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RESURRECTION IS THE SEAL AND THE KEY OF THE NEW COVENANT

**Easter Sunday
15 April 1979**

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-19

Happy Easter! This is the day of the Lord's triumph. The long journey of Lent ends on this summit of glory. During Lent we traced the history of God's covenants with humankind. All God's striving to win over the people's love was met by their constant rejection, but the stubbornness of the Lord's eternal love is finally victorious. Easter is the feast that gives meaning to God's long struggle for our love. That is why Easter occupies such an important place in our liturgical celebration. We might even say that all the other celebrations of the year make no sense if we don't understand something about the paschal mystery that we are celebrating today.

That's why my homily this morning—more than an explanation or an exhortation or a catechetical lesson—aims to be above all a testimony of faith. Alongside my beloved people, I want to say to the Lord, «I believe in the risen Christ». My words this morning seek to be the joyful announcement that was at the heart of the apostles' preaching: «Christ has risen! That is the great news!» And more than anything, I would like my words also to be an invitation for us to be grateful and to celebrate the true Eucharist this Sunday morning. All humankind falls on its knees before the God who loved us to the point of giving us his Son nailed to a cross but who has raised that Son up again. In the triumph of the crucified One is all the hope of humankind.

The three readings we just heard are not only testimony, announcement, and invitation to gratitude, but they also invite us to reflect on this great event. In trying to sum up all the readings of this celebration, I would give the following title to my preaching this morning: «The Resurrection is the Seal and the Key of the New Covenant». As usual, I will develop this theme along three lines. The first is the resurrection as the key to all of God's revelation; the second is the church as the depository and witness of the resurrection of the Lord; and the third is a call to us who are baptized to participate responsibly and honorably in the same Spirit that raised Jesus up.

The resurrection is the key to all of God's revelation

In the first place, I would urge you, beloved sisters and brothers, to esteem the resurrection as the key to all the Lord's revelation. At the end of today's gospel passage Saint John, with marvelous frankness, tells us that he ran to the grave faster than Peter since he was younger but that out of respect for his elder he allowed Peter to enter first and observe. And John himself observed those linens thrown aside by a corpse that was now living eternally. At that

point the gospel offers a revealing phrase: «He saw and he believed, for until then they had not understood the Scriptures, that Jesus had to be raised from the dead» (John 20:8-9).

As long as Christ had not risen, the minds of the disciples were missing a key. There was no way to explain the behavior, the doctrine, the miracles, and all the marvelous works of the Redeemer without the resurrection. Everything about Christ remained a mystery until the moment that he had often announced, «My hour has arrived» (John 17:1). Why would he say something like that? «The Son of Man will be handed over, and they will maltreat him and crucify him, and on the third day he will rise» (Mark 9:31-32). They had heard his words, but they could not understand why a Son of God made man should have to undergo debasement. The disciples experienced a great crisis in their faith before they experienced this great revelation.

In today's second reading we find a summary account of the life of Jesus. When Peter addressed the centurion and a group of Gentiles, he told them how the apostles had experienced Jesus: «He was anointed by God with the power of the Spirit. He went about doing good and curing those who were oppressed because God was with him. We are witnesses to this» (Acts 10:38-39). The life they had lived with the Lord was marvelous, but then he was gone. What's the outcome of all this for us? The Second Vatican Council tells us that in Christ is to be found the key to all the Old Testament and all that was ever written or said about him. Only when Christ rises can these Scriptures be fully understood. Only then do we see revealed the great mystery of God that culminates in the resurrection of his Son.

All God's work, including creation itself, is recapitulated in Christ. Why did God create the world and see that everything in it was good? Why did God form a people of his own in the Old Testament? Why did he make a covenant with Noah and promise him that the natural world would be preserved forever? Why did he use an old man like Abraham to create a people that was as impossibly numerous as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea? Why did God concern himself with an enslaved people in Egypt, freeing them from the lashes of their overseers and leading them miraculously through the desert to the Promised Land? What sense was there in the language of the prophets? What was the meaning of the Servant of Yahweh, who was a son of God coming not in majesty and glory but as one humiliated and spat upon, receiving lashes on his back? Who could understand all this?

