person and the sacred mission of the Roman pontiff and to celebrate the day of the pope, I don't want to stray far from the biblical readings that were read today. We could say that the three readings pay a triple homage to the triple mission of the Roman pontiff: first, he is holy, a man of God, one worthy of Christ; second, he is a prophet sent by Christ; and third, he is a sacrament, a visible presence of the divine life that God wishes to give us for our own happiness. I will try to develop these three ideas.

The pope is holy, a man of God, one worthy of Christ

First of all, I have just seen the pope, and like the Shunammite woman of the first reading (2 Kgs 4:9), I would like to tell all of you that that man of God is a saint. He is holy. In all his fragility, eighty-one years old, tormented by arthritis, and almost dragging his feet, he still has a lucid mind and above all a heart that is a veritable volcano of love for humanity. He is a saint; he is a true disciple of Christ.

Today we read in the gospel, «Those who do not leave father, mother, children, spouse, and all that they own for my sake are not worthy of me. Those who do not take up their cross and follow me are not worthy of me» (Matt 10:37-38). Today's gospel states that we must leave everything because those who want to find here on earth their comforts, their permanence, their life will lose them all. But those who for love of Christ and his Gospel renounce their life will find it (Matt 10:39). With these words Christ counsels those who are to be his apostles in history, and I have seen them all made reality in Paul VI, a man detached from everything.

During the audience of June 21 he said, «The force of circumstance obliges me to speak about myself even though I do not like to do so. Today marks fifteen years since I was elected to this apostolic charge. That means simply that since that time I am completely yours; I belong to you; I am not my own»². This is the pope's commitment. He is a man who doesn't live just for himself; he is a man whose heart beats with a love that makes him feel like father, leader, guide, pastor of humankind. He is a man with a heart so sensitive that he weeps when he sees the ingratitude of his bad children, but he smiles when he experiences the affection of those who love him and try to correspond to the love he has for them. He is a good man, a holy man!

When I saw him, I was reminded of the scene on the shores of Lake Tiberias: «Simon, son of John, do you love me?» (John 21:15). Paul VI responds with Peter's words: «Yes, Lord, you know that I love you». «Feed my lambs». Only a pope can know the price of the love needed to feed the whole world. He has to have a gigantic heart in order not to tremble before the onslaught of the great evil and indifference of a desacralized world that is turning its back on the Divine. We have a pope who wants go out to this world in order to lead it to its true happiness.

The cardinals greeted the pope on June 24, the day of his saint (his baptismal name is John Baptist). When the cardinals visit him on the feast of Saint John, he usually gives a discourse in which he reviews the life of the church. On this occasion he said, «Allow me to convert this homage to myself into an homage to the church. I no longer live for myself; I live

² Catechesis of Pope Paul VI in the general audience of Wednesday 21 June, the fifteenth anniversary of his election as pope. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (25 June 1978).

for the church»³. And he began to describe the goals of the church precisely in terms of holiness: «There is no true church when there is no true holiness». It seemed like an echo of today's gospel: «Those who do not leave everything and take up their cross and follow the Lord are not worthy of him» (Matt 10:38). These words of the church, sisters and brothers, on the lips of the pope are a call to holiness.

But when we spoke privately, the pope said to me, «Let us preach not only with words, but let us preach also by the testimony of our lives». I remembered a phrase he once spoke: «The world of today does not need as many teachers as it does witnesses—witnesses of love, witnesses of holiness» (EN 41). And he proposes to be himself a witness to holiness. He is truly a holy man! Looking at the pope, every Catholic should feel like that eagle in the psalms who is inspired to fly by the example of a greater eagle (Ps 103:5). The pope has scaled the heights of sanctity: his faithfulness to Christ and his love for the people reveal the perfection of a person who lives no longer for himself but only to be an example and a model for those who want to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the true follower. The pope said, «Each person has to follow Christ in his or her own vocation: the priests with priestly holiness, men and women religious with the holiness of consecrated life, married couples with the holy fidelity of their matrimony, single persons with lives of chastity proper to those who render homage to God through the offering of their flesh». The pope wants young people, children, all of us, to be holy according to the goal of each person's unique vocation.

