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CHRIST HAS ENTRUSTED US WITH A PROPHETIC MISSION

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

15 July 1979

Amos 7:12-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:7-13

Dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience, tomorrow is a great day for popular devotion; it is the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. I want to offer our reflection today as a homage to this devotion of our people, inviting all of you to see in Mary the model of our Christian commitments.

During the Second Vatican Council there was much profound discussion about where the Council would place the treatise on the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ. Some Council fathers who were very devoted to Mary wanted it to be a separate treatise, a special document treating just of the Virgin. Others with a more progressive and developed ecclesiological vision said that discussion of the Virgin Mary should not be separated from the treatise on the church; they recommended that a chapter be added to the Constitution on the Church. Those who followed the Council deliberations will remember that some preposterous things were published, as always happens, as if some fathers were devoted to the Virgin and others weren't. Despite the apparent differences, the opinion prevailed that the treatise on Mary should crown the treatise on the church. There were not to be two distinct treatises but a single one on the church and Mary.

Accordingly, in the last chapter of the Constitution on the Church, dedicated to the Virgin, the Council was able to make this beautiful observation: «Mary is hailed as a preeminent and singular member of the church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother» (LG 53). So the reason why the reflection on the Virgin Mary is found in the document on the church is that the church—we who are the church—views Mary as a model or a paradigm; she is the person in whom the church sees her ideals realized. Since Mary is the model, the church's work is oriented toward becoming like her. When the day comes that every Catholic, as a member of the church, proposes to imitate Mary, we will have the «dream» church, the ideal church. Let us therefore contemplate her on this feast of Carmel.

The biblical reflections presented to us this Sunday in the Liturgy of the Word help us to make Mary the object of our aspirations so that we can be like her. Indeed, that is the only way we can do what Christ asks of us in today's gospel. Since she is the model of the church, she assumes the prerogatives and the duties of the church in the world.

What is the prerogative referred to in today's biblical reading? It is the theme of prophecy, which we treated last Sunday and take up again today. The Council directs special

words to you lay people who are baptized, to those of you who are not priests or religious, who are married and live in the world, who form the major part of the church. Hear what the Council says in your regard: «Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and the power of his words, continually fulfills his prophetic office. ... He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and with his authority, but also through the laity whom he made his witnesses and to whom he gave understanding of the faith and a gracefulness of speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life» (LG 35). This means that, just as Mary is the prototype of the church, so every lay person, every parent, every man, and every woman has to be trained to carry out a prophetic function in the world precisely as a lay person. That is why Christ has given all Christians the gift of faith—and you indeed have great faith—and also «a gracefulness of speech». The simple words of counsel offered by a parent, a friend, or a spouse—if all those loving words are anointed with a sense of prophetic responsibility, how effective they will be for implanting the kingdom of God in families, in the government, in business, in the economy!

This is a serious prophetic responsibility that you have as the people of God and that I have also, as hierarchy in the name of Christ, the great Prophet, and with his authority. Within the vocations proper to us, you and I carry out the prophetic mission of the church. Mary was not a priest or a religious; she was a lay person like you, part of the people of God. Mary was a spouse, a parent, a lay woman. She could be seated there on the benches of the cathedral, one more woman listening to me, and I wouldn't be able to pick her out. But her heart, so filled with the prophetic charism, would absorb the words of the great Prophet, Jesus Christ, her son, and she would make them reality with love, with faith, with charity, with courage, and with the fortitude proper to lay people who must also be prophets in the settings in which they live.

Let us therefore offer to Mary, Our Lady of Carmel, something more than wearing a scapular, which people often do only by habit. If we wear it as proof of our alliance with Mary, magnificent! But please don't consider the scapular as some kind of passport that will save anyone who dies wearing it—that's a lie! If we fail to do the will of the Father, then even if we cry out, «Lord! Lord!» we will not be saved (Matt 7:21). Mary will teach us what our prophetic mission is, and then, yes, her holy scapular will be an emblem of our commitment, not so much to her—for she is also a «handmaiden of the Lord» (Luke 1:38)—but the Lord himself.

