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GRACE IS THE DIVINE GIFT OF EASTER THAT THE CHURCH CONVEYS TO HUMANKIND

**Fifth Sunday of Easter
13 May 1979**

Acts 9:26-31
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

Dear sisters and brothers, I've always believed that the best part of a journey is returning home¹. When traveling, you learn a lot and have new experiences. Your life is enriched, especially if you travel as a pilgrim or a pastor. You assimilate all that enriching experience and relate it to the homeland that has been entrusted to you. From Rome I bring you new emotions and new impressions. My returning here to you is the best aspect of my journey, and I thank all of you who are here in the church of El Rosario, which has been made into a home where we all feel like family. Thank you for your warm welcome, which moves me once again to continue coming in order to share our people's joys and sorrows, their sad tragedies and anxieties, and also their hopes as we all walk along in our pilgrimage.

As I told you already, the main reason for my trip to Rome was the kind invitation of the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation whose founder, Father Francisco Coll Guitart, was beatified fifteen days ago, on Sunday, April 29. On that day two men were elevated to the honor of the altars, Father Coll and another French missionary, Father Santiago Desiré Laval.

The Vatican Basilica, the largest in the world, was unable to hold the great multitude that attended; many people had to stay outside, but they applauded enthusiastically when the moment came. After we sang «Lord, have mercy», as we did here today, the postulators of the causes of beatification asked the pope to graciously proclaim, with the supreme teaching power of the church, that these two men are worthy to be honored on the altars and to be held up as models of virtue for Christians around the world. The pope replied by pronouncing the words of the decree of beatification. This brings them one step closer to canonization, which means that the person can receive the worship of the universal church. We hope that day arrives very soon. After the pope read the decree, they drew back the curtain covering the images of the two new blessed so that they could be seen against the glorious background designed by Bernini. The immense images were seven meters high but given the size of the basilica they appeared quite natural. When they were unveiled and illuminated, all the faithful responded with joy as the pope invited them to sing «Glory to God in the highest and peace to those loved by the Lord» (Luke 2:14). The Mass followed, celebrated in view of these two new saints that humankind has been able to offer to the Lord.

¹ Archbishop Romero left for Rome on 27 April and returned to El Salvador 12 May 1979; therefore he did not preach in the Cathedral of San Salvador on two Sundays, 29 April and 6 May 1979. See *Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, su diario*, San Salvador 2000, 151-170.

These ceremonies and those that followed were certainly beautiful, but now I want to share with the Dominican Fathers the joy I experienced in my visits to their general headquarters and to the main church of the Dominicans, Santa Maria de la Minerva, where a solemn Mass was celebrated in honor of the new blessed. Afterward there was a ceremony in the church of the Claretian Fathers since Father Claret, founder of the Missionaries of the Heart of Mary, had a close friendship with the new blessed. After leaving Rome, I continued my pilgrimage in Spain, where I visited the places where Francisco Coll was born and where he practiced his priestly ministry.

I think my pilgrimage is ending here right now with all you, dear sisters and brothers. Along with the Dominican Fathers and the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation, all of you are devoutly assembled in this church dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary² to render tribute to this founder who is now honored throughout the world, for this is a congregation that has spread into many geographical horizons.

While there in Rome, I received news about the sad situation of our country, and it's painful to feel pointed out abroad as somebody coming from a country where violence seems like the air you breathe. Outside the country one sees versions of events that cannot be seen from here within. The impressions of people there are crueler than what we see here ourselves, but sometimes Europe's insensitivity toward America causes heartache. As a Latin American in Europe, one feels like a missionary awakening people's consciousness of universal solidarity and asking for their love and their understanding regarding the great problems of Latin America.

In this regard I was able fulfill my duty when they called me to be interviewed on Vatican Radio and also when I had the opportunity to speak with the Holy Father himself and with some of his collaborators in the church's central government. So the whole journey was one of pilgrimage. I was accompanied not just by my faith but also by my great love for this country and my desire to bring back to it new strength and new illumination. How I wish upon returning, dear sisters and brothers, that I could give you all the same joyful optimism and hope that I now have and so fill you with the fresh air that our Christian faith produces wherever it spreads!

Therefore I believe that the message we want to draw from the word of God today can prescind from trips to Europe and wonderful experiences such as those I've had, because the same rich liturgical sources we have for nourishing our holiness and devout worship are the same ones the pope and the bishops of the world have. Here in this concrete context of El Salvador the word of God becomes ours, and the message of God, which is proclaimed from the church's altar every Sunday and every day, must give nourishment to our lives.