As we think about the vocation or the proper role of the pope in this Mystical Body, where each man and each woman has a role to play for the good of the whole Body, I recall what I said before about the pope's charism of «strengthening the brethren» in the faith. We must be the strength and uniting force of the Mystical Body; we must be what Christ said of Peter one day, «You shall be called rock because on this rock I will build my church» (Matt 16:18a). The pope is that rock, he is stone, he is solid foundation. That's why when someone who's a preacher in this church has the good fortune of being in direct contact with that rock that is the pope, and when the pope shakes his hand and bolsters his spirit, then that person feels that he is firmly built upon an immortal foundation and that even though the winds of hell blow hard, they shall not prevail because it is Christ who on this solid rock is establishing the holiness of his church (Matt 16:18b).

That is what I hope for, dear sisters and brothers, as I transmit to you the love the pope has for the Salvadoran people. He urged me to try to understand the people and to stay close to them by consoling and encouraging them and by keeping them away from the evil paths of hatred, violence, vengeance, resentment, and fratricidal struggles. How I would love it, sisters and brothers, if that love which the pope feels so intimately and so sincerely were to take root in the hearts of all of us who are here this morning to pay him honor. If we leave here today with no other purpose than opening our hearts completely to trying to love and to build a new world based on the love Christ and his Spirit inspire in us, then that would be enough, sisters and brothers, to make the pope feel very happy and to make our homage to the pope an homage worthy of this people. It would be a loving response to the love which the pastor of all peoples—and therefore the pastor of Salvadorans—asked me to express to you. He encouraged your pastor: «I understand», he told me, «how difficult the times are for you. It's not possible that everyone will think like you. Be patient. Be strong. Love. Follow the Gospel faithfully».

³ PAUL VI, «Discourse to the College of Cardinals, June 23, on the Fifteenth Anniversary of his Election as Pope» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (2 July 1978).

Blessed be God, sisters and brothers, that this confirmation of my path is precisely the road I am taking, trying to be faithful to the Gospel and the doctrine of the church. And along with you, I want to give thanks to the Lord because when I asked in Rome whether they had found any errors in my faith—they had a lot of my homilies there—they told me clearly: «No, you can be sure that there are no errors of faith». Blessed be God! The one now preaching to you, therefore, is in communion of faith with the one who is the teacher of the faith.

The pope is a prophet sent by Christ

I come now to my second thought. Paul VI has been sent; he is the one Christ speaks of in today's gospel: «Whoever receives those sent by me receives me, and whoever receives me receives the One who sent me» (Matt 10:40). I find in these beautiful words of today's gospel the communion of humanity with God, and especially of those persons who want to enter into the communion of faith but preach a revelation that is not ours.

On the day when the pope responded to the cardinals⁴ he asked whether the faith the church professes is the authentic faith that Peter received from Christ. We know that the tomb of Saint Peter is very close to his chair, the chair of Peter of 1978, and so it can be said that he teaches the same faith that the chair of Peter taught in the first years of the Christian era: there is coherency; there is fidelity.

Here we find the second charism of the pope: infallibility, the certainty of teaching the same doctrine that was received from Christ. Thus, all those who preach on earth have to judge their preaching against the preaching of the successor of Peter. When they are able to tell their people, «What I preach to you is the same doctrine as the pope preaches; it is the deposit of faith that he keeps and preserves», then there is profound joy in the hearts of those pastors because they can tell their people, «Let us continue in this doctrine. Let us get to know it better and better». And so I feel new fervor to keep preaching the Lord's doctrine through these homilies.

