

150

CHRIST IS THE LIFE AND THE TREASURE OF HUMANKIND

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

1 July 1979

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-25

2 Corinthians 8:7-8,13-15

Mark 5:21-43

At this time of the liturgical year, dear sisters and brothers, we may have the impression that, after walking on the heights, we are descending again to the plains to continue on a more ordinary path. In fact, these Sundays that follow the Easter season are called the Sundays of Ordinary Time. We find ourselves today at the Thirteenth Sunday because Ordinary Time began before Lent and was then interrupted for the celebration of the mystery of our redemption: Lent, Holy Week, and Easter.

Now we return to those ordinary Sundays and follow an ancient tradition that goes back to the times of the primitive church: the weekly commemoration of the mysteries of Christian redemption—the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of Christ. This is the paschal mystery, the mystery of salvation. The Second Vatican Council states it thus: «Every Sunday Christ's faithful come together into one place to hear the word of God and take part in the Eucharist. In this way they celebrate the mystery of their redemption and give thanks to God who has begotten them again in living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead» (SC 106). Every Sunday, then, is Easter. Every Sunday should inspire in us the hope that we are following a living Christ who will never die again and who has the power to grant us salvation.

In celebrating these eternal mysteries, the liturgical year tries to apply them to the concrete historical situation that every people is experiencing. Preaching on this Thirteenth Sunday is not the same in Rome or in Poland or in Africa or in Argentina or in Nicaragua as it is here in El Salvador. The word of God that was just proclaimed here today is meant for us Salvadorans now, on this first Sunday of July of 1979, and we have to view it from that perspective. The word of God reveals the mystery of our salvation because the history of every people and every person and every family serves as an instrument of God for saving that people, that person, that family. That's why it may often seem that our preaching touches on very dangerous matters, matters about which it would be easier to keep quiet. But then the word of the Gospel would not accomplish its mission of shedding the light of the mystery of Christ on the people's reality.

As we seek to synthesize our thoughts about today's readings, we propose this theme as an aid to our memory: «Christ is the Life and the Wealth of Humankind». This is our central theme and idea for today's message. Christ is the life and the wealth of humankind. To develop this theme we are going to break it down into three reflections, as is our custom: first, Christ has divine life-giving power; second, Christ, as justice and love, evens out social

differences; and third, as a conclusion drawn from today's gospel, authentic faith in Christ is the only solution for our great national problems.

Christ has divine life-giving power

Let us first of all look at Christ as one who has the power that gives life. Today's gospel tells us about Christ standing before the dead girl, taking her by the hand, and returning her to life. We also see him restoring health to a woman who had been suffering an incurable disease for twelve years. He is the wonderful image of the power of life in the midst of death and infirmity. Along with that girl lying dead, let us behold also all the young men and women, all the children, and all the others who have died here in El Salvador. The empire of death extends over the earth and especially over our country, where violent death has become almost like the air we breathe. Our hospitals are filled with the wounded because of the violence and the widespread sickness. The dead are filling up the cemeteries day by day. But in the midst of this darkness and gloom, behold the light of the power that gives life: Jesus Christ!—ceaselessly.

This Christ, standing before the dead girl, the daughter of Jairus, is the eternal God who became man. But before becoming man, the sublime Gospel of Saint John tells us, «He was the Word who was with God, and by that Word all things were made. The Word was life, and the life was the light of humankind» (John 1:1-4). Christ is the plenitude from which has flowed all the life that is here today in the cathedral and all the life that throbs in the veins of our country. There is no life in the world except that which comes from God, the power who gives life.

The first reading inspires us to meditate on the God of life: «God did not make death, nor does God rejoice in the destruction of the living. He created all things so that they might exist. The creatures of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them. ... God created human beings as incorruptible, and he made them in the image of his own nature» (Wis 1:13-14; 2:23). The God who does not die wants to have children on earth who also do not die. This proclamation from the word of God today is quite clear, then, and it should fill us with a sublime respect for life. God has not created death. God made life and he wants life to continue and not end. We are children of the immortal One, so we must also be immortal.

