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CHRIST, THE BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH

**Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
25 February 1979**

Hosea 2:16-17, 21-22

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Mark 2:18-22

What a wonderful surprise! I am filled with great optimism as I listen to the words that come from the lips of these young men who are preparing for the priesthood, especially the words of solidarity expressed by this young man in the name of thirty-six major seminarians, the students of philosophy and theology who are preparing for the priesthood¹. With their diplomas in hand, these men could aspire to other professions, but you see that they have a profound conviction and an acute awareness of what young people commit themselves to in the major seminary. I want to tell you that, along with these young men, there are another fifty minor seminarians, who are called such because they still don't have their high-school diplomas. Soon, under the direction of the archdiocese, they'll get their diplomas in the minor seminaries of San Salvador and Chalatenango, and we hope that they'll then join this group in the major seminary.

I want to take this opportunity to tell the people of God who are listening to me that all of us who are part of the people of God should feel a commitment toward these young men. What we need most is your spiritual and moral support. We want our seminarians who are preparing to be leaders of our Catholic communities to find among our people a spirit of hopefulness, energy, and encouragement. Let nobody try to quench that generous flame that the Holy Spirit has ignited in these young hearts. In the course of time the people will receive a good harvest from this crop which they themselves are cultivating with their prayers, their moral support, and also their economic assistance. This last is needed since almost all these vocations came from among the poor and therefore need economic help from others. We are not asking for alms; we are simply telling the people of God that they have an obligation to help prepare these men with a priestly vocation. They have been drawn directly from among the people so that they will be leaders inspired by what the Lord has given us in the Gospel.

Our pilgrimage through the liturgical year continues today as we find ourselves now in the Eighth Sunday [of Ordinary Time]. This week we're going to put a period and start a new

¹ Before the homily the seminarians of the archdiocese expressed their solidarity with Archbishop Romero. One of them read a letter that said the following: «On your second anniversary as archbishop, we want to express to you our solidarity. We do so because of your authentic fidelity to the Gospel and because you have put aside any desire for privilege and have accepted all the risks involved in strongly denouncing the violations of the fundamental rights of the human person. Despite the ever-increasing oppression and persecution of the people and the church, we want to let you know that with wholehearted courage we are willing to continue firm in our vocation. One day we hope to become direct collaborators in the prophetic ministry that you have undertaken in order to make the kingdom of God more present here among us».

season because on Wednesday of this week begins the intense period called Lent. Ordinary Time will be suspended until after the long period of Lent that begins Wednesday; this is a time of preparation for celebrating the paschal mystery, that is, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After Lent come the fifty days following Easter and finally the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, which crowns the work of redemption. After the feast of Pentecost we'll return to the Sundays that are now being suspended, beginning with the Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Today, then, we gather together to bid farewell to this season in order to enter the desert as Christ did.

Let us prepare for our Lent. Right now I want to invite everyone quite cordially to inaugurate this season of Lent next Wednesday at seven-thirty in the evening in the Heart of Mary Church in the Colonia Escalón. The vicariate of that sector has invited me, but I don't want to go there just by myself or feel that I am there alone in the vicariate. I want to feel the whole diocese entering into Lent. Next Wednesday at seven-thirty in the evening I'd like to see Heart of Mary Church filled with you people who come to the cathedral. I want there to be the same enthusiastic cry of the people that we hear here in the liturgy. Instead of lifeless liturgies or celebrations according to protocol we want the liturgy of the people of God to be the way it really should be. That is why I would like to be accompanied by all of you, dear sisters and brothers who hear me now, especially those of you in the parish communities and the base communities. Let us go there and give life to that inauguration of Lent. Then we'll be able to say about Christ what a seminarian said today about his bishop, repeating the words of the apostle when he felt the call of Christ: «Let us go with him and die with him!» (John 11:16). Christ is inviting us now: «Those who wish to come after me must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me» (Mark 8:34). On Wednesday we will respond in liturgical language when we bow our heads and receive the sign of penance: «Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you will return» (Gen 3:19). Lent is not a question of letting our enthusiasm diminish but of bestowing true greatness on our human dignity. We'll talk further about this, then, next Wednesday, God willing.