In Rome I was asked whether I thought my homilies were too long. I told them I certainly thought so, but when I see people so attentive to my words, I take advantage of the minutes. I thank my people for listening to me. And as I realize that, besides the multitude in the cathedral, the radio audience at this hour is almost completely tuned in, I feel sure that that the Spirit of God in my poor words is bringing revelation, the message of the Gospel. I try to be faithful to the Gospel even when my words disturb one sector or another. I try to define my message completely in terms of the church's authentic doctrine. I don't want it to be a doctrine manipulated by any particular group, by any partisan political tendency, by any opposition, or by any official organism. I don't want anyone to use my words, the word of God, for purely secular interests. I am with those who seek justice because of the justice they are seeking, but I do this without sharing the paths by which these people, autonomous as they are, may be seeking it. I know the church does not allow me to walk the paths of violence or any paths that are not the paths of Jesus Christ.

But thanks be to God, this infallibility which assures people that the doctrine of Paul VI is the doctrine of Peter and the doctrine of Jesus Christ also guarantees—blessed be God!—the doctrine that the humble archbishop of San Salvador preaches to his people. And he grows in

⁴ Ibid.

faith along with his people for I also receive, sisters and brothers, your preaching to me. I know by the church's theological doctrine that that gift of infallibility that God alone possesses has been given to the people of God, and I know that this people of God has an instrument which is the pope. The pope expresses the charism of infallibility at the same time that the people sense it and live it. That's why the people know how to tell when the preaching is not authentic. You have a very fine intuition of what is called the *sensus fidei*, the sense of faith, by which members of the people of God can detect when a preacher is not in harmony with the doctrine truly revealed by God. This is the case when people listen attentively and follow faithfully. But many who listen to me, sisters and brothers, do so not for religious motives. This was an objection to which I had to respond in Rome. I know that many people listen to me with political motives, with the intention of catching me in some phrase, with the intention of challenging me if I say something wrong. But I know that most people who listen to me listen for the purpose of seeking the revelation of God. If some do not listen in this way, they should know that they're not in tune with me because I am preaching as a pastor, as a teacher of faith, and I desire only one thing: that this faith that I preach might find an echo of faith and devotion, an echo of love in the hearts of all of you. That's how it is when the people of God themselves act as a guarantee that assures the preacher that his doctrine and his teaching are following the paths of true revelation.

In this way the people are served by the church. It is not demagogic service; it is not political service. The church is not politicized. If the church touches political topics, she is simply using her competency in God's revelation to tell politicians what is good and what is sinful. She has the duty to instruct people in morality, and morality encompasses all aspects of human life.

The pope recalled that ten years ago his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* set down the sure norms that everyone has to follow⁵. Many ask, «Why does the church's doctrine intrude into the intimacy of matrimony?» The church has the right to do so because she is the guardian of God's law and of nature, and in the name of that law she speaks about the intimacy of matrimony. In like manner, in the name of God's doctrine and God's commandments and God's justice, the church decries in the political arena whatever is not right. In this regard she cannot be silent. To speak out in this way is not to meddle in politics but to preach what God desires for humanity on the basis of her competency in the Gospel.

Last Sunday at noon I went to hear the pope and to pray the *Angelus* with him in Saint Peter's Square, as he does every Sunday. Before praying to the Virgin, the pope always delivers a brief message. I tell you that he made me cry last Sunday when, just before the *Angelus*, he told the story of an Italian boy named Mauro, eleven years old. When Mauro saw some men kidnapping his fifteen-year-old brother, he told them, «Don't take him; he's sick. Take me instead». So the kidnappers took the eleven-year-old boy. When his poor parents managed to collect a part of ransom money to rescue him, the person who delivered the money to the abductors was hit over the head with the butt of a revolver because he didn't bring the amount they demanded. The boy's mother offered to take his place so they would set him free, but he has been held captive since April. The pope severely condemned the evil of this world in which we live, but at the same time he praised that boy whom he called «the little lamb». Mauro, we

⁵ Ibid.

are with you. You are not alone. You are a hero of humanity. You are a model of the kindness and goodness that this world of today so badly needs⁶.

When the pope denounced such concrete cases, I rejoiced to think: this is the role of the church! I do nothing more here in the *cathedra* of my diocese than point out things that are wrong and that demand justice in the name of the Gospel, just as we also justly praise the good things that are done.