So why did death enter into the world? No doubt Saint Paul drew on today's first reading for the sublime thought he expresses in his letter to the Romans, «Through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death» (Rom 5:12). Death is the fruit of sin. According to the original plan of God, today's first reading tells us, «There is no destructive poison in the world, and the dominion of the abyss is not on earth» (Wis 1:14). The abyss, which the Hebrews called Sheol and the Greeks called Hades, represented the power of death and of hell. Nowadays we represent death as a gaunt figure with a scythe for cutting off life, but death appears in the Sacred Scriptures as a foreign power. For example, the reading today says, «Death entered the world due to the devil's envy, and those who belong to him experience it» (Wis 2:24). It is sad to have to pay tribute to the devil, for death is a tribute to the power that destroys life. God did not want death. If death became a reality, it is because human beings opened the door to sin. By the disobedience of Adam, the first man and the father of all people, death entered in and spread to all humanity. Death is a foreign power. That's why Saint Paul speaks to us of disobedience, of something groaning, of something that is not normal, of something that is an enemy—*inimica mors*, the enemy death that will continue to spread.

Death is the sign of sin above all when sin produces it so directly, as it does among us. The violence, murder, and torture that leave so many dead; the people chopped with machetes and thrown into the sea—all that is the dominion of death. Those who bring about death are in league with the devil. Those who belong to the devil experience death for they are his collaborators. As agents of the devil, they impose on us something foreign, something that has no part in God's plan. That is why the church will never grow weary of denouncing everything that produces death. All death, even natural death, is a product and a consequence of sin. A day will come when Christ will reestablish immortality for he has already paid the tariff of death, as the Council says, «according to the Christian faith, bodily death», which entered into history as a consequence of sin, «will be vanquished when humans who were ruined by their own doing are restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Savior» (GS 18). Christ, who is the God who created life in the beginning and never desired death, has seen the reign of death extending its dominion over the world, and that is why he comes to restore life.

Christ standing before the daughter of Jairus, is the image of the power of life that restores even life that has ceased. Great is the love of God, who could have simply left us with the consequence of sin, which is death. He had no obligation to come and restore us, but he wanted to participate even in our death: «Dying on a cross, he destroyed death, and rising up, he restored life»¹. Christ restores the life he gave humanity before death entered in, the life that we killed by sinning. He rescues life from sin and makes it twice the gift, twice as lively. Today we have the joy of a life redeemed, and we have hope for eternal life. We have life in a double sense: the life the Word gave us in the beginning—«in him was life, and the life was the light of humankind» (John 1:4)— and the life that was killed by sin and then recovered by Christ's redemption.

Sisters and brothers, let us pause for a moment before this panorama of death that comes from the devil and of life that comes from God. If the church is in the world to continue Christ's mission of uprooting sin, which is the cause of so much death, then we might ask: if Christ has redeemed us from sin, why do people keep dying, even those who repent of their sins? Saint Paul has an excellent answer when he tells us that Christ, by his death and resurrection, has given us the seed of life, and that we already possess the seed of life in our spirit even if the seed of death still prevails in the body—we get sick, we grow old, we die, we are killed. The Spirit that raised Christ up will also raise the dead up no matter how they died (1 Cor 15:45-49; Rom 8:11). Then Paul exclaims, «Death has been swallowed up in victory!» (1 Cor 15:54b). And from the heights of victory, life cries out, «Where, oh death, is your victory?» (1 Cor 15:55). Then Paul utters that precious phrase of hope: «The last enemy to be defeated will be death» (1 Cor 15:26). What that means is that already in today's world those Christians who by their faith and their holy lives carry the Spirit of God within them carry also the seed of life, even though others kill them.

They have done nothing to Father Palacios! He died in God's grace. His body must decay in the tomb, paying the tribute of death for the sin of Adam, but his spirit, which already had the anointing of immortality, is in heaven and is laying claim to this body which will one day be raised up. That day of universal resurrection will be the climax of history, and it will not be death that has triumphed! It is not by killing others that human beings reach victory. There is no constancy or consistency in systems that are built on death. The tyrants who cling to

¹ *Roman Missal*, Easter Preface.

power know this, like the ones in our neighbor Nicaragua. That is not the way to stay in power. All those who have died, if they carry the seeds of life within them, are already laying claim to immortality and are condemning with great eloquence those who have caused so much death. We can say the same about such situations in every country and every political system.