On this Eighth Sunday, then, the readings join with Puebla in inviting us to renew ourselves. I want all of us to become more familiar with the language of Puebla, which is the language of the Spirit of God. In presenting the document, we bishops wrote the following: «The Puebla Conference is first and foremost a spirit; it is the spirit of the church that is reaching out with renewed vigor and evangelizing force to serve our peoples. We must accomplish this by heeding the vital, transformative summons of him who set up his tabernacle in the very heart of our history and by being completely faithful to the Lord, the church, and humanity». That is also the substance of my homily today, which draws on the three readings you just heard; it concerns the spirit of renewal for which Puebla is calling and the whole of our church on this continent is longing. Let us hope that among all the notes sounded by the many individual churches of this immense and hopeful continent, the note intoned by our archdiocese resonates harmoniously in the grand concert to the glory of God and to human dignity.

Accordingly, I'm going to give my homily a youthful title, one that Christ himself has authorized us to use. The title may seem a bit bold, but Christ has given us leave to call him today «Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church». I would like to honor here all those persons who live their union with each other not just as a passionate adventure but as an attempt to imitate Christ, whose youthful heart unites him to his church. The first point for this homily will be

Christ and the church, a mystery of conjugal covenant. Following on that is my second point: the church, the beloved bride of Christ, possesses the divine competence that Christ grants her. And the third point is this: if Christ and the church are betrothed and love one another profoundly, then Christ is renewing the world through the church. Just as the bridegroom finds his bride becoming the center of his own life, so the church becomes Christ's home and the point of reference for all his activity

Christ and the church, a mystery of conjugal covenant

We say first, then, that what takes place between Christ and the church is a mystery of conjugal covenant. The central figure in the Gospel of Saint Mark this week is Christ responding to one of his critics. In chapters two and three of Saint Mark we see a conflict that is developing between Christ and his enemies. The conflict comes to a head in a verse of chapter three that says, «The Pharisees and Herodians took counsel on how to eliminate him» (Mark 3:6). Every person who announces a message of love, truth, and justice is naturally opposed by the forces of injustice and selfishness, the opposite of love. Those who dwell in the shadows of falsehood are pained to see the truth, and they devise ways to eliminate it.

Christ's position becomes clearer, and at one point objections are raised. The disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees are observing a fast. Jesus is asked, «Why don't your disciples fast?» (Matt 2:18). This is the way it always is in religious matters: people object out of hypocrisy and concern for the appearance of legality. Because Christ seeks sincere adoration of God and wants people to be sincerely renewed interiorly, he answers as you heard in today's gospel: «Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and on that day they will fast» (Mark 2:19-20). This is a foreshadowing of Lent and Holy Week, but it happens within the love and affection that Christ has for his church.

In order to understand this comparison that Christ the bridegroom is making, we must go back to the language of the prophets. In fact, the liturgy for today has chosen a very ancient text, one of the first biblical passages comparing the relations between God and humankind in terms of matrimony. Hosea was a prophet who experienced in his own personal life the harsh reality of loving a woman but being rejected and then betrayed by her. Hosea used his resentment at being spurned to describe our relation with God, but he also patiently waited, just as lovers wait, even when they have broken up. The bridegroom always says, «Reconciliation will come. I still love her!»

Reconciliation came for Hosea and his wife, and the prophet later put on God's lips sentiments that were really his own but were transferred to the divine realm. They describe God's relations with his much-loved people, who have not known how to respond to him in kind. Rather, they have betrayed God; they are «hard-hearted», as the Bible says (Ezek 11:19), insensitive to the kindnesses of God. But God, hoping for repentance and return, says to his people, «I will allure her and lead her into the desert. I will speak to her heart, and she will respond there as in the days of her youth, as when I rescued her from slavery» (Hos 2:16-17). God reminds them of the days when he made great displays of affection toward his people, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and then guiding them miraculously through the desert. On Mount Sinai in the desert a covenant was made between God and humankind—we could

even say that a marriage was celebrated there. God reminds his people of this covenant, hoping that he will find a loving response to his scorned offer of love.

When the groom places coins in the hands of his bride on their wedding day, the coins are a sign of his complete commitment to her so that together they can build a home. In like manner, God explains what coins of commitment are involved in his marriage with the people: «I enter into this marriage with you forever, and it will be a marriage in righteousness and justice, in mercy and compassion» (Hos 2:21). These are the qualities that characterize the love that unites God with his people. Such is the love that the bridegroom Christ has for this church of which we are members. He hopes that the coins he gave us in his revelation will bear the fruit of righteousness and justice, of mercy and compassion. That's why the church cannot speak any language other than the language of love as she tries to respond to the one who has given her coins of commitment by defending human rights and condemning injustices and all forms of violence. A faithful wife must speak in ways that please her spouse, and the church, in fidelity to her bridegroom, Christ, must please him by speaking the language of justice.