Nature itself must have been amazed on Good Friday and even more on Saturday night when the resurrection took place. Everything God's chosen people had hoped for was realized when the natural beauty created for humanity shone forth in the splendor of grace. If nature today is groaning under the weight of the injustices and the abuses of sinners, that is not the destiny God means for material things to have. We humans do no more than create enigmas, and we make creation even more enigmatic when we submit it to the sins of selfishness, avarice, and injustice. Redemption is necessary, and it comes only by the light of the dying Christ. But the mystery becomes even more obscure when Christ ends up dead on the cross. So ends the life of the just man! Is it worthwhile being good and ending up crucified? Must we remain so passive and do without the aggressive strength that can overcome the injustices of the world by force of arms? Could not God send an army of angels to do away with all the persecutors of Jesus and his church? Such questions reveal the small-mindedness of those who want to fix the world's problems by using violence. Instead they should reflect as John did at the tomb of the risen Christ, and finally understand. For now Christ has risen; now his enemies

have fled in terror. Some tried to silence the voice of the resurrection by scheming: «We'll tell people that while you guards were sleeping, they stole the body away» (Matt 27:64). But who can cover the sun with a finger? The resurrection is a sun that is already shining, and no one can conceal the complete humiliation of the Lord's enemies.

Only the light of the resurrection can illuminate the triumph of Christ humiliated, tortured, oppressed, and made obedient unto the cross, but now receiving from God «a name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth, and in the depths» (Phil 2:9-10). This is the glorification that explains the mystery of suffering. This is the meaning of Easter: Christ risen, the beginning of a new creation. Now we understand that placing all our hope in the risen Christ, even when we seem to be at a dead end, means holding on to the Almighty who will keep us afloat in every situation.

God gives an eschatological meaning to the values of life. Saint Paul comments today on the resurrection of the Lord, saying, «If we have risen with Christ, let us seek what is above» (Col 3:1). Paul is not talking about alienating ourselves from the things of earth; rather, he wants us to look at our earthly activities from a higher perspective. He wants us to work for the same earthly freedoms and rights as others, but we're not going to achieve them by violence or armed struggle. We'll achieve them only by means of Christ's triumph.

That is the great service the church offers, as I wrote in my pastoral letter on the relationship between the church and the people's political organizations. The church cannot identify with any armed struggle. The church never provokes violence. The church is not a guerrilla force and does not seek short-range liberation of a political, social, or economic nature. The church understands all these struggles and encourages people who have a political calling to organize for justice and to work for liberation on earth. But the church doesn't consider just earthly liberation. Her cry is *plus ultra*—true liberation is «further on». The liberation brought by Christ envisions the goods that are above, for it is by those eternal goods on high and by the profound liberation from sin that Christ brought about on the cross that the world will be truly liberated.

There can be no freedom as long as there is sin in the heart. What's the use of changing structures? What's the use of violence and armed force if the motivation is hatred and the purpose is to buttress those in power or else to overthrow them and then create new tyrannies? What we seek in Christ is true freedom, the freedom that transforms the heart, the freedom the risen Christ announces to us today, «Seek what is above» (Col 3:1). Don't view earthly freedom and the oppression of this unjust system in El Salvador just by looking down from the rooftops. Look on high! That doesn't mean accepting the situation, because Christians know how to struggle also. Indeed, they know that their struggle is more forceful and valiant when it is inspired by this Christ who knew how to do more than turn the other cheek and let himself be nailed to a cross. Even submitting to crucifixion, he has redeemed the world and sung the definitive hymn of victory, the victory that cannot be used for other ends but benefits those who, like Christ, are seeking the true liberation of human beings.

This liberation is incomprehensible without the risen Christ, and it's what I want for you, dear sisters and brothers, especially those of you who have such great social awareness and refuse to tolerate the injustices in our country. It's wonderful that God has given you this keen sensibility, and if you have a political calling, then blessed be God! Cultivate it well, and be

careful not to lose that vocation. Don't replace that social and political sensitivity with hatred, vengeance, and earthly violence. Lift your hearts on high, and consider the things that are above!

Those who preach and inspire the various forms of earthly liberation do not have to be ideologues, much less atheists who are without God and without Christ. The one who most inspires the liberation of our country and of humanity is the one and only liberator, the risen Christ. Christ is the one who proclaims this morning the true victory over all the oppressive forces of the earth. This Christ who now reigns in the glory of the Father can challenge the might of Pontius Pilate and the Roman empire; he can defy the fanaticism of the spiritual leaders of Israel, the priests who have perverted the meaning of religion. By his resurrection Christ offers all the liberators of earth this challenge: «You will not free people! The only liberation that endures is that which breaks the chains on the human heart, the chains of sin and selfishness». Christ is the one who has left the grave empty and has broken through the bars of death and hell, and now he invites all men and women to die happily so that they also, at the hour of the universal resurrection, can defy the tombs of our cemeteries, saying, «Death, where is your victory?» (1 Cor 15:55).