Events of the week

I invite you, therefore, to reflect now on our reality from the perspective of Christ, the giver of life and conqueror of death. Let us consider the devil, who implants the black banner of death as a rival to the white banner of Christ, and let us consider the final culmination, which is the victory of life prevailing over the transient triumphs of death. It is in this perspective that we must view our sad situation of sin.

This is painful to contemplate, for if death is an index of sin, then our El Salvador is truly condemned as one of the countries where sin and the powers of hell have become enthroned in the most absurd and fanatical manner. At least twenty-four people were murdered this week for political motives. They continue to kill teachers. Unidentified bodies are constantly appearing in different parts of the country. So many people have died in this way that it becomes difficult even to mention their names or the political groups to which they belong. But all these deaths are a condemnation of this macabre dance of vengeance and institutionalized violence, for some are dying as direct victims of the repression while others are dying precisely for serving that repression.

We can say that our system is like that god Moloch, who insatiably devoured his victims, both those opposed to him and those who served him (Jer 32:35). That's how the devil pays his wages. That's why, when they tell me I fix my sight on just one class of dead persons and not on others, I respond, «Death grieves me terribly no matter who the person is!» This week three policemen died, and I could even say that I pity them all the more because they died serving the god Moloch. Why exactly do they die? Is it by force? Is it because they have been brainwashed? Or is it because they are truly enemies of the people? Or is it simply to save their own lives? It is sad, but the truth is this: the murders on both sides of this macabre death-dance of political vengeance are the best index, and a frightening indication of how unjust our system is, for it claims victims both by direct repression and by the indirect repression that results from serving the repressive powers. And what is most tragic is that there is no effective action on the government's part to restrain these awful crimes that are bathing El Salvador in blood.

From a Christian viewpoint, not one of these crimes can be justified even though the perpetrators say they are committing them to save the country from terrorism. Pope John Paul II has just made some instructive statements about the demands of an Italian neofascist movement that wants the government of that country to establish strict anti-terrorist measures, including the death penalty. In response to this voice of the extreme right, which can defend itself only by calling for repression, the pope stated that «the Catholic Church seeks to free good people from terrible temptations that could lead them to provocative and oppressive reactions»². The church is not partisan to those voices of vengeance.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Allocution to Bruno Bottai, the New Ambassador of Italy before the Holy See», 25 June 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica*, (26 June 1979).

Once again we insist that our government has the ability to put a halt to these crimes, and we therefore formally ask that it do so. Violent repression is not an effective way to pacify the country and reestablish justice. Today General Romero will give his presidential report. We want to hear something new in his message, words that restore the credibility and the confidence that have been lost, words that provide the answers the people have long been waiting for. Where are those who have disappeared? (Applause) When will those who are exiled return? (Applause) When will the torture and the arbitrary arrests cease? (Applause) When will the church be trusted and given true freedom? (Applause)

With regard also to violence, we must denounce—how can we not do so!—the repression against our *campesinos*, which often results in murder. In the village of La Pita in the El Puente district of San Vicente, 300 security agents and members of ORDEN seized and killed two *campesinas*: Pilar González, forty years old, and Adelina Carranza de Martínez, 50 years old, along with her son, Pastor Martínez Carranza. I have fond memories of Señora Carranza de Martínez; she is the mother of Carlos Martínez Carranza, a *campesino* who was captured in Zacatecoluca on May 17 last year. Recently she wrote me a letter lamenting that sad situation and sending an offering of ten *colones* for our cathedral. May the Lord be mindful of your faith and your love for him.

The security forces then proceeded to El Campanario, where they captured two other *campesinos* whose names are unknown. In further action, Salvador Montano and Jorge López of San Benito district were arrested. Francisco Laureano Lemus was arrested in San Marcos Lempa, as were Ricardo Iván Lemus, José Antonio Rivas, and María Amanda Galán de Rivera, who was taken out of her own house. All these have already had recourse to habeas corpus, which our constitution guarantees to those who are deprived of their freedom. We hope that the Supreme Court of Justice will not disdain this legal attempt to free the many persons who have been captured as well as those of whose fate we know nothing.

We must continue to deplore the victims of this wave of kidnappings. We know nothing more about the English bankers³, but if they are still alive, we ask that there be prompt negotiations and that they be freed. William Rocha was already set free⁴. It seems that the ERP has still not given sign of releasing Miguel Armando Miguel⁵ even though his family has fulfilled the conditions for his release. We pray to the Lord that this voice—which has no other intention but to be the voice of justice, love, truth, and fraternity—may find an echo in those who are able to bring a little happiness to these anguished families.