The theme of my homily today is taken from the Bible readings, and I give it the title: «Christ Has Entrusted Us with a Prophetic Mission». I will develop it with three ideas, as I usually do. The first idea will be the conditions of the true prophet; the second will be the false prophets; and the third will ask: what prophetic message do we, as the people of God, have for the world?

The conditions of the true prophet

First, then, what are the conditions of authentic prophecy? We have only to recall today's gospel, in which Christ describes an apostle as one who is sent as a prophet. All of us, by virtue of our baptism, continue this mission of being messengers of God in the world.

Today's gospel tell us that Christ «called them and sent them out two by two, giving them authority over unclean spirits» (Mark 6:7). This what comes first: a sense of being

authorized by Christ. Last Sunday we mentioned that every prophet has to have a vocation, an anointing, a mission. The same applies now with regard to the prophets of the New Testament. Christ called them: «It was not you who chose me, but I chose you» (John 15:16). The prophet is a person chosen and sent by the initiative of God. Only those who have been sent can preach the true word. Only those who have heard the Lord tell them, «Go and speak to this people», are able to declare, «This is what the Lord commands». The prophetic mission requires authorization: «He gave them authority over unclean spirits» (Mark 6:7). The prophets of the Old Testament received a mission from God, but the apostles received from Christ a mission and an authorization that identified them closely with the one who was sending them. They became representatives of Christ: «Those who despise you despise me, and those who listen to you listen to me» (Luke 10:16). So there is a stronger authorization between us as the people of God and Christ than there was between the prophets of the Old Testament and God. They were messengers, but we as the people of God are more than messengers, for Christ has inserted himself into the life of this people of God and he is the one who is speaking.

What other condition of prophecy does the gospel point out? The second condition is a sense of community. Christ sent the disciples out two by two and told them to seek hospitality in the home of some family in the town. They were to preach to the people, and if the people accepted them, then peace would come to the people, but if the people rejected them, then they would leave because the people were refusing to believe. If that happened, Christ told them, «Shake the dust from your sandals to show they are at fault» (Mark 6:11). The people were rejecting the prophets sent by Christ; as a community they were refusing to accept the saving message, which was to form a fraternal society where people would not prey on one another like wolves and where people would not be afraid of one another. Those who accepted the message of Christian fraternity would be blessed, but some people refused to accept it, and the sign of shaking the dust off one's sandals was a gesture of reproach, showing that God was giving up on that society.

May the Lord deliver our nation from hearing in our own time the words that Christ spoke over Jerusalem as he wept on the mountain of Gethsemane: «Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets. How many times I yearned to gather you together as a hen gathers her young, but you were unwilling! Therefore the vengeance of God will come, and no stone will be left upon another» (Matt 23:27). May the Lord deliver us from such a curse! There is still time for us to accept, not only as individuals but as a Salvadoran fraternity, the message that Christ is sending us through the Christian people, who are a prophetic people. There are so many holy people in our country! There is so much prayer! Let us keep praying, sisters and brothers, that the Lord will make the words of his prophets so effective that our people will hear them and not be cursed by the Lord.

We find the third condition of the true prophet in the beautiful instructions Christ gives the disciples; they are very concrete and simple norms. He told them to take a walking stick and nothing else: no bread, no knapsack, no money in their belts. They could wear sandals but not carry a spare tunic. Using eastern, biblical expressions, he told them to live the evangelical spirit of poverty. That is what I would like to stress this morning, especially since we see around us so much greed and jealousy and desire for material goods. Christ told his disciples, «Leave those things. Present yourselves with a spirit of poverty». The reason for this, sisters and brothers, is that no one is as free as the person who refuses to be subjugated to the god that is money, and no one is as enslaved as the worshiper of money. That's why Christ, seeking to break the yoke of such idolatry, told his disciples, «Do not worry! Trust in

Providence, and you will be given bread and clothing and all that you need. Go and preach the kingdom of God, but don't do it for money for that is a bad business» (Luke 12:29).