Everything else dies, everything else is sin, everything else is hatred and violence, everything else is bloodshed and murder and kidnapping. None of that is liberation. All that is buried among the old things that Christ leaves behind to give us the new, true life which only true Christians can experience. Let us hope that the fanatics of violence and terrorism, as well as those who think repression and force are going to fix the situation, learn that those are not the ways of the Lord. Rather the ways of the Lord are love and respect and obeying the law of the Lord; they are the humble ways of Christ. Christ is the one who grants true liberation to those who want to accept it. Christ is indeed the key to the revelation of God.

The church is the depository and the witness of the resurrection of the Lord

My second thought for this Easter is that the church is the depository and the witness of the resurrection of the Lord. As members of the church founded by Christ, we should be immensely thankful for this. When Saint Peter for the first time met up with a group of Gentiles, he witnessed to how God does not make distinctions between persons. He realized that the true religion no longer belonged just to the people of Israel through the covenant with Abraham. Rather, the risen Christ had broken through the barriers that separated peoples so that now Romans and other pagans could also gain Christian redemption through baptism. Peter states this in the exquisite sermon we heard today: «We are witnesses of all that Jesus did, and he commissioned us to preach to the people and testify solemnly that God has appointed Christ as judge of the living and the dead. The testimony of the prophets is unanimous, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name» (Acts 10:39,42-43). In other words, Christ by his resurrection has received from the Father the promised inheritance of all the covenants of the Old Testament. This inheritance became reality in Christ, who brought us eternal life and founded a church on the testimony of those who were witnesses of the resurrection.

Peter and John ran to the tomb and saw that it was empty. The empty tomb puzzled them as it did Mary Magdalene, but they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to have faith in the risen One. Christ is alive! Christ is not a dead man! Christ is the reigning judge of the living and

the dead! Christ is the forgiver of all the sins of humankind! The resurrection has ratified and placed God's seal on Christ's power to forgive those who repent of their sins. «We are witnesses of all this» (Acts 10:39). The apostles corroborated the prophets' message. Now we understand why Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the other old dispensation prophets kept this hope alive. For the apostles it was no longer just hope but a reality to be shared with those who believed in Jesus Christ.

The church is the institution Christ founded to distribute officially the gifts of his redemption. We are therefore fortunate to belong to this final time of the church—the church of Paul VI and the synod of bishops from all over the world, the church of the Latin American bishops who met in Puebla, the church of John Paul leaving Rome to journey to Latin America and announce this same news. This church of today is the same church that the apostles received from Christ. It is the church of Peter, of John, of Paul, of the first apostles, of the early communities we heard about in today's first reading. The church of those early Christians is the same church of 1979, your church and my church, and its concern is to spread this evangelization throughout Latin America in the present and in the future.

How can we help people not only to hear the Word of God but also to understand the sacramental signs—baptism, confession, Eucharist, matrimony blessed by God, priestly ordination— as expressions of the covenantal relationship between God and the people? The seven sacraments are the means for receiving forgiveness, grace, and the life that Christ gives us, the life for which he paid the tremendous price of the cross. All this is evangelization. Never before, dear Catholic sisters and brothers of 1979, has the church had such a clear consciousness of her evangelizing mission. Never before have we understood so completely the need to preach the word and announce the Good News—the news that Christ has brought God's kingdom to earth—and at the same time combine it with the response of men and women who go to confession, who are married by the church, who are baptized and confirmed.

The sacraments are indispensable for making clear to Christ that we accept the covenant. Like the word, the sacraments are like a current that flows through God's covenant with humankind. One cannot be a true Catholic without receiving the sacraments, and one cannot receive the sacraments well without paying attention to the word of God. That is why our pastors, thank God, are understanding that the sacraments cannot be given without evangelization, that baptism cannot be given without pre-sacramental talks, and that confirmation cannot be administered to crowds of children who aren't even aware of what's happening. There is a need to prepare those who are going to marry and also those who are going to receive confession and communion.