In a very significant gesture, the teachers who were decorated by the Ministry of Education returned the medals as a protest against the violence and the threats being experienced by their fellow teachers.

In the field of labor, violence continues to fly its banner. The strike of the medical residents and interns that began on June 11 continues without resolution. The Higher Council of the University has agreed that the demands made by the strikers are just and so has decided to support them and to ask the health authorities to dialogue with them and find a reasonable solution to the problem. The Union of Social Security Workers voted to call a nationwide strike,

³ Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton were kidnapped by the FARN on 30 November 1978.

⁴ William Rocha, a Nicaraguan citizen and manager of National Cash Register, was freed on 27 June 1979 after being kidnapped for twelve days. *La Prensa Gráfica* (28 June 1979).

⁵ A Salvadoran businessman kidnapped on 29 May 1979.

which started on June 29. The workers of IMES and La Fabril in San Miguel have denounced abuses on the part of management.

As we contemplate this whole milieu of violence and death, sisters and brothers, we also find Christ today saving a dead girl because he, the author of life, can restore her to life.

Christ, as justice and love, evens out social differences

With confidence in the Lord, then, let us look at another aspect of today's gospel. We have said the Christ, as justice and love, evens out social differences. The second reading, from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians, deals with the alms collection the apostle was promoting in Corinth to help the poor Christians of Jerusalem. Paul explains the social doctrine of the church, thus planting seeds for what would become the treasured encyclicals of our times. Starting from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, we have *Populorum Progressio*, *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, the Council, Medellín, Puebla—they are all shining a bright light on the unjust situation of our America and the whole world.

Saint Paul wrote the Christians of Corinth, «It is not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality» (2 Cor 8:13-14). That is what the Scripture says. Paul is recalling here the remarkable time when the people of Israel were crossing the desert and were given manna to eat. They were instructed to collect only what they needed for the day, but some people wanted to collect more, with the result that there would be less remaining for others. The Bible tells us, however, that «those who gathered much did not have too much, and those who gathered little did not have too little» (Exod 16:18; 2 Cor 8:15). That is the will of the God who give us gifts, who gives us harvests, who makes the coffee on our farms blossom and turn red—truly mine of red gold today! He is the God who desires the happiness of all his sons and daughters, as Saint Paul says, «It is not a question of some giving and ending up with nothing but of all sharing equally» (2 Cor 8:13).

In this regard, I want to invite all of us today to examine the Puebla document of the Latin American bishops and to consider this pastoral work that is called the «preferential option for the poor». In viewing the reality of Latin America, the document offers an accurate analysis of the awful social injustice that exists among us. The bishops at Puebla stated, «By the light of faith, we see the growing gap between rich and poor as a scandalous contradiction of what it means to be Christian. The opulence of a few becomes an insult to the destitution of the vast majority. This is contrary to the plan of the Creator and to the honor that is due him. In the people's anguish and pain the church sees a situation of social sin» (P 28). We stated already that death is an index of sin, and now we can say that social inequality is also an index of sin. The Latin American bishops stated that quite explicitly at Puebla: «The church sees a situation of social sin, and its seriousness is all the greater since it exists in countries that call themselves Catholic and are capable of changing the situation» (P 28). The bishops then cite the words John Paul II spoke in Oaxaca, Mexico: «Remove the barriers of exploitation against which the people's best efforts at advancement are dashed».

The Puebla document continues with concrete observations: «We brand the situation of inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin Americans live as the most devastating and humiliating kind of scourge. This situation results in high infant mortality, lack of adequate

housing, health problems, starvation wages, unemployment and underemployment, malnutrition, job insecurity, and massive forced migrations without any protection» (P 29).

«Analyzing this situation more deeply, we discover that this poverty is not a passing phase but is rather the product of economic, social, and political situations and structures, although other causes also exist for the present state of misery» (P 30). We're not going to deny that there are other causes of poverty or that there are some who are poor through their own fault or because of their own vices. But that does not negate the fact that there are horrendous, brutal structures that make it impossible even for the best-intentioned poor people to make progress. «In many cases», says Puebla, «the internal conditions of our countries have their origin and find support in mechanisms which are inspired by materialism rather than authentic humanism. As a result, they produce at the international level a situation in which the rich get ever richer at the expense of the poor, who get ever poorer. This reality therefore calls for personal conversion»—personal conversion!—«and profound structural changes that will respond to the legitimate aspirations of the people for true social justice. Either these changes have not taken place, or else they have proceeded too slowly in the experience of Latin America» (P 30).