It's wonderful, then, to hear Pope John Paul, as an interpreter of today's church, supporting the line of the bishops in Latin America. The pope stated, «We must call injustice by its proper name. It is the exploitation of one human being by another; it is the exploitation of human beings by the state; it is the exploitation of human beings by economic systems. We must call by its proper name every social injustice, every type of discrimination, every type of violence inflicted on the bodies, the spirits, the consciences, the dignity, and the lives of human beings». ² I think many people are unhappy with John Paul because he is trying to be faithful to this relationship of loving union between Christ and his church. A bride who betrays her bridegroom by flirting with other idols would not be the true bride of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm delighted to remind you that in Puebla we spoke also of calling poverty by its proper name and of describing the different forms it takes. The document states, «There is the poverty of our indigenous peoples and the poverty of our *campesinos*, the poorest of the poor; there is the poverty of our workers, who are deprived of the right to organize. Every attempt at organizing and unionizing among workers and *campesinos* is undermined». This is the countenance of all those who suffer: the tortured, the imprisoned, the disappeared. These people are loved by Christ with the same love he has for his bride, the church, and that is why he must be at their side. Let us thank God, then, that the pope has clearly authorized us to call injustice by its proper name.

That is why in today's gospel Christ, recalling all that the Scriptures say about God's covenant with the people, defines his own position with respect to his enemies, the Pharisees, and even with respect to his friends. Take special note of this detail: the disciples of John were not Christ's enemies, but their idea of prophecy and their vision of the world didn't include the broad horizon of humanity's renewal that Christ was unveiling. We'll see more about that in a moment. What I want now is for our hearts to behold this magnificent figure of Christ as he reflects God's untiring love for humanity despite all the betrayals. Such a love will be understood by persons who have experienced the tragedy of unrequited love, as Hosea did. Today's readings make us reflect on how God presents himself in Christ as the bridegroom of humanity.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to Youth at the General Audience», 21 February 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (25 February 1979).

Hosea was concerned not only about his wife's infidelity but about the social infidelity of his times and his society. He was concerned about the politics that sought only personal advantage and separation from the kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom, Israel, had drawn apart from this center of revelation and was falling little by little into idolatry. That nation was worshipping Baal under the influence of rulers who had lost the true Jewish faith. The «baals» were the gods of fertility, the ones responsible for harvests, rain, and sunny weather. Throughout the whole of his book the prophet cried out, «It is not the baals or any other idols who give bread to Israel. Only the true God does! Be converted from your idolatries!»

The voice of this prophet seems very relevant for our time, when new baals are seeking to be worshiped instead of the one and only God who loves us and desires our love in return. The baals and the idols of our time are the idolatry of power, the idolatry of money, the idolatry of luxury, and the idolatry of sex. Like the apostates of Israel, people today are worshipping before all these idolatries and turning their backs on the true God.

Since God uses the comparison of human love to reflect his divine love, I would like to apply all this to marriage. Saint Paul offers a profound reflection for married people when he says that the marriage of a man and a woman is a great mystery (Eph 5:25-32). The reasons for their mutual love and their living together are not just human affection and pleasure. There is a mystery in the love God has granted them, in that irresistible attraction between man and woman that is capable of leading them to the altar in order to promise perpetual love to one another. What is the mystery reflected by married persons? It is the mystery of the love between God and humankind.

Dear married sisters and brothers, dear Christian couples, it is to you that I now address my words. I want to tell you that, just as my priestly ministry provides a great service to the world, so it is with you. In your love for one another you show all of society how God loves us. Whenever a married couple passes by, the whole world should feel the thrill of the love of God that comes through the sacrament of that couple, and their testimony is even more beautiful if they are with their children. Since I have urged you to become familiar with the document of Puebla, listen now to what we wrote there regarding the family: «The couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony is a Gospel of the paschal presence of the Lord» (P 583). Never forget these words, dear married folk: «The couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony is a Gospel of the paschal presence of the Lord. The Christian family cultivates the spirit of love and service. There are four basic personal relationships that find their full development in the family» (P 583). What are those four relationships? The first is parenthood, that is, the love of the father and the mother for their children. The second is the filial love that children have for their parents. The third is the love that unites the children of a couple together as sisters and brothers. And the fourth is nuptial love, the love that is felt when we cease to be children, when we become young men and women and realize that we are under an obligation: «He shall leave his father and his mother...» (Gen 2:24). Or as that Spanish poet said, «And I will seek among the daughters of my land a woman like my mother!» How wonderful it would be if every young man, in his search for a future home, were to think of his mother and seek out a bride who would be a continuation of that love—and vice versa, if every young woman were to seek for her future home a man who could be a responsible, holy, and upright pillar like her own father! Fathers and mothers, can you resist this challenge of the young?

