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THE WAY OF THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time 9 July 1978

Zechariah 9:9-10
Romans 8:9, 11-13
Matthew 11:25-30

Dear sisters and brothers, every Sunday Christians come together to be nourished by God's word and to participate in the Eucharist. Let us not separate these two objectives of our Sunday Mass. We don't come only to hear the word; we come in order for that Word to become life, to become celebration. It is a Word that becomes Passover, a Word that becomes the Body and Blood of Christ who redeems us. That is why we must bring the concrete reality of our lives into this torrent of God's Word so that our Sunday Eucharist is not an act that runs parallel to our lives but is the true soul, the true force, the very spirit of our own lives and our own history.

It is for this reason that I am always careful to give you a few examples of the historical reality we're passing through. This doesn't mean that I'm going outside the limits of the word of God. Rather, it's an invitation to all of you to do the same. Just as we do here on Sunday, shedding light on our national realities and the problems of the country, so should each of you also try to do: throw light on the difficulties of your families and your own personal problems. If we're truly Christians, then we should be known by the criteria we use to shed light on the realities of our lives. Our criteria are not those of the world, the self-centered, materialistic criteria of hatred and vengeance. Rather, we use the criteria of love inspired by Christ.

And so, sisters and brothers, after discussing our social realities here and illuminating them with God's word, we then take them to the Eucharistic altar where the whole life of our nation, our families, our individual selves (however intimate they may be) becomes sacrifice with the host and the wine, fruit of the earth and of human labor, the labor of our whole week that we bring like bunches of produce for our altar. They are our realities, the ones we need to shed light on every week. Sunday Mass, therefore, is beautiful because we come to bring the Lord the fruit of our labor, our trials, our hopes, our failures, our joys, our disappointments—it all belongs to him. This is the response we want to give to the words of today's gospel: «Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest» (Matt 11:28). We leave Mass truly realizing that we don't walk alone through life; a divine power goes with us and gives meaning to our suffering, our hopes, and our projects.

Events of the week

This week, for example, sisters and brothers, I've been waiting anxiously and hopefully for a response to the anguish of Mrs. Matsumoto. All the newspapers published the archbishop's

call¹ echoing the suffering of this woman, and certainly it has reached the ears of those who know the whereabouts of Mr. Matsumoto. Where is he? How is he? That is what his wife wants to know. She is open to any possible negotiation in order to find him again. It is not true that the family has refused negotiation. She is willing to negotiate within the bounds of possibility, naturally. If the conditions the kidnappers stipulate for the freedom of Mr. Matsumoto are of a political nature, they cannot be negotiated by the family. That would be the responsibility of politicians, and they don't want to discuss political conditions. But remember that prevailing over all the political interests of any party or group are humanitarian values, and it is in the name of these that this aggrieved wife offers the possibility of negotiation.

In my communication I also said that I am pained at the loss of freedom—and who knows if not also at the loss of life—of those persons whose release is being demanded as the price for the life and liberty of Mr. Matsumoto². For that very reason, in the name of sound morality I repeat a great principle that is often sadly forgotten but must be kept in mind in all these moral considerations: *Non sunt facienda mala ut eveniant bona*, a Latin phrase meaning «evil deeds cannot be done to achieve good ends»³. Human freedom and dignity cannot be bought at the price of trampling on the freedom and dignity of others. It is not right to bring consolation to the families of the disappeared by inflicting the same kind of anguish on another family. We can never do something evil as a means for achieving something good. When people say that the church has become communist, they are forgetting that she always defends this principle which matters little to communism: the ends do not justify the means. As good as an end may be, we can never use an evil means to attain it. This principle has enormous relevancy, but as I say, it has been quite forgotten in our time.

On the other hand, how delighted I was this week when I read the moving account of that child I mentioned last Sunday, the boy the pope referred to in his noonday audience two weeks ago⁴. Mauro Carassale, an eleven-year-old boy, offered to take the place of his fifteen-year-old brother who was being kidnapped. He told the kidnappers: «Don't take him! He is ill. Take me». The boy then disappeared. Finally, this week he returned to his home. It's reported that the kidnappers had become quite fond of the boy, and when he said good-bye to them, they responded, «Forgive us, Mauro! Forgive us, Mauro!»