The word of God is the key we need to understand the sacraments—just as you have to learn a language in order to understand what someone else is saying. When I don't understand a language, it doesn't matter how beautifully they speak to me—I won't understand them. The same is true with the sacraments, which are in the language of signs. If you don't learn the language, you don't understand it. People have to learn the meaning of the water that is poured on the child in baptism; they have to learn the meaning of the bishop's hand anointing with sacred oil the foreheads of those being confirmed; they have to learn the meaning of the gesture of the priest in the confessional who says, «I absolve you of your sins». Otherwise, it is like hearing a language that they don't comprehend. Understand this, dear sisters and brothers: the church of today is conscious of her responsibility to impart this redemption, and she wants

to begin by speaking with people in the common language that Christ taught her so that people will learn that language and enter solidly into the covenant with the Lord.

Even though the church has been given responsibility for distributing the gifts of the resurrection, she does not have exclusive control over them. Let us open our hearts wide so that we can say with the Second Vatican Council, «Outside the church there are many elements of truth and grace which belong to Christ the Redeemer. Those persons of good will who live outside the church because they do not know the truth of our church will be saved» (LG 16). Who knows, dear Catholic sisters and brothers, perhaps they will be saved with more merits than we who possess the fullness of the means of salvation! Being Catholic is no merit of ours; it is a grace of the Lord. Having faith is a gift of God.

With Christ we can say, «How many people longed to see the day of the Lord and have not seen it?» (Matt 13:17). Today, how many pagans, if they were Catholics, would love Jesus Christ, respect the church, and obey her pastors much more than do many of our Catholics who think they have property rights on church just as they do on their farms? The church is not the property of anybody. The church belongs to God, and God gives her to whomever he wants, and he can also take her away from those who despise her. How many are there within the Catholic Church who are not really Catholic? «They remain in the body of the church», the Council says, «but not in the heart» (LG 14). On the other hand, how many are there outside the church who perhaps don't belong to the body but who do belong to the heart of the church?

Let us understand well this great truth of the redemption of the risen Christ, which overflows the borders of the church, so that we as Catholics don't think that we have a monopoly on Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Christ and the Spirit don't let themselves be monopolized, nor do they let themselves be controlled. They reach out and seek all generous hearts, as the beautiful prayer of the Mass puts it: «You extended your hand to all who seek you with a sincere heart»¹. How consoling it is to know that it is a matter of the heart! Who will be saved? Those who seek Christ with a sincere heart. It's not just coming to Mass and belonging to the church; it's not just being baptized without knowing the meaning of baptism; it's not just boasting of belonging to the church and being the friend of some bishop or priest. None of that saves. Saved are those who seek Christ with a sincere heart. This is the church that is the depository and the witness of the resurrection.

I therefore want to tell you, sisters and brothers, that you and I are responsible for this grace the Lord has given us because we have had the good fortune of knowing the true church of Jesus Christ. Like the apostles, we must be witnesses of the resurrection. No matter where they went, they had to announce the great news: «Christ has risen for the forgiveness of sins. Be converted!» How wonderful will be that day when all of us—bishops and priests, religious men and women, and all you baptized lay persons, working in a profession or as laborers or in workshops, wherever you may be found—when all of us bear witness to our faith in the risen Christ, as did the first Christians!

Christians share in the same Spirit that raised up Christ

I'm now reaching my third point: Christians share in the same Spirit that raised up Christ. What an honor this is! This Holy Spirit who guided Christ and gave divine value to his death on the

¹ *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer IV.

cross, this Spirit who was the power of God raising Jesus from the dead, is the same Spirit who is given by baptism to all us who form the Mystical Body, to all who are part of the people of God. Even though that Spirit now seems invisible, even though we get old and get sick and die and are buried, still, Saint Paul tells us, we carry within us the seed of resurrection. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. One day the tombs in the cemeteries will be opened, and death will be astounded. It will be like Michelangelo's splendid painting of the last judgment, in which a skull is shown with an expression of astonishment. The skeleton of death is amazed as it beholds all the dead escaping its grasp. The cry of the Gospel is heard: «O death, where is your victory?» (1 Cor 15:55).

The risen Christ is the first fruits, the first among the living who will never die. But we who possess the Spirit will also be like him. Even if we die, even if we suffer, we carry the seeds of eternal life. Christ said, «Those who believe in me will never die», (John 11:25-26), for they bear within themselves the Spirit that raised up Jesus.