The prophet Amos, whom we heard in the first reading, experienced that kind of freedom when he encountered a false prophet, who was more interested in money than the kingdom of God. The false prophet told Amos, «Go and earn your bread there in your own land. Don't come and prophesy here. Do not disturb us for this is the national sanctuary!» (Amos 7:12). The prophet Amos responded with a calmness that could come only from a true spirit of poverty: «I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. My profession is not that of prophesying. I am nothing but a shepherd, a cultivator of fig trees. I am a strange man of the desert, but the Lord took me from my flock and told me: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel". I do not come here seeking money or bread to eat. I come because God has sent me. I earn enough with my cows and my fig trees. I had no need to expose myself to these humiliations which you, boasting of your high position in the national sanctuary, heap upon me, a poor *campesino*» (Amos 7:14-15). Such is the freedom of those who are truly great, those who have the evangelical spirit of poverty.

In speaking about the renewal of the church, Paul VI pointed out just two virtues that are necessary for our time: charity and the spirit of poverty. He then stated why it is fitting today for the church and Christians to live this spirit of poverty: «We believe that interior freedom is produced by the spirit of evangelical poverty» (ES 28). «The interior freedom produced by the spirit of poverty»—what a beautiful thing that is! It is not enough just to be lacking things. There are poor people who are not inwardly free because they avidly seek to possess things, and they hate and resent those who have them. That attitude has nothing to do with the freedom that comes from poverty. It's not enough to be a poor person without possessions. Persons who are truly poor have broken their interior chains. That's why the pope says, «Such inner freedom makes us more sensitive to the human aspects of economic questions, and better fitted to understand them» (ES 28). No one understands better the need for money than those who have a spirit of poverty because they know that money is useful and cannot be dispensed with. They know that money is a means and not an end; it is meant to serve rather than to be served; people must not be slaves to money but masters over it. Those who have the spirit of evangelical poverty know how to use money better than the wealthy do; they understand the economic dimension of life better than those who are enslaved to the god that is money.

The pope goes on to say, «The inner freedom which results from zeal for evangelical poverty makes us in fact more sensitive to the human aspects of economic questions, and better fitted to understand them. When necessary, we can pass a calm but severe judgment on wealth and on the luxuries of life». (ES 55). In other words, we cannot deny that wealth is necessary for the progress of nations, but what can be said about our own progress, which is dependent on the exploitation of so many people who will never enjoy the fruits of this progress? (Applause) What use are the beautiful highways and airports and the magnificent high-rise buildings if they are built with the blood of the poor who will never enjoy them? (Applause) Those who have true interior freedom will know how to give true meaning to those highways and buildings if they're among those promoting them, and the true meaning is what the pope calls a «calm but severe judgment». «Severe»—that is the word that is lacking. With regard to wealth, severity means that those who possess it must place it at the service of the common good. That is what the Lord wants in asking of us a spirit of poverty: he wants us

to serve others with whatever money we have and to do so in a way that is disciplined and severe on ourselves.

Another advantage of poverty is that «we can come promptly and generously to the aid of those in need» (ES 28). No one understands poor people like the evangelically poor. They know what the hunger of a mother or a child in the slums is like because they have also experienced it, perhaps not in the same physical conditions, but with the spirituality of poverty that helps them understand and sympathize. They are solicitous and generous, sharing with those who have nothing. They do not give condescendingly for it is not a time for paternalism but for fraternity and for feeling that all are sisters and brothers. Their interests are the interests of the poor, of the *campesinos*, of those who have nothing.