May the human sentiment prevail that I evoked at the end of my published message, using words the pope spoke of another kidnapped person, Aldo Moro. When addressing Moro's kidnappers, the pope stated, «Allow me, as an interpreter for so many of your compatriots, to nourish the hope that your spirits still preserve humane sentiments that will in the end triumph. I await the proof of that while praying for you and loving you always»⁵. Whenever we have denounced sin or crime, we have not done so without love. With love and prayer we hope that a person's good and noble sentiments, no matter how criminal the person may have been, will always triumph. And loving sinners with all our heart, we pray to God that they will truly return to a more humanitarian path. I hope that these words, which I know are broadcast to

¹ «The Message of the Archbishop of San Salvador to Those who Know the Whereabouts of Mr. Matsumoto» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 July 1978).

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

³ This is a traditional principle of moral theology, based on Romans 3:8.

⁴ PAUL VI, «Goodness Overcomes Cruelty and Violence», allocution on 22 June 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (2 July 1978).

⁵ PAUL VI, «Letter to the "Men of the Red Brigade" Requesting the Freedom of the Italian Statesman Aldo Moro» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 April 1978).

many corners of the nation, also reach that mysterious silence where Mr. Matsumoto is hidden away and that we may feel again the joy of his home returning to tranquility.

Also remaining unresolved is the disappearance of Dr. Eduardo Antonio Espinoza Fiallos, professor of medicine at the university. His family asks that he be freed or else brought before the courts.

We suffer also along with 273 families left without work in the San Sebastián mines, where promises were made and not fulfilled. May the Ministry of Labor assume greater responsibility in this labor conflict as well as in others, and may tranquility be restored to these people who are now without work and without food.

With great pastoral joy we have seen how the voice of Latin America is resounding in ways similar to the ways we're trying to make the church's voice heard from this *cathedra*. After making consultations throughout Latin America, seventy bishops in Bogotá have been preparing the document that will serve as the basis for dialogue during the bishops' meeting in Puebla in October. They have made some very strong, critical observations about the present social, economic, and political situation in Latin America. The bishops of Colombia presented a document in which they made a very serious analysis of their country. These voices will no doubt be heard in Puebla. Indeed, they must be heard! In that document, for example, the Colombian church blames the political and economic classes for the crisis the nation is experiencing. The national institutions have deteriorated markedly in their functions, and they no longer effectively carry out the tasks that correspond to them according to ethical and regulatory norms. The bishops also state that the military has not escaped the moral crisis that has taken hold of the nation. Indeed, the bishops speak of a tremendous moral crisis that has overwhelmed all sectors of national life. The capitalist mentality preempts the Christian values that ought to be guiding the nation. It is not really a question of shouting about the «dangers of communism» but of saving the homeland. What advances the cause of communism is the social and political forms inspired by a type of capitalism that is deservedly called atheist because it adores the gods of money and power and forgets that God is the Father of all people.

Also this week, Vatican Radio said we are passing through a difficult time in church-state relations, especially in Latin America, Africa, and certain communist nations. You see? A Christian perspective does not consider only the danger of communism; it also sees danger in the anti-communism inspired not by Christian principles but by self-interest. Since the time of Pope Pius XII the church has seen communism as being aided and abetted by the bogus type of anti-communism⁶ we extol so much in situations like our own.

«Certain regimes», said Vatican Radio, «certain authoritarian regimes in Latin America are concerned about the work the Catholic Church is carrying out on behalf of human rights and the less favored classes of society»⁷. It is quite true, sisters and brothers: wherever the Gospel is preached together with a Christian proposal for human development, conflicts will arise. We have only to look at the Latin American continent where attempts are being made to preach a Gospel that seeks to establish here now on earth a just kingdom of God among Christians. Conflicts always arise, as we see in what happened recently with the priest killed in Guatemala⁸ because he was trying to prevent water from being taken from his town to supply

⁶ PIUS XII, «*Col cuore aperto* (With Open Heart) », radio message on the vigil of Christmas, 24 December 1955.

⁷ «Vatican Says Church-State Relations are Difficult» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 July 1978).