Puebla goes on to say that «these same four relationships make up the life of the church» (P 583). Notice how the human family reflects all the relationships within the church herself. What is the church? The church is «experience of God as Father», a relation that is both filial and paternal. The church is also our «experience of Christ as brother» and our «experience of being children in, with, and through the Son»; and finally the church is «experience of Christ as spouse of the church. Family life reproduces on a small scale these four basic experiences, the four faces of human love» (P 583). Puebla has spoken thus, and as you can see, there is much rich material for reflection there. For now it is enough for us simply to cultivate the loving relationships that should unite us completely to Christ, who is the model of the four faces of love. The bridegroom is in the church.

As the bride of Christ, the church possesses divine capacities

My second thought is this: by virtue of the conjugal covenant between Christ and his church, the church possesses divine capacities. Here I am going to focus especially on the second reading, in which Saint Paul is responding to enemies of his preaching who are telling the people, «Paul presents no letters of recommendation from other communities, but we bring letters that authorize and recommend us». Answering them with the fine irony that characterizes his letters, Paul writes, «Sisters and brothers, do we really need to commend ourselves or ask for letters of recommendation? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You are a letter of Christ edited by our ministry, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God» (2 Cor 3:1b-3).

And with much pride I can tell you the same, sisters and brothers: «You are my letter of recommendation». When I heard read here the letter from the seminarians telling me how they were all in solidarity with their bishop, I thought about Saint Paul's words. Dear seminarians, you are my letter of recommendation! I give thanks also to all of you for giving me such a solid recommendation! I therefore ask that we may be worthy of this presence of Christ in the midst of our community. I am the first to recognize my deficiencies and my limitations, but I know that all of you—priests, sisters, ecclesial communities, Christian families—are bearing saintly witness to the presence of Christ in his people. You make up for the deficiencies of your own pastor, and by being united to him you give the archdiocese such a wonderful spirit that it is truly worthwhile being a Catholic in our archdiocese.

Saint Paul says that none of this is due to him; we have this confidence through Christ. By ourselves we are incapable of achieving even our own fulfillment. All our qualifications come to us from God (2 Cor 3:5). Now let me return to the Puebla document and convey to you its thinking about the nature of a diocese, a parish, and a small base community. What Puebla says about the diocese echoes the Council: «The local church which is the diocese is shaped in the image of the universal Church, and in it we find the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ truly existing and operating» (P 645). If Christ is alive and makes himself manifest in the person of the bishop for the whole diocese, then the diocese should form a unity with its bishop. Nothing without the bishop! That's why I said before: I recognize my limitations and my abject state, but I cannot renounce the role that Christ has commended to me, which is that of being the sign of the unity of doctrine and truth in the archdiocesan church. That's why I'm so grieved when there are so many dissident sentiments, and they don't exist only among lay people. Some people are enemies of the church and servants of other self-interested idols of

the earth, and their ignorance is understandable. But it is more painful when such dissidence takes root in the hearts of those should be close and trustworthy collaborators of the bishop. (Applause) It makes me sad to know that there is one priest who feels ashamed to pronounce my name during the prayers of the Mass, even though every priest is obliged to pray for his bishop by name as a sign of unity with him. If someone doesn't feel such solidarity, what is he doing in the diocese? (Applause) I'm grieved by this not because the contempt, the calumny, the paid ads, and the sick jokes are aimed at me personally. All such offenses I would gladly put up with if they were simply directed against me as a man. Saint Paul says, however, «Our qualification comes to us from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant» (2 Cor 3:5), and so I consider this dissent and contempt to be directed not against a man but against God himself. Let us hope and pray that God does not take into account this contempt and this lack of love.