I remember when the pope, in describing the new blessed, spoke precisely of the Easter season that we prepared for during Lent. Now we gather together the values that the Redeemer Christ has granted us by his death on the cross and his resurrection—he offers us new life, joy, and hope. The world, despite its tragedies and its sorrows, is illuminated by the hope and the faith that flow from the word of God and from our hope and belief in Christ, for he

² The Cathedral of San Salvador was still being held by members of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc, who occupied it on 4 May 1979.

now lives and will never die again, and he has the power to save all nations. The pope stated, «This Easter message becomes even more brilliant now because we see it incarnated in two men of this world who are almost our contemporaries. From eternity Christ continues to attract those who wish to help their sisters and brothers»³.

The pope went on to describe the two beatified men as great evangelizers and great catechists. He said that, even in difficult political situations such as our own, they knew how to rise above desperation. As the result of persecution that shut down Dominican priories, Father Coll had to emigrate, but even without the protection of a priory he was able to carry his Dominican vocation to a wider world. His work yielded fruit, including the marvelous work of the congregation of Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation, who keep his spirit alive in the world.

Returning, then, to the pages of the Bible, we find there the message that was read to us today. In today's reading there is a phrase that provides the theme for our reflection. In the gospel Christ says, «I am the vine, you are the branches» (John 15:5). From that phrase I take the title for our homily: «Grace is the Divine Gift of Easter that the Church Conveys to Humankind». First, I would like to ask, what is grace? Second, what is the relation between the church and grace? In trying to respond to the question, what is grace—the first part of our reflection today—I see in the readings three aspects of divine grace. First is the negative aspect: grace is the forgiveness of our sins for it removes from our lives what separates us from God. Second is one of the positive aspects: as Christ says today, grace is communion with the very same love and truth that God has revealed to us. All this is grace. So if grace is forgiveness of sin and communion in the truth and love of God, what is the relation between this Easter gift we call grace and this church which is made up of our lives? The answer is that the church is precisely the sign and the conveyor of these gifts from the Lord.

What is grace?

Let us try to understand what grace is. I want to ask something of you, dear sisters and brothers and beloved reporters who are here with us. When reporting the message contained in one of our homilies, don't report only on what the message has to say about the sad reality of our people, because then it will appear to be just another political speech. Instead, make it clear that the substance of my message is the theology of the word of God. What we reflect on Sunday after Sunday in the church is the revelation found in the divine words of the Lord. Curiosity has perhaps brought some people here this morning to see what the archbishop will say about the massacres of the past week, but that is not the important thing. We will shed light on them, but we will do so from the sublime theology of the transcendent word of God. So even if there are no depictions of our social reality, we will always have to reflect on the word of God so that it will be the foundation for our life as Christians.

Today I ask the question, what is grace, not just impulsively but because God's word urges us to speak about grace since it is a word that synthesizes much of the content of theology. That is to say, this word «grace» was invented by theology to gather together all the treasures and values that Christ gave out so generously in the gospels. The job of theology is to systematize everything that Christ did even though he wasn't concerned about theology; what

³ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in the Mass for the Beatification of Francisco Coll and Santiago Laval», 29 April 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (6 May 1979).

he did he did as a good shepherd, as the chorus just sang, giving to his flock the food they needed.

The word «grace» does not appear in today's gospel, and yet the whole gospel is a definition of grace. Christ makes a comparison: «I am the vine, and you are the branches. The branch bears fruit if it remains united to the vine, but if it is severed from the vine, it no longer receives the sap from it and so withers and dies. It is useless except to be thrown into the fire» (John 15:5-6). What do we find in this language of Christ? A beautiful definition of grace!

I was traveling through the fields of Europe precisely during these first days of spring. One of the most spectacular aspects of spring is the way the vineyards send out new shoots. In Europe the winter is deathly cold; all the vegetation loses its leaves, including the vines. The workers who cultivate the vines cut away the branches and leave only the stump, a little trunk, and those stumps are now sending out shoots. What a delight it is to see life emerging from that death! Those little branches are now tender, but during May they will keep growing and spreading. Supports are placed under the branches because soon they'll begin to produce bunches of grapes. Around the month of August, when the heat of summer is strong, the workers will begin to harvest the bunches of grapes. So we can understand the comparison Christ makes: «I am the vine. I am like the trunk that is drawing nourishment from the earth. I am the vine; the little branches are you. If you remain united to this trunk, you will begin to produce large bunches of fruit. My Father is the farmer, and he will trim the branches so that they produce even more. So remain united with me. If you don't remain united with me you will die. Without me you can do nothing» (John 15:1-6).