These observations of Puebla led the bishops to recommend pastoral measures, which they state clearly: «With renewed hope in the vivifying power of the Spirit, we reaffirm once again the stance the Medellín Conference took in making a preferential option in solidarity with the poor, and we affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole church to a preferential option for the poor, whose goal is their integral liberation» (P 1134).

The document speaks more clearly about the church: «Not all of us in the Latin American church have committed ourselves sufficiently to the poor. We are not always concerned about them, nor do we always work in solidarity with them. Service to them truly requires constant conversion and purification of all Christians, so that they achieve an ever fuller identification with the poor Christ and with our own poor» (P 1140). My sisters and brothers, this is a call for renewal issued to everyone, from the bishop to all the faithful, passing through priests and religious and Catholic institutions. It is scandalous that in a situation such as ours, which so reflects the reality described by Puebla, there are in the church persons and institutions that carry on as they please, indifferent to the poor. We must therefore make an effort to be converted.

Puebla provides concrete evidence of how great the cost has been to the church for remaining faithful to what was proclaimed at Medellín. The document states, «The church's prophetic denunciations and her concrete commitments to the poor have in not a few instances brought persecution and oppression of various kinds upon her. The poor themselves have been the first victims of this oppression» (P 1138). In this regard, I want to take this opportunity to share with you some news that was given to me as I entered the cathedral. Today is the first anniversary of the death in Guatemala of Father Hermógenes López of San Pedro Pinula; he was killed precisely because of his solidarity with the poor. Those priests of ours who were killed in this diocese are glorious proof of their preferential option for the poor. Their voices could not be tolerated by those greedy ones who don't want anything to change and who are capable of paying murderous hands to silence the voices that cry out for justice to be done for those deprived of justice. This is, then, the conversion that is expected of all of us, because the church is not a demagogic institution asking only for a change of structures; let us always be aware that what the church requires above all is a change of heart.

We must therefore remind the people's political organizations fighting for the just demands of the people that they must integrate their struggles and efforts into the wider horizon of our liberation from sin in Christ. If they fail to do this, the liberation they offer will be only partial and often mutilated by sin. Such liberation may well take on structures tomorrow that do new violence to the poor; they will be *nouveaux riches* and nothing more. I want to tell those people who, conscious of the injustice in which we live, are working for a more just world that they must begin by having a profound change of heart, and I also want to tell those whom God has favored with abundant possessions: be converted!

There is a phrase in Puebla's greeting to the peoples of Latin America that may enlighten those who believe that the church, by proclaiming herself the church of the poor, is unduly favoring the poor and disdaining the wealthy. That is not the case at all. The message is universal: God wants to save the wealthy also, but precisely because he wants to save them, he tells them that they cannot be saved unless they are converted to the Christ who lives there among the poor. The message of Puebla explains what it means to be poor—«accepting and defending the cause of the poor as if accepting and defending one's own cause, the cause of Christ himself: "Whatever you do for one of these brothers or sisters of mine, no matter how lowly, you do for me"» (Matt 25:40)⁶.

As Saint Paul has reminded us today, sisters and brothers, the secret is not to get rid of material things and be left with nothing. Not having things is not enough. I want to tell the poor people who have nothing that having nothing is not enough, for if they fail to invest their poverty with an evangelical spirit, it is not the poverty Christ wants. I also want to tell the wealthy that spiritual poverty is not enough if it is not efficacious and remains simply in desires. I say to the wealthy: as long as you fail to incarnate your desires for evangelical poverty in actions that matter, such as the cause of the poor as the cause of Christ, then you will continue to be the wealthy ones whom God disdains because you put too much confidence in your money and you distinguish yourselves from others whom you regard as second-class citizens.