⁸ Father Hermógenes López was killed in Guatemala on 30 June 1978. See *Orientación* (16 July 1978).

the capital. Wherever efforts are made to defend the poor and to encourage the people to cease being passive and to develop critical awareness, there the church causes disturbance. That's why the problem of El Salvador is the problem of many countries. Where no one preaches a Gospel that provokes such conflict, then naturally there are no conflicts. Everything goes well—just as everything goes well with the Gospel preached by Protestants who don't want to preach a Gospel that is committed to the people. That is not the Gospel of the Christ who became man in order to share our anguish and to ascend to Calvary for the sake of humankind.

In regard to the president's recent speech⁹, we are concerned about its mainly repressive tone and its silence regarding the just demands the people are making. Formal petitions have been made for an amnesty, for repeal of the Law of Public Order (instead it was ratified), and for the right of the *campesinos* to organize. At the same time, we're filled with hope as we read many of the government's philosophical concepts, which if carried out could open the way to solutions for our nation's problems. They propose, for example, the philosophy of true peace being based on justice, freedom, and valid laws. There is talk of «the humanization of wealth» and the social function of private property. Magnificent! Moreover, there is talk of the participation of all Salvadorans in political service for the common good, of «respect for the interdependence of powers», of «rural people as the center of gravity for agrarian policy», of perfecting the system of justice, and of «integral education». This one I liked a lot: «migration to friendly countries». I think that God is not to blame here. God has made the land for everyone, and if in El Salvador we're all crowded together while other countries have unused land, then people must come to an understanding so that the population is distributed more justly. I'm happy to hear about this project of migration to friendly lands. There is also talk of «full development of the human person», «freedom of expression», etc.

These are all ideas about which Christ might say, as he did to the doctor of the law: «You have answered correctly; do this and you will live» (Luke 10:28). Certainly there would be no conflicts in the country if those doors were opened with all the sincerity of persons seeking the common good. And here also the church offers the helpful collaboration that the Council requests (GS 76). The church is open to dialogue and cooperation, hoping only for the sincerity of deeds. She is ready to give the whole of revelation, and that is precisely what we want to talk about today, basing ourselves on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Life in our communities

But first of all I also want to make mention of the life of our communities. I want to highlight what happened yesterday afternoon at two o'clock in a community of Jesuit fathers. About fifty or sixty heavily armed members of the security forces arrived at the Jesuit residence in eight cars and a truck. The objective of the operation was to search for weapons. According to the authorities, there was an accusation that they were storing arms. That's why the operation was like the siege of a military fortress. With all due vigilance the priests, who were engaged in after-dinner conversation, allowed them free rein to search the premises, even going ahead to show them the different rooms of the house. Every corner was searched, and not a thing was found. The security forces have had the opportunity to verify the fact that these priests do not possess any arms. Their power, like that of all Christians, resides in their faith and their love. But it is sad to think that such distrustful searches are carried out.

⁹ «Message to the Salvadoran People from the President of the Republic, General Carlos Humberto Romero, after his First Year of Government», 1 July 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (6 July 1978). Passages in quotation marks are subtitles or quotations from the discourse.

We want to confess honestly that the soldiers were under the command of persons who clearly understood that type of operation; they conducted themselves politely, if politeness can be said to be entering with rifles and pointing them at people as if they were enemies. All the same, there were no personal attacks. But let us state clearly: such actions do not help to win the church's trust. I want to congratulate the Jesuit fathers of that house for the serenity and honesty with which they put up with this new proof of distrust of their work. I take this opportunity to reaffirm the complete trust of the church in her priests, but they must be brave and ready to be the object of conflicts and suspicions as long as they work for the authentic development of people, as Christ asks of us.

I also want to congratulate beforehand the community of Tepecoyo, where the Sisters of Charity have finished building a pretty church that will be blessed today at two o'clock in the afternoon.

At the same time, I transmit the congratulations and greetings of the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious¹⁰, Cardinal Pironio, to all the women religious, both those involved in traditional works of schools and hospitals and those working in direct pastoral ministry among the people. He is a Latin American bishop from Argentina, a great friend whom I had the pleasure of embracing warmly. He told me, «Three things are necessary for a religious community to be an authentic community of hope in the church: first, a great concern to love Jesus Christ; second, fidelity to their founding charism, the spirit of their congregation; and third—this is very important—readiness to work for the local church. A community of religious men or women should daily strive to love Christ more and be faithful to the mystique of their congregation. Not only that but they should above all place that love and that mystique at the service of the people where they are working by observing the pastoral norms of the bishop who leads the diocesan community. Tell them that I am quite at peace with these communities even though they are accused of being communists, third-worlders, etc.»