This is not something that happens naturally. There are many sinners who accomplish great things. All earthly tasks can be done without living in God's grace. It's even possible for professionals to be good professionals and for artists to be good artists without any concern for living in God's grace. But whatever they produce comes from a branch that has been severed from the vine and deprived of life. They are not united to Christ. They may yield many earthly fruits and build great organizations, but they produce nothing for eternal life. So when Christ says, «Without me you can do nothing» (John 15:5c), he is referring to fruits that remain for eternal life. Such are the fruits of a man like Father Coll and others who have been beatified, and even of those who have not been beatified. So many of our own people—humble women in our countryside, honorable men in our towns—have striven to remain united to Christ! At the hour of death they are happy because their hands are filled with the fruits of good works that will bring them the eternal life that no one can take away from them. What's the use of spending your life just making money or trying to live comfortably? What's the use of seeking political advantage if life is cut off at the moment we least expect? What remains of all that we have worked so hard to attain on earth? There remains only our union with God.

What then is grace? In today's readings what I find first of all is forgiveness of sins. What the miracle of grace does first is convert those who delight only in earthly things, in carnal vices, in idolizing wealth. Many people trust only in the power of politics or wealth, but there comes a moment when the truth of God exposes the vanity of all these things and reveals the beauty of living united to Christ by grace and by love. When Jesus Christ says in today's gospel, «You are already pruned because of the words I spoke to you» (John 15:3), he means that the message he preaches cleanses us from sin. The profoundest joy for a preacher is hearing that

people's hearts and lives have changed in such a way that Christ can tell them, «You are already pruned because of the words I spoke to you».

In my preaching, sisters and brothers, the only thing I seek is conversion. When we denounce crimes and injustices, we are not seeking vengeance or hatred. All we want is for sinners to be converted. How many times have we had to denounce hands that are stained with blood! But we do so not out of desire for revenge but to tell them, «Cleanse yourselves by repenting! Be converted to the Lord! Let yourselves be pruned because of the words you have heard!» Blessed are those who hear the word with an attitude of sincere conversion. This is what grace is: people feel that a great weight has been lifted from them, a weight that was oppressing them, the weight of sin.

We can say the same thing with words from the second reading we heard today: «Let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth» (1 John 3:18). This reading bids us to keep a peaceful conscience, to observe the commandments, and to do what God desires. All this is in keeping with the idea that grace takes away our sins. It is also related to conversion and to helping people find happiness, for happiness cannot be found in earthly things or transitory possessions. It can be found only in love and union with Jesus Christ, the vine of eternal life.

Grace is also communion in love and in truth. If Christ had done nothing else than remove the weight of sin from human hearts, that would have been more than enough, but Christ did something more. The grace of Easter and of redemption is something positive. It doesn't just take away sin; it also gives people something new, two things they didn't have before: love and truth. We find these two treasures in the words of today's readings. In the gospel Christ says, «Remain united with me. Remain in my love. This is my commandment» (John 15:9), and the second reading tells us, «This is his commandment: that we love in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us» (1 John 3:23). May we truly believe in the name of Jesus Christ and love one another as the Lord has commanded us.

Truth and love are the two aspects of grace. As truth, it means believing in the name of Jesus and in what Christ has done. We must believe not just in the name of Jesus but in all that that name contains. It means believing that Christ is God who has come to earth. It means accepting his Gospel. It means believing in everything he has done and in everything he has preached. This is the supreme truth, the truth that makes us really free and provides the basis for true love so that we can love one another as he commanded us. This not some romantic or sentimental love. It is love shown in deeds and in truth. It is love that rids us of selfishness so that we share with others the happiness we have. It is a love that is courageous and bold enough to forgive even the hand that wounds us, so that we can say with Christ, «Father, forgive them, they know not what they do» (Luke 23:24). It is love that allows us to identify even with what is most hateful. It is love that does not divide but unites and provides a basis for true peace.

This is the civilization of love that the bishops who met in Puebla desire for all Latin America⁴. Love is not weak. Many people have placed their trust in violence and hatred. They think that society's problems will be fixed that way, but they forget that there is no power in hatred and violence; there is only weakness. The real power is love, and if we haven't already

⁴ *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, 8.

seen a world transformed by love, then it's because we haven't really tried out the power of love. We want to see things change without doing anything ourselves to contribute to this authentic love.

There is also much talk now of freedom, a pretty word that is much loved in our time. But in his new encyclical John Paul II seeks to unite the concept of freedom and human rights with the concept of truth. He writes,

Jesus Christ meets the people of every age, including our own, with the same words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings us freedom based on truth, frees us from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in our soul, our heart, and our conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still being given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint! (RH 12).