All of us, rich and poor, need to have an evangelical spirit of poverty, not as an ideal or a theory, but in reality. Evangelical poverty must matter, it must do works, it must share, as Paul tells us Christ did in today's second reading, «Though he was rich, he became poor so that through his poverty we might become rich» (2 Cor 8:9). This is the dialectic of evangelical poverty, and that's why Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, «You're going to give something to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, but don't do it in a paternalistic way. Those in Jerusalem will also give you a great deal of what they have, for they are very holy and evangelically poor». And that is what I would like to say: we should not feel superior for having helped somebody, because those who give materially receive spiritually. There is an exchange of goods that is understood only by those with a true spirit of poverty, for such a spirit makes the rich feel very close to poor and makes the poor feel in no way inferior to the rich. Instead, there is a parity of exchange, as Saint Paul says; the giving is mutual and makes people equal.

How beautiful will be the day when we understand this wonderful doctrine of evangelical poverty! On that day we will trust only in the Father, as Christ did, and like the Virgin we will know how to be the poor of Yahweh, possessing holy freedom so as to cry out

⁶ *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, 3.

against sin wherever it is found. The poverty of the church will be more authentic and more effective when she is truly independent of the help of the powerful and no longer seeks the protection of the mighty. Evangelization does not consist in having power but in seeking evangelical holiness and the support of the poor Christ whose poverty makes us wealthy. That is why in today's homily we have called him the love and the justice that evens out social situations.

Authentic faith in Christ is the only solution for our great national problems

Finally, we need only one thing so that we can understand Christ as life-giving power and accept Christ from the perspective either of wealth or of poverty and make Christ the force that unites us in justice and love, and that one thing is the response of faith, which Christ expects of us this Sunday.

The gesture of Jairus was splendid: kneeling before Christ and saying, «My daughter is dying. Come, place your hand on her, and she will get well» (Mark 5:23). While they were walking to the house, the servants came to tell Jairus, «Don't bother the Master any further. She died already». But Christ said to him, «Have no fear. Just have faith» (Mark 5:35-36). That was the condition for healing, but it provoked ridicule. Then Jesus said, «She is not dead; she is only sleeping», and he took her by the hand and spoke to her an Aramaic word that Saint Mark preserves: *Talitha kum*, which means, «Little girl, I say to you, arise». With this very human gesture, Christ raised the girl, handed her to her parents, and told them to give her something to eat for she woke up hungry (Mark 5:39-43).

Magnificent also was his gesture with the woman who the gospel says was suffering from a hemorrhage. This woman had spent years suffering with a flow of blood, and there she was in the crowd, seeking some way to touch the cloak of the Master and thinking with great faith, «If I manage to touch him, I will be cured». She did touch him, and she was cured. Christ felt his power going out toward the faith that was touching him; it was very different from what he felt when others touched him out of curiosity. So he turned to the woman, who was now fearful and worried and trying to explain to the Lord, but he said to her, «Have no fear, my daughter, your faith has cured you. Go in peace and with health» (Mark 5:28-30, 34).

Puebla reminds us that among the realities of Latin America we find real treasure in the ecclesial base communities. These are Puebla's words: «Commitment to the poor and the oppressed and the rise of base communities have helped the church in Latin America to discover the evangelizing potential of the poor. For the poor challenge the church constantly, summoning her to conversion, and many of the poor incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to receiving the gift of God» (P 1147).

The ecclesial base communities are a marvelous recipe, and it is one that our diocese is trying to put into practice, thanks be to God. These groups of Christian reflection are not subversive! They are reflection groups where people learn about the evangelical virtue of poverty which is indispensable for both rich and poor. I congratulate all our beloved pastors, as well as the pastoral ministers and the religious who work in the towns, because we've already formed many of these ecclesial base communities. But in those places still full of distrust, people should remember that the best school for discovering the valuable treasures hidden in

the hearts of our poor people and our *campesinos* is right there, in the ecclesial base communities.

Yesterday, here in the cathedral, there was what seemed to me a congress of ecclesial base communities. Rarely does one experience a Mass like the one we had yesterday, the single Mass for Father Rafael Palacios. Everyone took part, and we all felt like family. Our joy was contagious as we communicated hope to one another. This is the fruit yielded by poverty in the ecclesial base communities. And the church that yesterday presented that magnificent spectacle now wishes to inform you about her life, while inviting you to live in ever closer communion in our community.