This leads us to the conclusion that we as church must feel great confidence in God. The one who gives us serenity in our work is Christ; he is the bridegroom who forms his church in love. The Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of love, unites all persons of good will because together we constitute the church. I want to reaffirm this, sisters and brothers: what we are doing in the archdiocese is not in rivalry with anybody. I don't want to be «anti» anybody or «against» anybody. I simply want to work for our great affirmation of the God who loves us and wants to save us. As Puebla said about marriage, the church is nothing more than the sign of God's love in the world. If the family is also such a sign, it is because it reflects the church, and the church is the great family that reflects the love of God. Building such a united and authentic church as the true bride of Christ gives joy to your pastor, who desires for Christ all your love, all your homage, all your solidarity. I don't want my poor human presence to be an obstacle, for as John the Baptist said, «I must disappear so that he will increase» (John 3:30). Christ is the bridegroom of the church, and I should not compete with him but simply serve him with humility and love, and rejoice when he wins over the heart of his church.

Life of the church

Here is where I'd like to recall that this church, with Christ as her bridegroom and spouse, is not an abstract church. I want you to feel that Christ is present in what has been the history of our church this week. For example, I'm very grateful to the journalists of the press, television, and radio for the press conference that allowed me to give them news about what happened in Puebla and to inform them about other aspects of the life of the diocese. I was impressed by the reception and by the coverage given to the interview, in which I was treated cordially as a friend. I thank you all! I'd only like to clarify the emphasis the reports gave to the question of dialogue with the government. I want to tell you that I said nothing new. *Orientación* communicated my thoughts faithfully when it quoted me as saying, «On one occasion I explained to the president himself the conditions for a dialogue between the church and the authorities. An atmosphere of confidence should be created, and arbitrary arrests, searches, and assaults should be halted. I'm not seeking dialogue for my personal advantage—what interests me is being of service to this people that is suffering. Therefore, as long as there's no guarantee that this dialogue will be truly beneficial for the people and will help to increase the atmosphere of confidence and credibility, all the rest is appearance; there is no concrete reality that will win my confidence and presage a change in the situation». That is what I said. (Applause)

In this regard I also want to clarify a headline in *La Crónica del Pueblo*: «Church and ANEP Open Dialogue». I repeat the same thing and state the same criteria, and the newspaper itself mentions at the end what the criteria are. I am completely open to dialogue with the government, with ANEP, and with any significant force in the country because I feel tormented by the present situation. The church, whose unworthy representative I am, wishes to offer its grain of salt to the solution, but she also hopes to find an environment that is appropriate for her evangelical proposals. When *La Crónica del Pueblo* speaks about this dialogue with ANEP, it repeats the criteria which must be considered for there to be true dialogue: «The archbishop in his homilies», it says, «frequently alludes to the institutionalized injustice in the country; with frank and direct language he criticizes both the government and the economically powerful sectors of the country; he demands justice for the most exploited sectors, especially those working in agriculture»³. These are indeed my criteria, and I want to tell people that I don't want to lose the credibility and the confidence that they have placed in the church. There must be hope that there will be tremendous benefit to the welfare of the people. You can be very sure of that. (Applause)

The pastoral commission of our church community here in the archdiocese has met for the first time. This body, made up of representatives from several vicariates, will plan and promote pastoral ministry throughout the whole of our archdiocese.

I ask your prayers for the priests who will be on retreat during this first week of Lent, from the fifth to the ninth of March. Let this serve as an invitation also to all my fellow priests who still haven't made their retreat. That includes myself, and I'll be participating in the retreat that week.

I also want to express my sincere condolences to Somascan Father Sebastián Martínez for the death of his beloved mother, Doña Teodora de Martínez.

In the area of religious life, yesterday I was happy to attend a meeting of perhaps three hundred men and women religious to give them news about Puebla. They showed a wonderfully receptive spirit toward the pastoral initiatives that should characterize the ministry of our archdiocese. We should thank God that Puebla has simply propelled us along a road that we were already following, for Puebla is a further step in the line set by Medellín. Both Medellín and the Second Vatican Council have been the inspiration of the pastoral ministry of our archdiocese. (Applause)

With regard to religious sisters, there has been a change in the director of the Colegio Guadalupano, and I greet Sister Esperanza Madrigal Duarte who replaces Sister Lucila and will now guide the destiny of that school.