The pope then tells us how Christ over the course of many centuries, beginning with the apostles, has stood alongside those persons who were judged because of the truth they spoke and who went to their deaths as persons condemned because of the truth. «Is it possible», the pope asks, «that Christ would cease to be the spokesperson and the advocate of those persons who live their lives "in spirit and in truth"?» (John 4:23) (RH 12).

Let these words encourage us, then, in this atmosphere of distortions, lies, and falsification, so that we realize that we cannot breathe the air of freedom there. Freedom must be the product of truth, as the pope just told us. Christ will accompany those who are truthful even when they are brought before the courts and even when Pontius Pilate asks them, «What is truth?» Christ told him, «For this I was born, to testify to the truth» (John 18:37-38). Christ accompanies all who are victims for the truth. Grace is truth, then; grace is communing with the truth that the Lord has revealed to us; grace is above all communing with the love that God has revealed to us in his Son, Jesus Christ. «See how God has loved the world», the Gospel says, «that he has given his own Son so that the world might be saved through him» (John 3:16). That same Christ who was sent by the Father as a testimony of love tells us every day and will shortly tell us in this Mass, «Take and eat, this is my Body. This is my Blood that is shed for you. I am offering myself for the life of my brothers and sisters and for the glory of my Father» (Luke 22:19-20). This is love! Love is giving of yourself. Love is surrendering yourself without reserve. Love is desiring without selfishness. Love is serving not exploiting. Love is everything we are taught by religion. Grace, then, means communing with the love God had for the world when he sent us his Son. That we love one another as God has loved us—that is the new commandment of the Christian law, and that is grace. That's why, when a person is to be canonized or beatified, it is the person's love that is examined. Love is holiness and the measure of holiness. Those who love selflessly are holy; those who talk a lot about holiness but don't know how to love are not holy.

Let us see this truth in the light by which we'll be examined in the evening of our lives, as the poet Saint John of the Cross says, «In the evening of our lives we will be judged according to love»⁵. If you pass this test, you will be saved, and you will be holy in the degree that you pass. Let us hope that you will pass this test of love with a high grade, with an A-plus! But if you're not found passing in love, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who hate, even if they are fighting for good earthly causes, are not building true freedom. Those who commit violence because they believe more in violence than in love are not building true freedom. As the pope has said, we don't want just the appearance of freedom, but freedom founded on truth and on love. This is the communion with the Lord to which we are invited when Christ tells us, «Remain united as the vine and the branches» (John 15:4).

What relationship exists between grace and the church?

Our final theological consideration this morning, sisters and brothers, is this: the church and grace. Here I want to draw on the first reading, which is a magnificent description of Paul, the persecutor who was distrusted in the church communities. When he arrived in Jerusalem, the book of Acts tells us, nobody trusted him even though he had spoken with Christ and was preaching the name of the Lord to the Gentiles. He went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and the apostles, and only after he had validated his preaching and his teaching with these pillars of the church did other Christians recognize him as a true preacher belonging to the Christian hierarchy. From that point on he would suffer the persecution that all true preachers must undergo. Some Greek philosophers tried to eliminate him. Such was the fate of anyone preaching the name of Jesus. When there were plots against Paul to eliminate him, the Christians sent him to another place. Fleeing from violence is not cowardice when good work can be done somewhere else. In those distant lands Paul began to preach the great doctrine that has made him so holy and so famous: the freedom we have in Christ our Lord.

Another thing we have in today's reading is a connection with the hierarchy. Because Paul had seen Christ personally, he felt his vocation deeply; he told the apostles how he had spoken to the risen Christ when he was struck down on the way to Damascus. He knew that he was preaching the Christ who had spoken to him, but he still needed the validation of those whom Christ had appointed to be guardians of revelation. Only when the vocation he received from Christ was united with the mission of the apostles was Paul truly an apostle, a bishop, and a preacher of the Christian church. This is something that is needed by all of us who preach. We need a vocation in which we feel the call of Christ, but that is not enough. We also need to be validated by the hierarchy and so united to the certified teaching of the church.

This is something I have just experienced personally and with great joy because last Monday the Holy Father was kind enough to receive me in a private audience. I had already greeted him the Wednesday before when we attended a public audience that filled the whole of Saint Peter's Square. He invited all the bishops to come up on the platform so that we could join him in blessing all the people, and afterward he greeted us one by one. When I told him my name and my position here in San Salvador, he told me that he hoped to be able to speak with me in private. Greatly encouraged by his words, I asked for the audience that the pope himself had suggested. At noon on Monday I had the good fortune to converse with the pope and to

⁵ The original phrase is: *A la tarde te examinarán del amor, aprende a amar como Dios quiere ser amado*. It is taken from his work, *Dichos de luz y amor*, in SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Obras Completas*, Madrid 1988, 94.

hear from his own lips the consoling words, «I understand that the situation in which you have to carry out your pastoral ministry is very difficult, very difficult»⁶.