Events of the week

This morning, for example, do we not feel that our own blood has been spilt in the death of the priest Hermógenes López, who was brutally killed on June 30 near his parish in San José Pinula, twenty-four kilometers from Guatemala City⁷? In this Mass we wish to express our solidarity with the victim of that murder, a crime that has made us reflect seriously on the way our unforgettable Father Grande died.

We also want to express our solidarity with the demands of the vicar general of the diocese of Santiago de María, who denounced the unjust capture of José Adán Romero and Carlos Chicas in Ciudad Barrios while they were fulfilling missions as part of their pastoral ministry. I know these two individuals, and they are truly men who work hard for the kingdom of God. I can testify that the request of the vicar general of Santiago de María is just and that his protest against this unjust assault is equally just⁸.

I also feel solidarity with the suffering recounted to me by the family of Doctor Eduardo Antonio Espinoza Fiallos, professor of medicine at the university. He was captured and taken to National Police headquarters, and according to the family there are witnesses who have seen him there. This poor doctor needs certain medical treatments, and nothing is known of his present situation.

Along with the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Prisoners and the Disappeared, I am also in solidarity with the denunciation of the disappearance of Miguel Amaya Villalobos and Roger Blandino Nerio. Because they expressed solidarity with the mothers' hunger strike, these men were removed from the central prison of Cojutepeque at 11:30 o'clock on the night of June 29. They were already under the jurisdiction of the Fourth Criminal Judge. Nevertheless, the poor families are unable to obtain information even from the prison department. The minister of justice has the obligation to respond to the families' demands regarding these disappeared men who are already under a judge's orders. Furthermore, we denounce the maneuvers aimed at unjustly implicating political prisoners in an escape attempt at the Santa Ana Prison.

⁶ PAUL VI, «Goodness Conquers Cruelty and Violence», allocution on 25 June 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (2 July 1978).

⁷ «Hermógenes López, Martyr» in *Orientación* (16 July 1978); «Communiqué of the Committee for Justice and Peace», *ECA* 356-357 (1978) 557-558.

⁸ «Declaration of the Bishop's Office of Santiago de María» in *Orientación* (2 July 1978).

We also feel as our own the suffering of those who are going hungry as a means of demanding news about their loved ones⁹. One of the mothers is seriously ill, and yet no heed is being paid to the call that issues from her pain.

In El Paisnal two *campesinos* were murdered: Roberto Saracay and Santos García Molina. After they were taken from their homes at midnight and beaten, they were found dead.

Elsewhere, there are unjust maneuvers in the San Sebastián mining company, allegedly with the complicity of the Ministry of Labor¹⁰. Also, the labor difficulties at the textile firm INCA and the company called IRA have still not been resolved¹¹.

In view of all these manifestations of suffering and pain and violence, how opportune it seemed to me, sisters and brothers, to read there in Rome, in the newspaper published with the pope's approval, *L'Osservatore Romano*, an article by the head of that paper titled, *L' stato democratico e la violenza*. Among other things it states:

The objective which a democratic state must try to achieve is to make ever more hypothetical and unreal the case in which recourse to force by individuals and groups is justified because they claim that there exists a tyrannical regime of a new type, one in which laws, institutions and governments, instead of recognizing and promoting basic freedoms and other natural human rights, systematically trample on them, thereby reducing citizens to the condition of oppressed people. If the democratic state, on the basis of its constitution and laws, preserves and promotes freedom and the other human rights, and if it provides and employs the appropriate instruments for assuring justice and peace for its citizens, and if it furthermore allows free and representative elections so that the people can express themselves regarding the exercise of power and the peaceful succession of those who wield power, then the recourse to violence by individuals or groups becomes inadmissible.