This Spirit that raised up Jesus brings strength and holiness to the earth. I have always preached to you about eschatology, and I've told you, sisters and brothers, that eschatology is about the end times, the definitive perspective of history. But we don't have to wait for history to end in order to have this eschatological perspective. It is like someone who is looking toward the goal when he is halfway there; he keeps that ultimate, eschatological goal in mind so that he can proceed with hope and confidence, knowing where the road leads. That is what the risen Christ has done: he has placed the eternal aspect of his life within the flow of history, in the midst of transitory things that come and go. The life of the risen One who will never die belongs to this world, so blessed are those who know how to give an eschatological meaning to their lives, which means seeing the risen Christ as the goal of their journey. Despite all our poverty, all our trials, all our longing for liberation, if we cling to Christ we cannot fail. Christ gives us strength and energy in our struggle for a better world.

That is why I repeat: let us not deprive Christians who join liberation movements of Christian energy, even if those movements don't believe in God or Christ. Dear Christians, don't let yourselves be deceived. You possess a much more vigorous force than any political group or any organization that seeks only earthly things. Political, social, and economic forces also need to look to Christ and take their strength from him, for that is how they will recover their Christian forcefulness. The church does not identify with any of these forces but inspires them; she encourages people to remain in the struggle but without losing the perspective I am pointing out.

That is why I do not identify with any of your organizations. I want to remain free to preach this eschatology which will always find much to criticize in any human project, because the great project of Christ will not be realized on this earth. That project is the kingdom of God, which gives light to the kingdoms of earth, thanks to those men and women who bear the Spirit of Christ and work as Christians. I would therefore ask you to allow me to make the following suggestion to those Christians who belong to ecclesial base communities. If the time comes when you no longer think it is worthwhile to read the Bible and belong to the community and you decide to join an organization as the only way to serve the nation, then you are making a mistake. Or rather, you are confused. Do not be confused! The church will always point out a just and valid goal in every organization, but she will also reject everything that is unjust, criminal, and evil.

I would ask you Christians: Why is there so little initiative? If you possess the project of the kingdom of heaven and have faith in Christ the risen King, why do you become slaves of earthly ideologies? Why do you think that Christian values are not as good as political ones? Why don't you have the boldness to infuse the organizations to which you belong with Christian meaning? Why must you become slaves of others? Why have you surrendered the leadership for which Christ has set the example? Why must you submit to such yokes? Don't be humiliated! You say you are liberators, but you are slaves! You say you are working for just claims, so how can you let yourselves be subjugated? No one is more rebellious than Christians because they do not submit to any earthly ideology for they possess the great freedom of Jesus Christ the Liberator.

Dear Christians, at this critical time for our country many liberators are needed, but they must be liberators who truly work for freedom. As Paul VI said, the basis of their action and their deliberation must be the doctrine of the church, the love of Christ, and true freedom from sin and everything that diminishes our humanity (EN 38).

Life of the church

This church, sisters and brothers, is not an abstraction. She is the depository of the treasure of redemption; she is the faithful witness of the risen Christ. I cherish one idea that I always repeat: the church is all of you—and myself as well. We are the community that now lives on with all her aspirations and all her defects. I cherish the idea that the church I preach is not an abstract church somewhere in the clouds; she is a church that journeys with her feet upon the earth, even when she bewails her sins and seeks to be converted and do better. This church of ours has experienced many beautiful things during this Holy Week.

For example, on Palm Sunday the pope stated that power should not be abused². Later, when preaching during the Stations of the Cross in the Roman Coliseum, he urged the church to live in solidarity with the martyrs of our time³. We have martyrs—let us not forget them. They are our priests, our catechists, our people of faith who have wrongly been accused of subversion and political involvement. They have been tortured and they have been killed. God alone knows the faith of those who offered their lives. Let us pay our respects to them, and let us live in solidarity, as the pope tells us, with this church that tries to be faithful to the point of martyrdom, as was Christ our Lord.

During this Holy Week the church has seen many activities. From this central cathedral of the diocese, I want to greet and thank our dear priests, the religious men and women, the laity and catechists, the young people, and the university students who organized themselves into missions to visit the towns and villages. They have all helped to make the celebration of Holy Week a truly beautiful experience. Here in the cathedral as well, only God can measure the extent of the devotion we have seen during this Holy Week. I got only a small sense of how great your presence was in the cathedral, and I tell you that my faith has been greatly enriched. But I have also been thinking, even while here in the cathedral, of the great multitudes in the villages who were making processions and praying the Way of the Cross and participating in the diverse manifestations of love for the Christ who redeems us.