Naturally he gave me the guidance and the advice that the supreme head of the church would be expected to give to a collaborator in a difficult situation. He counseled great care and prudence, but also boldness. In very serious cases denunciation is also necessary. That church must fulfill her duty of accompanying the poor and of being the voice of those who have no voice. But the pope was also prudent enough to say that care must be taken to avoid becoming consumed in that mission; the church's authority needs to be maintained. Often he compared my situation with the pastoral work he had carried out himself during the difficult times in Poland when the government was no great collaborator of the church. The church must make her way through all sort of difficulties in order to bring the message of Christ to the hearts of the people.

He spoke a lot about you also, dear sisters and brothers. Through his bishops the pope tries to love all his people and to hear their voices. An impression that remains firmly with me is the keen attention with which John Paul II listens. When he finished speaking and I began to speak, he gave me all his attention; he even leaned toward me bodily in order to hear and understand me better. When elected pope, he was unexpectedly taken out of his Polish setting to assume that extremely difficult job of being pastor to the whole world, and he did so without having had any prior experience of the Roman curia's universal work. I understand, therefore, why he is now so attentive to hearing about what's happening in all parts of the world. In that way he can be the true shepherd of all.

What the Bible tells us today, therefore, about how «Paul went up to Jerusalem and spoke with Peter» (Acts 9:26), is something that took place in my own poor life. I also went to Rome and spoke with the new pope, and I draw the same conclusions Saint Paul did. We are bound to suffer, and we are bound to be misunderstood, but we must face difficult situations with boldness. We move forward united by the communion that binds us with the one who has been authorized to validate the teaching that Christ has brought to the world.

But there is another side to all this that I want to stress, dear sisters and brothers, and it is you people. How beautiful are the final words of today's first reading: «Meanwhile, the church was growing in faithfulness to the Lord, and she kept spreading by the force of the Spirit» (Acts 9:31). Believe me, this is something I must tell you: I felt very proud of my archdiocese as I traveled to different parts of the world because everywhere people are talking about us and want to know more about the experiences of our church. In Europe, when I was at the tomb of Father Claret in Vich, a town near Barcelona, one of the Claretian Fathers reminded me that Father Claret had been bishop of Santiago de Cuba. He later returned to Spain and died there. When he founded the Claretian congregation, his motto was «America is the new vineyard. Europe is the old one». He placed all his hope in this land of America where his missionaries worked.

And just now we were speaking of vineyards, vines, and branches and of how the church, under the impulse of the Spirit, was growing in fervor and fidelity to the Lord, as the

⁶ «Papal Audiences» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (13 May 1979). In his pastoral diary Archbishop Romero offers more details of his audience with Pope John Paul II. See *Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, su diario*, San Salvador 2000, 160-162.

book of Acts tells us. I don't think there's any danger here, sisters and brothers—if there is, let us beware of it!—of a tendency the pope tried to expose in his speech at Puebla: «Be careful», he said, «when there is talk of the church of the people, because we can make the church into a democracy»⁷. Such would be the case if the people made decisions and the priestly ministers had to do what the people say. That's not the case. If it were so, it would be a wrong conception of the church. The church to which I am referring in the Acts of the Apostles is the church that is growing in fidelity to the Lord under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and this is our church: priests, religious, laity, and communities in the towns and villages, all of them nourishing their meditation with the word of the Lord. I believe they are growing in fidelity to the Lord, and so, as the pope did with the bishops in Puebla, I make it clear to you that there is great danger in converting the church into a political organization—if we do that, we will bring the church to ruin. The church that is needed in our time is the one that remains faithful to the Lord and allows herself to be impelled by the Holy Spirit. Only in that way can she take part in political realities and shed light on them.

The church that remains faithful to the Lord and under the impulse of the Spirit has no need to forsake earthly realities. That would be «dis-incarnation»! That would be the opium of the people! That would be an alienating type of religion. Unfortunately there are many people who still cling to a type of piety that involves no commitment. Let us have a balanced view, especially for these people of ours who have so much anguish, so many problems, such a great need for justice to be done. They need to find a transformative force in the Gospel and in their own Christian identity. But Christians involved in politics will be transformative only to the extent that they are faithful to the Lord and remain under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. All of us, according to our particular vocations, must be messengers of the Lord and of the Spirit, working to transform the society in which we live.