Using the familiar *tú* of Argentina, this cardinal also told me, «Don't worry. They've called me a communist too. I just received a book with the title *Pironio, Pyromaniac*—as if I were an arsonist and a communist». I replied, «I'm happy to have the honor of being called a communist for having tried, like you, to put into practice in our America those documents of Medellín inspired by the Spirit of God, and I'm happy that we are preparing to continue on the same path with the help of the Divine Spirit in Puebla».

In this regard also, sisters and brothers, I forgot to tell you that I've returned from Rome with a special invitation to participate in Puebla¹¹, where I'll have the pleasure of joining with the bishops who'll be studying the problems of Latin America.

Finally, as we draw close to our patronal feast of the Savior of the World, I want to urge you to make the days ahead days of intense prayer. The cathedral here will be done up in picturesque style, but more than anything it will be the scene of great fervor in these days preceding the feast of August 6. Let us come to visit the Divine Savior. Let us join in pilgrimage and prepare ourselves above all to celebrate August 6 with a magnificent gathering of

¹⁰ The actual name is the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

¹¹ Starting in 1975, Archbishop Romero was a consultor of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, and that is why he was invited to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (1 October 1978).

communities as we did last year. We will gather there in the park to honor the Divine Savior of the World in the name of the whole nation. As a practical way to honor him I ask you once again, sisters and brothers, not to slacken in the efforts we're making to build for him a beautiful cathedral. Thanks be to God, the work is progressing, and the elegant lines of the dome that will crown this temple are becoming more clearly defined with each passing day. We ask for the help of all, especially in these days when we celebrate the feast of our Divine Patron.

I want to present my homily today as a path leading to the mystery of salvation. This path arising from God's initiative can be understood as the integral redemption present in the midst of humanity, a redemption that can be received only by the simple and the humble, not by the learned of this world. So I present these three ideas: First, the initiative of salvation is God's. Second, salvation is something integral, that is, it includes the body and our social relationships; naturally, the soul and eternal life come first, but there is also temporal life. And third, we need to make ourselves ready because not everyone receives this salvation of God. Christ has said, «I thank you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the proud and have revealed them to the humble and simple folk» (Matt 11:25).

The initiative is God's

The initiative is God's. The first reading is a most beautiful song announcing the king's arrival: «Rejoice, O daughter Zion; shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you» (Zech 9:9). This is a king who takes the initiative of coming to visit humanity. And humankind rejoices not because they've invited this king but because, as the Sacred Bible tells us, «in this we realize that he has loved us: that even before we loved him, he came for us» (1 John 4:10). In the gospel Christ speaks to us about the hidden mystery. We would have known nothing about this mystery, just as we know nothing about what other people are thinking as long as they keep their ideas to themselves. But when someone spontaneously says to us, «I'm going to tell you something. I want to communicate to you my thoughts and my opinions», then we can know what is contained in the mystery of human thought. So too, God remained hidden until Christ revealed him; this is the mystery of salvation. Christ explains it more clearly when he say, «No one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father and those to whom the Father wants to reveal him» (Matt 11:27).

Sisters and brothers, be very careful with faith! Faith is a free gift. Blessed are those who have faith. They have not merited it; it is given to them by God. Blessed are those who know Christ because no one knows Christ except the Father, so that those who come to know Christ participate in the thought of the Father. Blessed are those who can open their mouths and say with full awareness and love, «Our Father who art in heaven!» (Matt 6:9), because they have faith and they know that a Father exists whom no one knows unless the Son reveals him.

All of you and I myself have come here this morning to Mass because we're going to offer the sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood in order to appease the Father for the sins of the world and to ask God's blessings for our families. Christ could tell us now, as he told Peter, «Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven» (Matt 16:17). None of us has faith by our own merit. All faith is a gift of God. Let us give thanks for it and not go about exposing it to danger. Many people are playing with their faith when they say, «I no longer believe; I don't have faith anymore». If you didn't have faith, you wouldn't say so. If you say you don't have faith, it's because you know that there is faith and you want to have it. And to want to have it is to have it.