«Finally», the pope says, «this spirit of poverty enables us to do our utmost to ensure that economic goods, far from being a source of conflict, selfishness, and pride amongst people, shall be used justly and equitably for the common good and be distributed with greater fairness» (ES 28). Unless people possess this spirit that Christ recommended to the apostles, our society will never change. Today's message about Christ sending out his apostles should not be considered just a memory of the distant past. «Oh, in those days there was no capital! There were no buildings to construct! There were no highways to build!» Certainly progress has always been a human ideal, but it turns into selfishness and becomes a source of rivalry when it is not endowed with a sense of virtue. The spirit of poverty is a Christian virtue, and all of us need to be converted to it.

I've also brought with me the document of Puebla so that you can see how severe the church is with herself. Number 144 of the document of Puebla says this: «The church must be every day more independent of the powers of the world so that she will enjoy a broad space of freedom that will allow her to carry out without interference her apostolic labors: worship, education in the faith, and fostering the very diverse activities that help the faithful to implement in their personal, family, and social lives the moral imperatives deriving from that same faith. In this way, free of other commitments, the church will be more credible and better heard, simply by virtue of her testimony and teaching, and the very exercise of power will be evangelized for the common good» (P 144). I rejoice, sisters and brothers, that our church is being persecuted precisely for her preferential option for the poor, for attempting to embody in herself the interests of the poor, and for declaring to the whole people, including government officials, the rich, and the powerful, «Unless you become poor and show concern for the poverty of our people as if they were your own family, you will never be able to save this society». (Applause)

There's another paragraph from Puebla that I want you to know about so that you can realize with what sincerity the authentic church is living today. This is what Puebla wrote about the preferential option for the poor: «The Gospel demands of us poverty as a way of expressing solidarity with the poor and of rejecting the situation in which most people on the continent live». Therefore, being a poor church is a prophetic gesture, a way of identifying with the majority of the people on the continent. «Evangelical poverty frees poor people from being individualistic in their lives and from being attracted and seduced by the false ideals of a consumer society» (P1156). What a great advantage it is for poor people to understand the evangelical spirit of poverty! For if there is any sickness among the poor and the middle class, it is the most terrible one of being victims of the consumer society, of wanting to have their television now, of wanting to have their receptions like those of the upper echelons, of wanting

to enjoy life even when lacking what is necessary for subsistence. The spirit of poverty is the best way to drive away those temptations that destroy families and diminish human happiness. Therefore, the church makes an option for the poor in order to teach them the true meaning of detachment.

But Puebla says that there is even more that can be done by a church that is poor and has an evangelical spirit of poverty: «The witness of a poor church can also evangelize the rich whose hearts are attached to wealth; she can convert them and free them from this bondage and from their own egotism» (P 1156). How wise the Lord Jesus Christ was to tell the apostles to undertake their evangelizing missions like poor pilgrims. And today's church needs to be converted to this command of Christ. This is not the time for fancy vestments, for large, useless buildings, or for splendid pomp in our churches. All those things had their function perhaps in another age, and we have to keep using them in ways that serve evangelization, but now, more than anything, the church seeks to present herself as poor among the poor and poor among the rich in order to evangelize both poor and rich. (Applause)

Since our filial love for the Virgin has dedicated this reflection to her, I want to speak about her in the same way that Puebla does, by citing the homily the pope gave at the sanctuary of the Virgin of Zapopán. He spoke of Mary thus: «In her *Magnificat* Mary proclaims that God's salvation is concerned with justice for the poor. Mary inspires our authentic commitment to other human beings, our brothers and sisters; she motivates our special concern for the poorest and neediest and for the necessary transformation of society» (P 1144). Those are the exact words of the pope at Puebla, so you can see that devotion to the Virgin is not something alienating. Tomorrow, the feast of the Virgin of Carmel, the crowds will be rushing to her shrine and putting on their scapulars, but let them not forget that Mary is, above all else, a prophetic messenger of Christ. In her canticle, the *Magnificat*, she remembered the poor and the hungry, and she said that God would send away empty-handed the proud and arrogant rich of the world if they refused to be converted to the poverty of God (Luke 1:52-53).