This is the church of my dreams! This is the archdiocese that I ask of the Lord: a people always growing in fidelity to the Lord and following the impulse of the Holy Spirit. The church has no desire to be a force of political opposition. None at all! I have never said that and never will. The church has no desire to be one more subversive party, and she will never be that. It cannot happen! The church may be accused of causing subversion and unrest; she may be branded as Marxist or communist or politically driven. Let it be understood that that is only calumny coming from those who don't want a church that, in fidelity to the Lord and under the impulse of the Spirit, denounces all the injustices committed in any part of society.

This is the church we must build, dear sisters and brothers! Every Sunday I encourage you to build this true church that is faithful to the Lord and open to the impulse of the Holy Spirit. That is why I tell you that the church is you, the people of God, for it is you who assure us pastors that we are proclaiming the true faith that Christ has revealed to us. Let us behold the world, then, from this perspective of church.

Life of the church

First of all, this morning I feel the palpable reality of this community that is trying to be faithful to the Lord, and this is my great responsibility as its pastor. In this Mass our archdiocese unites itself to the joy of the Dominican Sisters and the Dominican Fathers in celebrating Father Coll,

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Inauguration of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

who wore the Dominican habit and was a faithful son of Saint Dominic of Guzmán. He was filled with the spirit of Saint Dominic and passed that spirit on as an inheritance to the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation. Under this inspiration these fathers and sisters are involved in many works among us that bring joy to the archdiocese. We rejoice also in all the diverse charisms of the many congregations and parishes and communities—they are what give true spiritual wealth to our church.

In this regard I also rejoice that we have a community in which priests and sisters have given a wonderful example of sharing in the people's anguish, as I have been told. On May 8 they offered to help out in the hospital with washing and clothing and burying the dead who were left in the cathedral⁸. I feel truly proud that in our diocese there is a community of sisters from different sectors and different congregations who would leave their pastoral ministry meeting in order to go and serve when the world cried out in need. In what ways can we serve our sisters and brothers, whoever they may be? Whatever the problems of those who make up our community, we feel them to be our own.

The day after tomorrow is Nurses' Day. I send early greetings to this guild of humanity that shares in the pain we suffer, and I invite you to join us tomorrow at four in the afternoon in the Divina Providencia Hospital. I ask those who are listening to please extend this information to other nurses and doctors in the hospitals. I offer this homage to the nurses, and I invite them spend some time reflecting before the divine Doctor, Jesus Christ, on the mission of the nurse in the world.

Here in this church of El Rosario we feel ourselves to be a community under the protection of the Virgin Mary. I want to echo the pope's insistence that we Catholics be very devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and that we pray the rosary frequently if possible. In fact, today, May 13, is the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. At four o'clock this afternoon in Planes de Rendero there will be a procession of palms and a Mass in honor of the Virgin, a very fine tradition among our people. I urge you, if you have time, to go to Planes de Renderos and participate in this pilgrimage—not to be tourists but to pray! Let us pray to the Virgin for the needs of our country.

This community of ours is also aware of the liturgical coming of the Holy Spirit. Within two or three weeks, on June 3 to be exact, we will celebrate the feast of Pentecost. In the last meeting they had, our priests remembered that June 3 is also Seminary Day, and so we will pray especially for vocations and ask people to support the work of the seminary. Since it is the day when the Holy Spirit descends on the church, it would be good to prepare our young people for confirmation on that day, as we did last year. I urge the different communities to prepare their young people and to inform us about it so that during the Pentecost Day Mass we can administer the sacrament of confirmation to many of the young people of our archdiocesan community. That is also what we're going to do this coming Saturday in the parish of Colón, where several districts are coming together to receive the sacrament of confirmation.

⁸ On 8 May 1979 the security forces repressed a demonstration of the People's Revolutionary Bloc in front of the Cathedral of San Salvador, leaving twenty-three dead, seventy wounded, and an unknown number of persons arrested. See «Information Bulletin No. 6 of the Communications Office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador», 9 May 1979, in *Orientación* (13 May 1979).

Besides reminding you of the seminary, I also want to recall those beloved priests who are no longer with us, even though here in the community of the archdiocese their memory remains alive in our hearts. As you know, in the days I was away Father Benito Alfaro died tragically—he was the pastor of San Rafael, Chalatenango. We will remember him especially in our Mass today, and I unite myself closely to the sorrow of his bereaved family. Four children were riding with him when his car crashed, but thank God they were not injured. Yesterday and the day before there were also celebrations of the second anniversary of the tragic death of Father Alfonso Navarro. I am grateful for all the people who still hold dear the message he brought to the world. We call to mind also, with great affection, Father Segura, who died a year ago on May first. As is only right, the seminary community was moved to remember him by celebrating a wonderful Mass of suffrage for him.