² *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 April 1979).

³ JOHN PAUL II, «Allocution after the Way of the Cross», 13 April 1979, in *L' Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1979).

During this Holy Week the church must also lament the secular attitude of many for whom Holy Week means nothing more than business and vacation. Taking time off can be justified, and I'm not going to condemn everyone here. I am referring to the secularists, that is, to those who neglect the things of the church out of disdain. I'm not referring to the people who have family obligations or those who need to rest and whose vacations helped them reflect and increase their faith. I wish them well also.

I also want to deplore the fanatical traditions that are at variance with the pastoral norms of our diocese. Please be very careful, Christian communities. Some people are determined to maintain traditions that are not legitimate because they are opposed to a church that wants to be a living expression of Christ's redemption.

I also regret the abuses that result from imprudent innovations that don't take the legitimate sentiments of our people into consideration. Even worse are those persons, if there are any, who have tried to take advantage of the manifestations of faith during Holy Week to introduce their own particular political objectives. That is not what the church is for; that is not what the processions are for. The church has her own language, as we've said, and we need to know how to listen to it or, in any case, respect it. But it should not be used for other purposes, either by the right or the left. The church follows no one except Christ, and she calls on everyone to follow this true Christ.

Therefore it is necessary to evaluate our pastoral action. After Holy Week my beloved priests will be involved in a pastoral evaluation of all that is good and sincere in the new expressions of faith. We will also get rid of all that is bad in the illegitimate traditions and in the innovations that can corrupt the language of our church. Please help us. You who are listening now know what Holy Week was like in your town or village. If there was any defect, send us a report so that we'll be able to analyze the celebration of Holy Week in our diocese and learn how to give it greater Christian meaning.

I'm happy because this Holy Week, despite all the liturgical services, has allowed the diocese to nourish relationships which give it new strengths. There was, for example, the visit of a United States congressman who collaborates closely with us in the defense of human rights. He personally witnessed the frequency jamming that interrupted one of our radio broadcasts. He became aware of the depths to which this system will descend. He also became aware of how the church is engaged in an unequal struggle with those who want to silence her but who don't have the courage to confront us directly and challenge our arguments. I regret that our radio station has been unable to broadcast some of our messages to the people—that is a loss for the people. Nevertheless, I think that the church has gained something as a result of this interference. Let me tell them that they have good reason to combat our statements, but their attitudes are disloyal and do a dishonor to those who hold them. They are an abuse of the right to free expression.

For this reason I want to repeat to my beloved Christians something I said before: a time may come when we no longer have a newspaper or a radio station, but if that happens, we hope that every Catholic will be what we have said today: a witness of the Lord. Each one of you must be a microphone that speaks loudly and a newspaper that is distributed widely. The voice of every Christian must know no fear but must announce the truth. Above all, when our

means of communication are silenced, Catholics must continue to broadcast the great news of salvation. We do not have the right to keep it to ourselves; we must announce it for the salvation of the world. These threats and this interference with our broadcasts can be signs of worse to come. Pray God they won't, but let us be prepared to be witnesses of our truth. Right now they tell me that the radio signal has not been heard since eight-fifteen, so you see the interference continues.

When he went to the marginal zones of our city, the visiting congressman was able to see that the church is not involved in a struggle to discredit the nation; rather, she is denouncing the truth about what is happening among our people. He told me something that made me very proud: «Even though we live far apart from one another, I'm going to consider myself one of your faithful». He is one of those who promoted my nomination for the Nobel Prize in the United States Congress⁴.

On this occasion I also want to express my gratitude for the strong testimony that the Belgian parliamentarians offered in favor of my candidacy⁵. I also thank the 800 Christians from forty-three dioceses in Mexico who expressed solidarity with the pastoral guidelines of our church. And I repeat, dear sisters and brothers, I do not see this as a personal honor but as international support and defense for the church of our archdiocese and for the true human worth of our people.