Life of the church

This church, then, feels very grateful for the condolences and the expressions of solidarity that have come from all over because of the death of Father Palacios. Without a doubt God has already rewarded this unassuming priest who had a clear idea about base communities and worked silently on their behalf. Yesterday the church responded to his initiative, and I also want to call on you all to second the initiative of the clairvoyant priests of the present time.

Many novenas were offered for Father Raphael in different parts of the republic. There will be a Mass on Tuesday, July 3, the day after tomorrow, at nine in the morning. I have been asked to invite the friends of Father Palacios as well as all Christians who want to take part.

Again I wish to offer my condolences to the parish of Jucuapa and to Bishop Rivera of Santiago de María for the death of Father José Abdón Arce, who was buried two weeks ago.

Last Sunday in the community of Chalatenango we celebrated the feast of their patron, Saint John, with genuine Christian joy, but we regret that the security forces are dampening the joy of these celebrations. The checkpoints at the entrances of the town stopped many people who were no doubt arriving in a Christian spirit.

Though I should have done so before, I also want to deplore the way my own episcopal vicar, Father Fabián Amaya, was maltreated—they searched him as a suspect, took him to the station, and so on.

In the community of San José Villanueva there was an attempt to set fire to the little church there. To prevent possible dishonor to the images in the church, the Passionist Sisters have removed them and stored them in their house.

This diocese rejoices with the members of Opus Dei as they celebrate the fourth anniversary of the death of their founder, Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer. I believe the spirit of Opus Dei, which many members do not practice, is outlined in the fourth chapter of the Constitution on the Church—the whole chapter is on the laity (LG 30-38). The members of Opus Dei now constitute an army, but some of their leaders have admitted to me that many members do not understand their role well and become fanatics. If instead they were to live according to the fourth chapter—which describes well the spirituality of Opus Dei and of lay people in the world—we would be able to count on many more Christians who by their

holiness are accomplishing much good in their professions. On this fourth anniversary of their founder, therefore, we ask God that all his followers may understand and abide by the true spirit of the church as it is expounded in that Council document.

The Salesian schools of María Auxiliadora and Santa Inés celebrated June 29 as the day of the pope. That same day, the feast of Pope Saint Peter, there were celebrations in the parish that bears his name, San Pedro Perulapán, and also in Ciudad Barrios, where he is also the patron. To them we send our greetings and our solidarity.

You're invited today, the first of the month, to the Holy Hour in Divina Providencia Hospital; it begins at five in the afternoon. Since Saint Paul speaks to us today about helping others, I want to mention to you what Divina Providencia is attempting to do in order to expand its assistance to the sick, especially all those children who are left as orphans when their sick mothers die in that hospital. It is truly a work inspired by the Gospel. To encourage contributions, they are asking people to help them purchase land at fifty *colones* per the square yard. Many people have already bought one or more square yards for this work. So I urge you to go there today, the day for devotion to Divine Providence, and to help out this work. And let us look to Christ, as Saint Paul did, so that we will do it with greater inspiration.

There have been various pastoral events, such as the meeting of the vicariate of Mejicanos, the meeting of the pastoral commission, and the coming meeting of the clergy. These indicate, thanks be to God, the efforts being made in our diocese to organize our pastoral life better.

I also want to make mention of the people's faithful devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is a blessing of God. We'll be hearing many fireworks in these three days—they're the prayers to the Heart of Jesus! This very morning I'll be there in the market to collaborate with this popular movement which does much to bring the masses of our humble people to the most Sacred Heart of the Redeemer of humankind.

I want to express my gratitude for the very significant visit I received from the workers who returned from Saudi Arabia. They came to thank the archbishop for the support he gave them in their conflict, and they left a generous donation, requesting a blessing for themselves and for the workers who are still in those distant lands.

I also make mention of the suggestion box that is now functioning here in the cathedral. Some excellent initiatives have already been collected in it. Anyone who has some suggestion for improving the life of our community should feel part of our family and help us to improve.

I want to make reference also to a letter received yesterday from the Ministry of the Interior, addressed to the director of our radio station YSAX, «the Pan-American Voice». The letter reminded him that this station is obliged to help in maintaining the social peace of our country, and it made note of the articles of the Constitution that are affected by the state of siege. It mentioned Article 14 of the code⁷, which among other things states that radio stations «shall not under any pretext transmit news or messages of any kind that are contrary to morality, good international relations, peace, and public order or that cause scandal or affect in

⁷ Part of the regulation for the establishment and operation of radio stations.

any way the honest private life or interests of persons». A response is being prepared that will be given to the minister, but I would like now to communicate two things to the community of my archdiocese.