I join in the sorrow of so many families that are grieving in these circumstances. I ask your prayers for the great number of deceased. There have been so many incidents that have brought us bitterness and suffering! Among all the grieving families I have been especially asked to remember Don Andrés Orellana Mejía of Cancasque on the anniversary of his death. I ask your prayers that all our deceased may find the glorious joy that Christ promises us.

I also want to announce you a new service of social communication for our archdiocese, namely, a weekly bulletin called «News and Commentaries». Its purpose will be to communicate the plain and simple truth in order to counter the many ways that truth is distorted in the life of our country. In this regard I also request your enthusiastic support for our paper, *Orientación*, which every week tries to reflect on the situation of our country and on what the church has to say in that regard. Likewise, we request your support for our radio station YSAX, which is certainly carrying out a great mission and is consequently suffering the same kind of persecution as the rest of the church.

We are also making an effort to publish the encyclicals and the homilies. There is an office here right on the west side of the cathedral where you can obtain these booklets, which will help you reflect on your life as Christians.

This community unites itself also with the community of the Diocese of Santa Ana, where they have been celebrating the silver jubilee of Bishop Benjamín Barrera y Reyes. It was on 5 May 1954 that he began to shepherd that sister diocese as their bishop.

Events of the week

As I come to an end now, sisters and brothers, I want to tell you my impressions on returning home. It is very painful to go on pilgrimage representing a diocese that is part of a nation in upheaval! Even so, much good can be done by missionaries of that diocese because they can clarify distorted reports, arouse people's sensibilities, and encourage communion with other communities through prayer and solidarity. That is what I've experienced during these days that I have been absent from the diocese. But as I return, there is great consolation in once again being with one's own family, the diocesan family, and in sharing again in all the anguish and tension among us. While away I tried to stay informed so as to be able to judge what is happening among us with the Gospel's criteria of justice.

Given the reality we have, we must regret the events that you already know about but that I still want to recall briefly. This has been a very dense and vivid week with the occupation of the cathedral and the embassies⁹, the police officers killed¹⁰, the transportation boycott, and the cruel massacre in which a peaceful rally was broken up by gunfire, leaving many dead and wounded¹¹. Today four more people will be buried after Mass is offered for them in the basilica at eleven o'clock in the morning. The official report of the National Police refuses to recognize their own error but instead accuses the demonstrators of having initiated the shooting¹². The president has promised to carry out a thorough investigation of the massacre¹³ and has also threatened to decree a state of siege¹⁴. What are we to think about all of these events? Above all I ask, how have we arrived at such a situation? What are the ultimate causes?

I want to express my solidarity with the wise and prudent statement written by the Superior Council of the University of El Salvador, which states,

It is generally accepted, both nationally and internationally, that the crisis that periodically agitates Salvadoran society finds its ultimate explanation in the extreme inequality of participation among the different sectors in the production and distribution of the national income. It cannot be denied that in recent years production has increased appreciably, but neither can it be denied that the economic expansion has failed to generate a parallel process of social democratization that would allow the majority of the population to enjoy the benefits of said economic expansion.

Moreover, these sectors are marginalized by the prevailing forms of the social organization of production, and they also suffer the consequences of the economic crisis which began in the mid-1960s and continues up to the present time.

At the same time there has been a steady consolidation of authoritarian forms of government that have denied the right of all sectors to express their interests freely, thus leading to a crisis of the representativeness and legitimacy of political power and of the state of law itself.

Given this general framework, when the popular sectors are denied the effective possibility of equitable participation in the enjoyment of the benefits of the production process, conflicts arise with greater frequency and greater intensity, thus obliging those sectors to seek alternative methods, such as mechanisms of social pressure. As they attempt in this way to have their interests attended to, they meet with ever more authoritarian and repressive reactions and responses on the part of the sectors that control political power.

⁹ On May 4 members of the People's Revolutionary Bloc occupied the embassies of Costa Rica and France and the Cathedral of San Salvador, and on May 11 the embassy of Venezuela, to demand the freedom of five of their leaders who had been captured during the last days of April. *La Prensa Gráfica* (5 May 1979) and «Chronicle of the Month of May, 1979», *ECA* 368, (1979) 450-452.

¹⁰ Between May 4 and May 11 four officers of the National Police were killed. *La Prensa Gráfica* (5, 7, and 11 May 1979).