How unfortunate are those folk who don't even think of looking toward the heavens to discover the glories of natural creation. As Saint Paul said about the Romans, even though God did not reveal to them the profound mystery of his divine personality, they still could find traces of him in the creation and preservation of the world (Rom 1:20). Human beings are responsible for attaining at least a natural kind of faith in God's existence. It's obvious that the sun exists and that every year around the same time flowers and fruits appear. What marvelous order! And so there exists a Being who gives order and existence to all things.

But besides that, as the Council says, God wanted to speak to human beings as friend to friend, and he has revealed to them that it is possible to enter into contact with him and to share in his divine happiness. God awakens in the human heart the hope of another life, a life that becomes present now as God's kingdom on this earth. God wants us to work for this other life, to work for God's kingdom of greater justice and love among men and women. He wants us to work for faith and not only for politics; he wants us to work for faith and not just for the demands of purely human types of liberation; he wants us to work with the conviction that all those who have faith in their hearts are already liberated. This was explained to me marvelously in the Secretariat for Justice and Peace in Rome, where they told us that we must sow this faith in the people even when we don't see much possibility of liberation in the social, political, or economic order. That doesn't mean preaching conformity. Rather, it's telling people who have faith that they're already free. It's telling them that God's word is not bound by any form of servitude when people's hearts are filled with love and a sense of hope and freedom. It's telling our Salvadoran people that, despite their great suffering and oppression, they are already a free people when faith and hope are alive in their hearts.

This is the freedom that the church preaches, sisters and brothers, and in this sense we can all leave this cathedral or the communities where the church invites us to reflect on God's word as free persons committed to true development. The church has no scheme or system. She cannot embrace a political ideology or be a popular organization. That's not the church's job. Any popular organization that tries to tell Christians that they're not Christian unless they belong to FECCAS or UTC or ORDEN or any other organization are lying, and they're misusing the church. The church does not preach any concrete system. The church does not offer any method. But the church does offer the principle of true freedom: believing in God the liberator. That is where free choice arises for every person. All men and women are free to decide on the political path they want to follow to help the country; they have the right to organize with others who think the same way they do about the paths of true liberation.

What God places in the heart, then, is profound faith. He makes people realize that they're not on a dead-end street and that the homeland, as dark as its history becomes, will in the end be saved. If faith, which is God's initiative, succeeds in illuminating people's conscience, then divine initiatives will arise in them and save the country. That's why the first thing that I ask of the Lord—and that I hope all of you ask for in these days of the Savior of the world—is that our people have faith, the faith that is a gift of God and that we've all had, thank God, from childhood—if we don't play around with it!

What does God's offer consist of?

My second thought, dear sisters and brothers, is this: what does God's offer consist of? Besides telling us of the divine initiative, today's readings explain to us what this Gospel consists of,

understanding «Gospel» in the sense that Saint Paul mentions. Gospel is the power of God, the hidden mystery of God that is revealed, the mystery of salvation offered to humankind (Rom 1:16). To say what this consists of, I would like to speak as clearly as possible so that even the simplest of you who are hearing me will understand it.

In the first place, it consists of knowledge. No one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father and those to whom the Father wishes to reveal him (Matt 11:27). So above all, God's offer consists of knowledge, but it is not knowledge of difficult theories. Of course, it is knowledge so profound that theologians never finish investigating it, but it is also so simple that Christ goes as far as to pray this way: «Father, you have revealed this to the simple and humble folk, but you have hidden it from the arrogant» (Matt 11:25). This knowledge, sisters and brothers, is the kind that anyone of us, even the most unlettered among us, can possess. It is the knowledge that there exists a Christ, Son of God, who came to reveal that God loves me; it is the knowledge that there exists a divine life in which God wants me to share; it is the knowledge that there exists, beyond our present history, the definitive history where the Father awaits me with open arms; it is the knowledge that in my moment of anguish I am not alone, that by my side is someone who tells me, «If you're sad or if you're tired, come and I will help you». We feel this companionship and know that this someone, even though I don't see him, is very close to me.