A review of the parish communities this week presents us with a beautiful vision. Last Sunday in Tamanique thirty catechists were authorized to bring communion to their villages. The training of Sister Juanita has been very effective. The Ana Guerra de Jesús Advancement Center began a new year of helping women market vendors to improve their situation. The Marriage Encounters in the parish of El Carmen continue to meet with much enthusiasm. I had the good fortune to participate in that lively pastoral ministry for married couples.

³ *La Crónica del Pueblo* (23 February 1979).

In the parish of El Calvario in Santa Tecla there was a Cursillo of Christian Initiation for the whole department of La Libertad. Another course for the training of catechists was held in the parish of Dulce Nombre de María in Chalatenango. Patronal feasts were celebrated in San Matías and in La Palma.

The patronal feast in Arcatao on February 2 also deserves special mention. Unfortunately, the roadblocks set up by the security forces interfered with the church's freedom to celebrate her feast day; the people were deprived of their legitimate right to a popular celebration. Ridiculously false information led the authorities to think that it wasn't a patronal feast but a subversive movement. As a result the people who were traveling to celebrate the feast were prevented from reaching Arcatao. The celebration was therefore transferred to Saturday the seventeenth, but even then there were renewed displays of distrust—even priests and nuns were searched. In light of all this I ask: is this the freedom that is given to the church? Is this not persecution of the church?

Similar displays and the consequences of persecution are seen in San Antonio Abad. Mother Chepita was sent back to Belgium by her superior general since the government was causing so many problems regarding her residency and her pastoral work.

On a happier note, last Sunday was the centennial feast of Tonacatepeque. The people chose an elderly woman of 114 years, Sebastiana Jiménez, as a symbol of the event. When the civil authorities gave her a laurel crown, she declared that she was not the one who deserved it, but rather it was I! She said she was going to bring the crown to the archbishop. (Applause) I was filled with emotion when I met this old woman, who came accompanied by some young people. She put the crown on my head herself and then placed it on the altar. Today I ask you all to pray for her during this mass. She seemed to me to be the likeness of old Simeon and old Anna, those elders in Jerusalem who were the first to greet the coming of Christian redemption.

The people of Zacamil are today celebrating ten years of working together in base communities. The main event, a Mass at the Externado San José, will be at four in the afternoon. You are all invited to join in this celebration of the Zacamil parish. The Belgian priests minister there, and they have the full backing of the archbishop.

This evening in the parish of San Jacinto there will be a change of pastors. The new pastor will be Father Eduardo López Molina. Next Thursday, as always on the first Thursday of the month, there will be a Holy Hour at the Divina Providencia Hospital at five in the afternoon.

I repeat here the special invitation that I extended at the beginning of the homily: the start of Lent will be celebrated next Wednesday at seven-thirty in the evening at Corazón de María Church in the Colonia Escalón.

These are our communities, sisters and brothers. As I was mentioning their names, I was thinking about Corinth and Ephesus because now I can say to our parish communities and our base communities what Paul told his own communities: «Christ is there with you; what is being done among you is a work of Christ». The reason why Puebla encourages and promotes these base ecclesial communities is that «they bring together adults, young people, and whole families in close interpersonal relationships of faith. They are communities of faith, hope, and charity» (P 641). These words of encouragement to the communities are from God, and I would

like to tell the government that it should respect the communities; it should recognize that in the communities the people are being nourished with the word of God. In the communities they develop a consciousness that is not a sluggish one but is instead critical, in the same way that the Gospel is critical. These are communities that cannot be stopped. The bishops gathered at Puebla determined that we should not slow down the progress of this creation of God's people throughout the length and breadth of the continent, for it is founded on the word of God and on the sacraments, and it is truly working to advance the liberation of our countries. (Applause)

Christ renews the world through the church

My final thought is this: Christ renews the world through the church. Here I want to make use of the final comparison that Christ makes in today's gospel: «No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak because the patch will pull away, the new from the old, and the tear will get worse. No one pours new wine into old wineskins because the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins» (Mark 2:21-22). What are wineskins? They're leather bags used in some wine-producing regions to hold wine. When the wineskins get old, they get stiff, and when new wine is poured in, they burst. So Christ uses this comparison of a new patch that ends up causing the old cloak to tear and of new wine that makes the old wineskins burst. That's why Christ is no friend of patches, and he doesn't like patches put on his bride, the church. Not only does he criticize bad patches, but he condemns the cloaks that are torn and the wineskins that are spoiled.

Events of the week

The situation in our country is reflected in the events that we have experienced this past week. It was a week of many hopes but also of many heartaches.