¹¹ *Orientación* (13 May 1979).

¹² *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 May 1979).

¹³ *La Prensa Gráfica* (13 May 1979).

¹⁴ *La Prensa Gráfica* (11 May 1979).

This irrational process only feeds fuel on the fire so that the social and political conflicts tend to spread unpredictably and result in violence, something the University of El Salvador definitively rejects¹⁵.

The statement continues with a description of what happened in the university and explains that repressive methods do not contribute to solutions. What is urgently needed is a more rational order. The church agrees strongly with this statement and believes that it explains clearly the ultimate cause of this situation.

As you all know, the immediate cause of the problem was the illegal arrest of five leaders of the People's Revolutionary Bloc. Two of them have already been released, but nothing has been said about the other three. It is clear that they were arrested by the security forces and have not been brought before the courts¹⁶.

The only reasonable and just way to resolve this conflict now affecting the country is not by repression or threatening to impose a state of siege; rather it is by responding to the just demands that are being made. What has happened to the three leaders who have not yet been released? This question is being asked not only by the People's Revolutionary Bloc but by every person of good will in El Salvador. They are asking the government to respect the law and to free their brothers. (Applause) Many thanks for that applause, but I would like to add that those three are not the only ones who have disappeared. (Applause) Apart from those arrested before February 22, we have the names of thirteen persons who were captured and disappeared between February 22 and May 8. If we add them to the earlier list, there is a total of at least 127 disappeared persons¹⁷. (Applause). They are our sisters and brothers, and we want to know where they are! (Applause)

They promised to carry out an exhaustive investigation. How wonderful that would be! It is only just and right, but we are fearful that the investigation will suffer the same fate as the one requested last September 14 of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, which was supposed to investigate the human rights situation in the country. If that happens again, then there is not much to be hoped for. Certainly, it is the right thing to do, but only if its purpose is to assign responsibility, punish the guilty, and correct mistakes. In my opinion, that is our most serious problem: errors are committed and are not recognized. We must all recognize our errors and not distort the truth for the sake of saving our honor.

At the same time, I want to speak frankly and say that it is my duty to repudiate the forces of violence and the abuses of freedom of action that result in the burning of vehicles, the machine-gunning of residences, and the occupation of offices and public locales. There is an unshakable moral principle which states that evil is not to be done even if some good is achieved by it. In my pastoral letter on violence, I recall a series of moral principles that should not be forgotten by those who are directing these pressure tactics. If these principles are not followed, then they will be committing the very same wrongs that they condemn¹⁸. There is all

¹⁵ «The Superior Council of the University of El Salvador Regarding the Nation's Social and Political Crisis», 9 May 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (12 May 1979).

¹⁶ Ricardo Mena was released on May 10, and Facundo Guardado, general secretary of the People's Revolutionary Bloc, was released on May 11, but the security forces denied capturing Numa Alberto Escobar Martínez, Oscar López and Marciano Meléndez. *La Prensa Gráfica* (11 and 12 May 1979).

¹⁷ «Report on Disappeared Persons» in *Orientación* (20 May 1979).

¹⁸ *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 46-51.

the more reason, then, for those who are responsible for promoting the common good to take prompt measures. With just laws and honest impartial dealings they can eliminate the need for people to resort to the extremes that we now shamefully lament.

Allow me also to make an earnest call to the friendly countries whose embassies have been affected by this situation: let them use the force of their diplomatic relations to bring about a more humane situation in our country. A senator of the United States recently spoke quite frankly, and I think his example is worthy of imitation for it shows true international solidarity. (Applause)

Having offered this perspective of our concrete history, let us now conclude. I repeat that these topics are not the main object of my preaching, but they need to be seen and illuminated by the light of my preaching. Let us remember that the center of our preaching and our reflection this morning has been the magnificent phrase of Christ: «I am the vine, and you are the branches. Remain united with me!» (John 15:5). This alone can give us true dignity and true freedom. Let us not be deceived by the false appearances of freedom. Let us seek freedom in the truth, which is found only with Christ who said, «I am the truth!» (John 14:6).

Christ offers us this great Easter gift, the gift of his grace. Participation in his life and his truth is waiting for us there on the altar as we celebrate. Giving thanks today to the Dominican Sisters of the Assumption and to the Dominican Fathers, we offer a brother of theirs as a model of heavenly holiness. And I want to repeat to the whole diocesan community that beautiful phrase of today's first reading: «The church kept growing in fidelity to the Lord and was moving under the impulse of the Spirit of God» (Acts 9:31). Let it be so. (Applause)