I'm also immensely grateful for a letter I received from the bishops' conference of Holland. The letter says,

Esteemed Brother, the news that reaches us from your country about the great difficulties you experience in the area of social justice and the defense of human rights has caused profound concern in the bishops' conference and among the Catholic people of Holland. At the same time, we have heard great praise for the courage and the truly pastoral activity with which you as pastor of the church are responding to that very sad situation. We believe it our duty and also a sign of our fraternal affection to send you this letter in support of your pastoral labors on behalf of the poorest members of your flock, those who are abandoned and unjustly treated. Be assured of our solidarity, our prayers, our moral support, and also our material support if you should find yourselves in some urgent need. We have no doubt that you will be able to take the wisest and most fitting measures in the difficult situation in which you find yourself. Receive our fraternal greetings and our prayers for the Lord's blessing. For the Bishops' Conference of Holland, Cardinal Jean Willebrands. (Applause)

During this Holy Week, besides the consolation that Christ gives us in his passion, we received the support of 20,572 letters signed by Christians of Europe; they were attached to a petition «For the Abolition of Torture»⁶. Among those who signed were the auxiliary bishop of Avignon, the auxiliary bishop of Paris, and the bishop of Ajaccio. (Applause)

⁴ Tom Harkin was one of twenty-three members of the U.S. Congress who proposed Archbishop Romero for the Nobel Peace Prize on 27 January 1979, supporting the postulation of 118 members of the British Parliament made in November 1978. See *Orientación* (4 February 1979).

⁵ Letter of Jules Pollé, president of *Entraide et Fraternité* (Brussels) in *Orientación* (8 April 1979).

⁶ This was a letter from Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), supported by Raymond Bouchex, archbishop of Avignon; Daniel Pezeril, auxiliary bishop of Paris, and Jean Charles Thomas, bishop of Ajaccio. *Orientación* (8 April 1979).

This concrete church that is today celebrating the Lord's resurrection belongs to an organization called SEDAC, the Bishops' Secretariat for Central America, which will be holding its annual meeting in Costa Rica during Easter week. I will therefore have the opportunity to converse with many of my brothers in the Central American hierarchy. I ask you all to pray especially that this meeting may redound to the benefit of our various Central American churches.

Events of the week

Our church again calls for an urgent reform of the country's labor laws so that ambiguous cases—such as that of ADOC where many abuses and deaths are lamented—may be clarified in a way that favors the interests of everyone involved in the world of labor, both workers and managers⁷.

Amnesty International has requested the Security Council of the United Nations to intervene quickly in order to stop political assassinations in the world. Sadly, El Salvador is one of the countries mentioned in their petition. As a human being and a Christian, I want to deplore these political crimes we hear about every day on the radio and read about in our newspapers. In Iran people are executed every day, including politicians. In Nicaragua also there was an increase in violence during Holy Week. As we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, let us lift up our prayers with the hope that we human beings will come to understand one another without the shedding of blood.

Since the resurrection of Christ is a feast of liberation, I once again cry out with the church and with so many families who are suffering: give us some information about the 118 persons who have disappeared. They are our Salvadoran sisters and brothers. On this day of the resurrection I also want to cry out for the release of the two Englishmen who were kidnapped⁸. If they are still alive—and I hope they are—give them what Christ purchased with so much suffering: the freedom that all human beings deserve.

A number of cases were brought to my attention in a beautiful letter from Arcatao. It contained a list of serious assaults there, but I'm sorry I can't read it because I gave it to the congressman. I ask the person who wrote this letter to please send me another copy.

Let this be clear, dear sisters and brothers: the resurrection of Christ is the seal and the key of the God's covenant with humankind. If Christ has risen, then the Father who loves us so greatly in Christ will continue to protect us. Our people who have placed their hope in Christ will not be disappointed. As we celebrate the resurrection in the midst of bloodshed, sorrow, incomprehension, hatred, and violence, let us not be pessimistic. Rather, if need be, let us share the loneliness of Christ on the cross: «My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?» (Mark 15:34). Christ never lost his love for the Father or stopped trusting in him. The hour had yet not arrived. But three days after his death and what seemed to be abandonment by God, God responded in a way much better than if he had freed him from the cross or had prevented him

⁷ *La Crónica del Pueblo* (9 Abril 1979).

⁸ Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton, manager and assistant manager of the Bank of London and South America, were kidnapped on 30 November 1978.

from dying or suffering. Christ is all the more glorious for having assumed all the sorrows of his life in the triumph of his resurrection.

And so also will be our glorification. If we learn how to assume all the trials and sorrows of our lives into our hope for resurrection, then surely the resurrection will come, not only for us as individuals, but for our beloved country as well. Alleluia, sisters and brothers. (Applause)