First, if this circular letter from the Minister of the Interior was sent to all the means of social communication, then we are in complete agreement. It is a useful, routine reminder. What is more, I would kindly ask him to see to it that Article 14 is observed by prohibiting paid advertisements in certain newspapers and on radio stations that offend against individuals and their dignity. (Applause) As an example of calumny, you will remember the publication of the report, disguised almost as an ad for Cafiaspirina, that the archbishop had requested the support of a communist deputy in Costa Rica⁸. When we clarified the matter, they announced that it was indeed calumny⁹, but the ad kept running all the same. What really happened can be discovered here, in this newspaper that comes from Costa Rica¹⁰. A decree presented to the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica had eight preliminary considerations, the fourth one of which states, «Among the voices of protest, that of Archbishop Romero of San Salvador stands out in asking for international pressure to be exercised to bring about the end of government repression in El Salvador». Among the various accords mentioned in the document, the third one states, «We are in complete solidarity with the campaign undertaken by Archbishop Romero to establish a truly democratic government in our sister Republic of El Salvador». The decree of the Assembly of Costa Rica also denounces other things, but at no point is there any mention of the calumny reported by the mass media here. That is why we say that the minister does well in reminding us of that article of the constitution, and we ask him to make sure that it is observed by those who are not complying with it, perhaps with the connivance of the authorities themselves.

Second, if this letter was sent only to YSAX as a warning, we want to ask the minister to show us concretely the programs of our station that are threatening social peace or disturbing the tranquility and peaceful state of our national audience. Whose peace and order are being referred to? (Applause) What should be made quite clear is this: if they want us to collaborate in promoting a pseudo-peace or a false order based on repression and fear, then we can only remind them that the only order and the only peace that God wants are those based on truth and justice. Given this choice, our option (Applause), given this choice, our option is clear, have no doubt about it: we will obey the order of God rather than the order of human beings. (Applause) We would prefer—naturally we wouldn't like it nor would the people like it—that they first close down our station. (Applause) Those days when we could not broadcast because of technical problems gave us sufficient proof of the consequences. It was as if the air itself was gone; there was no truth, there was no light in the midst of so much darkness. That's why I say that we would prefer to be silenced for speaking the truth and defending justice (Applause) rather than continue speaking while being manipulated by repression. (Applause) Our only regret would be that the people would no longer have even this small opening by which the voice of truth and justice may reach them. We would regret that the people, especially those who have nowhere else to express their views, would no longer have even this tiny medium which is our humble YSAX, «the Pan-American Voice».

⁸ *La Prensa Gráfica* (2 June 1979).

⁹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (7 June 1979).

¹⁰ The news came from the daily, *La Nación*, and was reproduced in *Orientación* (10 June 1979).

Let us conclude, then, by saying that the bold faith that makes this community follow Christ devotedly is not some magical faith. The faith that produced the miracles in today's gospel consisted in a disposition of total confidence in Jesus. Such faith leads us to freely accept the Savior. My desire for all of you, dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience, is that you have the same total confidence in Jesus that Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman had, because only then will we have a people who can truly expect the justice of God.

In this regard, I have two short letters that contain the voices of the people; they are pleas of the humble, expressions of faith. One is from a young woman of Ilobasco, Emérita Miranda, who asks me to give public thanks for the miraculous cure of her mother: «My advocates are the Virgin of the Forlorn and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. With all my Christian faith and with tears in my eyes, I knelt and asked them for the health of my mother, and they heard me. I ask you kindly to let all Catholics know that when they pray with faith, miracles occur». There is also the case of José Ascensio Orellana, who was taken to the Social Security Institute suffering with a hemorrhage. He asks me to thank God because he really prayed to the Lord with great faith, and now, without shame, he wants everyone to know that faith is not something of twenty centuries ago; faith is happening today!

If faith was able to work such cures for these new elements who trust in Christ, then my question for you, sisters and brothers, is this: why will Jesus Christ not do the same with our people, over whom death, murder, sickness, poverty, and institutionalized injustice hover as a banner of sin? A new order will be born, and new women and men will rise up through faith in Jesus Christ. Let it be so. (Applause)