God's offer also consists of feeling that we are in contact with God, feeling that Christ is not some distant, theoretical being but someone intensely present who invites you in all the circumstances of your life with that pearl mentioned in today's gospel, the pearl that hopefully you will guard throughout your life: «Those who feel tired and oppressed, come to me and I will free you! I will give you rest!» (Matt 11:28). Try it out, sisters and brothers. Try entering, says the Council, into that intimate sanctuary of your own conscience where God awaits you to dialogue with you. Tell him all your concerns and problems, and you will see how he will help you to be the architect of your own destiny even while respecting your freedom (GS 16).

We experience God present. The Father has sent his Son, the eternal Word. I find in the Council documents, sisters and brothers, this fullness of the Father's revelation. The document on divine revelation states, «He sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all people, so that he might dwell among them and tell them of the innermost being of God. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was sent as a man to humankind. He speaks the words of God and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do. To see Jesus is to see his Father. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death and to raise us up to life eternal» (DV 4).

How wonderful it is to know that each time we go to Mass, where Christ becomes present under the signs of bread and wine, he tells us about the intimacy of God's life and invites us, even while in this world, to become citizens of that divine life, for we don't have to wait to die in order to be happy with eternal happiness. All those who live holy Christian lives now on this earth are already blessed; they already live in heaven. That's why I told you that true liberation starts right here, from the human heart which already possesses that eternal life through faith.

And what else does God offer? I urge you all to meditate on today's second reading about the meaning of redemption. There Saint Paul goes to the heart of a great debate when he seeks the origins of the two great currents of humanity: good and evil. Evil has its origins in the flesh and good in the spirit. Today Saint Paul tells us with great clarity, «You are not in the flesh; rather, you are in the spirit for the Spirit of God dwells in you» (Rom 8:9). And he continues his analysis in what follows, so we must now delve deeply into Saint Paul's theology to explain the biblical meaning of that word «flesh».

«Flesh» is that soft tissue we wear to cover our bones, but flesh can also have a very lofty meaning, as when the Council urges us to honor our bodies: «Human persons must not despise their bodily life; rather they are obliged to regard their bodies as good and honorable since God has created them and will raise them up on the last day. Even though we are wounded by sin and so experience rebellious stirrings in our bodies, human dignity demands that we glorify God in our bodies and not allow them to be enslaved by the depraved inclinations of our hearts» (GS 14). In this paragraph from the Council I find a complete biblical theology of the flesh. The flesh is a creature of God. God has made our bodies and has made them marvelous. The Council even states that the human body is like a synthesis of the whole material world, the place where the world reaches free expression and so is able to please, thank, and praise God who has created this marvel of the material world (GS 14).

Yet this marvelous body, a work of God and a glorification of God, has by sin become a slave of passions. That is why the word «flesh» takes on a pejorative meaning: flesh in the sense of provocation to evil; flesh in the sense of weakness; flesh in the sense of love of drugs, of liquor, of overindulging, of everything that pleases that flesh without taking into account the spirit. Flesh is the human weakness that leads people toward sin. Flesh ruled by sin is an instrument of evil, but it must be redeemed.

This is the work of redemption, which Saint Paul now tells us about. We should no longer talk, sisters and brothers, about «saving our souls». As the Council tells us, we should be saying instead that «the whole person must be redeemed, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will» (GS 3). Salvation is of whole persons with their social relations; it is of human beings as stewards of nature; it is of human beings who must administer under the rule of God's law the good things that God has created for everyone. Salvation is of human beings, images of God, who, even if they have become weak through fleshly sin, still can count on redemption in the Spirit.

The same Spirit who raised up the flesh of Christ, thus giving human flesh eternal youthfulness in the glory of the resurrection, also bestows supreme dignity on the body of every man and every woman who desires to live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. How useful it would be at this time when the flesh lords it over people—especially young people, married couples, those who want to use many things to satisfy the flesh—to put our flesh under the dominion of the Spirit so that we are truly redeemed in soul and in body, redeemed by the Spirit in all our human reality, in all our social relationships, and with all of creation.

For creation has been made subject to human beings, but if human beings are dominated by the flesh, then they also submit creation to sin and make it selfish and idolatrous. In contrast, those who allow themselves to be swayed by the Spirit raise up all of nature along with themselves; they truly create harmony in their possession of the goods that God has

created for the happiness of all so that this world becomes a vestibule of that heaven where, as the fathers say, there no longer exists what is mine or what is yours¹²; there exists only the will of our Father who makes all of us who are God's children happy.