This is what the Vatican teaches: love of freedom and affirmation of human rights. When the archbishop of San Salvador preaches just as I have now, I am doing nothing more than echoing the preaching that is heard there in Rome within hearing of the pope, because a Gospel which does not try to point out the concrete defects of sinful humanity in order to save people and rescue them from sin and make them happy is not the true saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The pope is the great sacrament of the world's renewal

And so I conclude, dear sisters and brothers, with this third thought from today's second reading. We could say that in my first thought I presented the pope as a holy man who incarnates the church's longing for holiness. In the second thought I presented him as a

⁹ From 17 May to 14 July 1978 the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners and the Disappeared occupied the main offices of the Red Cross in San Salvador. There they carried out a hunger strike to demand the freedom of political prisoners and the return of the disappeared, but they received no response. See *Orientación* (25 June 1978 and 23 July 1978).

¹⁰ On 31 January 1978 the multinational firm San Sebastián Gold Mines Inc. dismissed 273 workers but, in an agreement with the Ministry of Labor, undertook to reincorporate them on 7 May or, failing this, to compensate them. They did not fulfill either agreement. See *Orientación* (9 July 1978).

¹¹ The trade union of the Central American Nylon Industry (INCA) of Santa Ana denounced the capture of its secretary for disputes, Margarito de Jesús Vázquez. See *Orientación* (2 July 1978).

prophet sent by God to preserve and announce his revealed doctrine, a doctrine to which all of us who preach in the church must be true. So third, since Saint Paul speaks to us about baptism as the cradle of *new* women and men, then I'm going to say that the pope is the great sacrament of the world's renewal.

The pope is a man like all human beings, but God has bestowed on him the charism of being the center of priestly unity. He is the great priest. If it is true that our episcopacy and our priesthood derive directly from Christ the priest, then the exercise of this episcopal office and this priesthood depends upon the jurisdiction that the pope gives to those who have been ordained. We are therefore accountable to the pope for our preaching, and he has a right to guide our pastoral attitude. I return now from Rome, sisters and brothers, with these new orientations and charisms that allow me to continue to announce the Gospel and, above all, this sacramental holiness—at least as long as the pope wants me to be the pastor of this diocese and has confidence in my simple words and my conduct.

Saint Paul tells us today that Christians are nothing less than persons incorporated into the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3). True redemption consists in this. That is why the church cannot confuse her preaching and her mission with other forms of liberation that are purely secular. The liberation that the church proclaims is the same as the pope proclaims: it is that of baptism, that of the sacraments, that of confession, that which comes when the sinner is told «I absolve you of your sins. I break the chains that cause all the world's slaveries». For the world would not be so evil if people were pardoned for their sins. But there is evil in the world because people are slaves of selfishness, pride, ambition, envy, and cruel power. That is why there is sin. And because there is sin, there is misfortune, and there is also discrimination among human beings, who ought to be all one family of God's children.

To conclude, it is beautiful to see how Saint Paul tells us that this incorporation of Christians into Christ is definitive. All those who are baptized, if they truly want to remain faithful to Christ, will no longer die (Rom 6:9). Only when people betray their faith and their religious convictions do they turn their backs on Christ and become sinners. That is why we have the sad situation of many baptized sinners, many baptized pagans, many baptized idolaters. They are not fulfilling their role as baptized persons. The pope is the great sacrament because the church is reflected in him. From him flow the jurisdiction and the power of a priesthood that baptizes human beings throughout the world and incorporates them into Christ so that they become new members of a new humanity.

Dear sisters and brothers, may this homage to the Holy Father culminate in a resolution to be faithful to our baptism and in a commitment to holiness. Let us not struggle for merely temporal forms of liberation, but let us work for the true freedom of the children of God! Let us break the chains that bind hearts and souls so that each of us can become a valuable instrument in the creation of a new world! It is useless to create new structures and to pass new laws if there are not new men and women whose hearts are renewed in Christ and who know how to make our nation a truly new society (M 1,3).

I thank you for the homage you are rendering with me to the Holy Father. We are going to enter now into the intimacy of our Eucharist. As we elevate the host and receive communion, let us be convinced that this Christ who nourishes us with eternal life is also sustaining until the end of time this important figure in our church, the pope, in whom this morning we place all our love, our trust, our solidarity.