First, the hopes. I'd like to mention the statements of the new rector of the university, Doctor Eduardo Badía Serra, about developing the university as a center of studies that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the university community. We would further say that the university must also examine all the dimensions of our country's problems. I have a request to make of you, sisters and brothers, regarding Doctor Badía, a man I know. I hope that he will find solid collaborators for what he hopes to do in his office. As the people of God, let us help him, at least with our prayers.

I am also filled with hope by the news that the distribution of 37,000 *manzanas* of land has begun. What I said last Sunday I repeat today: I hope this project of agrarian reform will be what the president proposed when he said, «We undertake this project with an awareness of our duty to promote human dignity and to benefit the people themselves ... without consideration of party affiliation⁴. This is just what the church proposed last Sunday.

At the same time, there have been further denunciations about anomalies in both agriculture and industry. The construction worker named José Macario Miranda has been detained for sixteen days now. His family is quite distressed, and in their name we ask that he either be brought before the courts or be set free soon.

⁴ *La Prensa Gráfica* (23 February 1979).

Employees of the national railroad have also complained that the promise of an increase in salary has not been fulfilled. Many arrests and other wrongs have also been denounced. In Chalatenango, José Santos Martínez González and Sabino Molina of Cancasque were arrested. Also there in Chalatenango the *campesino* Luis Antonio Alas was killed. In Cinquera, Paula Mijango, Mamerto Flores, and Pantaleón Flores were arrested; in Sensuntepeque, Juan Antonio Fuentes of Las Marías was arrested; in the Barrio Lourdes of our capital, the worker Oscar Armando Interiano was also arrested.

In Tutunichapa people are protesting an indiscriminate raid. Coming from those poor huts was heard this lament: «We live in misery and without hope, and still they pursue us as if we were war criminals. It is a crime to be poor in El Salvador».

A judge has been accused of criminal arbitrariness for having frustrated for a second time the trial of the prisoners Juan José Martell and José Alberto Landaverde; the trial should have been held last Friday in Santa Ana, where they have been imprisoned for two years now. We refer to the Supreme Court of Justice these anomalies which grievously harm a great many Salvadorans.

We lament again the death of the brothers José Heriberto Guzmán Córtes and José León Magno Guzmán Córtes. We mentioned it last Sunday, but I repeat it today. I'm grateful for the information bulletin that the director of the National Guard sent me⁵, but I want to clarify that what I said last Sunday was based simply on the news I read in the newspaper, *El Mundo*⁶. I didn't try to explain anything; I only conveyed what was written by the reporter, who was describing the criminal aspects of the cruel death of the Guzmán brothers.

We can describe these events by using the words of Christ this morning: they are the old cloaks and the old wineskins that Christ is coming to make new. In using this comparison of Christ, let us keep in mind that John's disciples wanted to preserve the old customs of fasting according to the law of Moses, while Christ was bringing something superior to the law of Moses. That's why he said that we shouldn't try to fit the ideals of Christianity into the molds of Mosaic religion. Everything in life is evolution. The church is always renewing herself. We can't preserve old traditions that no longer have any reason to be, and much less should we preserve those structures on which sin has become enthroned so that they produce assaults, injustices, and disorders of every kind. We cannot call «Christian» any society, any government, or any situation in which decrepit and unjust structures make our sisters and brothers suffer bitterly.

We must therefore open wide the doors to Christ, as we said last Sunday regarding the message of Puebla. We must bring in the new wineskins of the Gospel and the just and holy structures that the Lord brings us. We don't want legalities that conceal injustices; we want structures which provide channels for the justice of God, so that all Salvadorans can have lives of peace and joy and be guided by the light of Christ and the love he has brought us.

There is no happy marriage in a home which has problems like the ones that the religion of Christ has in our archdiocese. People cannot love Christ confidently when we labor

⁵ *La Prensa Gráfica* (22 February 1979).

⁶ *El Mundo* (15 February 1979).

and live under legal structures that are opposed to free expression of our love for the Lord. A bride and a bridegroom should be able to do anything to express their love, so if Christ is the bridegroom of this church of El Salvador, then we should encourage this love, sisters and brothers. Let us make sure that Christ the bridegroom feels at home in this house that he should feel to be truly his own. And let us work for a homeland where our love for Christ can freely expand with the tender joy of a bride who feels that she is understood. Let it be so.
(Applause)