Who receives and who cannot receive this offer that God makes on his own initiative?

I finish up, then, brothers and sisters, with this third thought: who receives and who cannot receive this offer that God makes on his own initiative? The word of God today is quite clear. There must have been a moment of frustration, I would guess, when Christ saw the great crowds that followed him, but among them only simple people, only peasants and fishermen. If perchance some learned persons drew near, Christ perhaps saw them withdraw with disdain, laughing at the teaching of that crazy preacher. And so when Christ was left all alone, he raised his eyes to his Father and expressed the tenderness, the anguish, the affliction of his heart: «Father, why do those people refuse to believe this wonderful teaching I offer them while others, especially the simple folk, accept it from me? I give you thanks, Father, for you have hidden these things from the learned and proud and have revealed them to simple people. Yes, Father, thus you have willed» (Matt 11:25-26). The initiative is God's. Jesus Christ is not to blame; neither is the church or the preacher. And if some people want to sneer because only the simple folk follow us, then here in the gospel we find the explanation.

As we reflect on this word of God, we are presented today with two magnificent parades of people. The first reading refers to the parade when Christ was entering Jerusalem mounted on a donkey. He seems to be a mock king, but he is the king who saves. Envisioning this king mounted on a burro, the prophet proclaims, «This man comes to destroy the chariots, the horses, the warrior's bows. He is the one who will bring peace to all peoples» (Zech 9:10). In similar fashion, the gospel contrasts the multitude of simple folk with the learned and the self-sufficient, those who are great in the world's eyes. It is not God who rejects any class of persons or prefers one or another class. It is we who elect ourselves or segregate ourselves. Those who accept the word of God elect themselves and belong to the worthy remnant of Israel. Those who in their pride think that the church and Christ are preaching foolishness segregate themselves; they justify everything, describing our teaching with repugnant epithets and saying it is not worthy of the wise of this world. That is why, sisters and brothers, the children of the Beatitudes are the poor and the humble.

How I would like all of us, as we reflect on the word of God, to resolve not to let our hearts be ruled by pride, arrogance, or self-satisfaction. We should feel grateful that salvation comes from God and is accepted only by those who are aware of their own poverty and so reach out their hands like beggars. It is in this sense that we say that the church is a church of the poor. It is not the church of those who have no wealth but are ambitious; it is not the church of those who lack material goods but kidnap people in order to extort money; it is not the church of criminals who take out their resentments in hatred of others. It is not the church of terrorism. It is the church of poverty, the church of today's scriptures: «Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem» (Zech 9:9). Who does not think here of the name of Mary, the daughter of Zion, the incarnation of true poverty, the humble virgin who says she is nothing in the eyes of God but whom the Mighty One looks upon and makes great (Luke 1:48-49)? She will be praised through all generations, and through her the church will do great things. This is the true

¹² SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, VII, 2; PG 60, 65-66.

poverty of the church, the poverty I have tried to preach, dear sisters and brothers. It is the poverty whose strength consists in its own weakness, in its own sinfulness, but is always borne up by the mercy of Christ in the power of the Lord. This church does not base its strength on the support of the powerful or the politicians. Rather, she nobly takes leave of them in order to walk hand in hand with the crucified one who is her true strength. This poverty of the church is preached to those who have and to those who have not. All of us are asked only to have a poor person's soul, a detached soul with arms extended to receive everything from God, a soul that does not trust in the false idols which are the things of the earth.

Dear sisters and brothers, today's message is precious. Now that we have relived the experiences of the week, the poverty of our lives, our lack of employment, let us not give in to numbing conformity but struggle with the spirit of faith. Let us draw close to the altar of the Lord, and there let us join ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ, the poorest of the poor, the one who suffered though he was rich, the one who died naked and in utter need on a cross. His was the true poverty of those who find their shelter in God: «In you, Lord, I have placed my trust. I shall never be put to shame» (Ps 31:2). This is the Eucharist we're going to celebrate: the Eucharist of the poor, the Eucharist of those who trust completely in God, the Eucharist of those who do not hate but forgive. This is the Eucharist of all of us who know that we need God and who pray for one another as the Lord's little ones so that we'll receive from God the richness that he gives only to the simple and the humble and denies to the proud and the arrogant.