Mary speaks out. If we love her as our Mother, then she is for us the model of Yahweh's poor, the paradigm of what it means to be a follower of the Gospel. Mary is the poor woman who, says Cardinal Pironio, «visits America with bare feet, holding a poor child who makes us rich, a destitute child who makes us free». We have great devotion to the Virgin, sisters and brothers, but it's a liberating devotion, a devotion that helps us learn from Mary the freedom with which she spoke. Our devotion to the Virgin should make us feel close to God, but not with the intention of imposing our way of thinking or our false prudence. Our devotion should make us stand up for Christ when he is nailed to the cross by the world's injustice and when everyone flees except Mary, who stays there beside him. She is the courageous woman of Jehovah, the one who defends the rights of God and the rights of humans even when the cost is humiliation and danger.

The false prophets

Let us now observe that the first reading sets forth the sad role of the false prophets and in particular a pseudo-prophet named Amaziah. Keep in mind that Bethel, the place where this priest was working, was a rival sanctuary to Jerusalem. Israel and Judah were divided. Judah had its temple in Jerusalem, and Israel had its temple in Bethel. Israel, the northern kingdom, had flourished greatly, and prosperity brought its usual problems: there was much vice and much luxury that was offensive to the poor, and the worship in the sanctuaries had become

mere performance. So God sent Amos, the shepherd of Judah, to prophesy in Israel. I urge you to read yourselves these few pages of the prophet Amos and to see with what liberty he confronted King Jeroboam II, announcing to him that his kingdom would be destroyed and his people taken into exile. Amos declared that there would be no peace unless there was justice; he warned that luxury and social injustice would bring only disorder to society. He announced that God would come one terrible day and mete out punishment. Of course, Amos's forthright language disturbed people. It was as if some poor *campesino* were to invade an elegant ball and issue threats—he'd be removed immediately! In the same way the Israelites wanted to get rid of poor Amos, and sadly they kept practicing their injustice, oppression, and extravagant luxury. Their worship did not honor God but was done only to satisfy the people, and the priests of the Bethel sanctuary went along with the farce. (Applause)

What was the sad role of Amaziah? You saw it in today's reading. First, he opposed the voice of the true prophet, telling him, «Go away, visionary! Flee to the land of Judah! There you can earn your bread by prophesying. There you can do what you want but not here!» (Amos 7:12). As if God were not master of the whole world and able to send his messengers everywhere! The words Paul VI has spoken to us today about «the severe judgment on wealth» are quite disturbing in certain circles (ES 55). Some people don't want to hear any language that refuses to endorse their injustices and atrocities. What's the use of the National Forum¹ if they invite only the people who think the way they do? What is the sense of not listening to the voice of the Lord?

What else is to be said about the false prophet? He told Amos to return to Judah to earn his bread, thus confusing the prophetic mission with economic interests. How terrible it is when the priestly or prophetic mission is beholden to economic interests or when priestly or prophetic ministry is subordinated to social interests! How often has it happened, dear sisters and brothers—and I'm talking about you lay people who are a prophetic people of God—that when you achieve a position in politics, you are no longer the same as you were before! (Applause) There are so many betrayals we have to lament! I receive certain letters that still preserve a friendly tone, but they tell me frankly, «You must understand, I cannot think the way you do because they would take my job away and I'd lose the benefits they've given me». So you see, we have a series of subordinations, as was the case with the prophet Amaziah, who thought that his prophesying was supposed to earn him bread and figured that Amos was in the same business. But he encountered a man who was free and independent and who told him, «I don't work for bread or money. I come because the Lord of Israel has sent me!» (Amos 7:15).

Amaziah also wanted to subordinate the prophesying to political interests, and so he told Amos, «Do not preach here for this is the house of God, the royal sanctuary, the national temple. Here one must speak as the king commands!» (Amos 7:13). Amos's reply is like Peter's response to the authorities: «We must obey God before obeying human beings» (Acts 5:29). We cannot work for the sake of pleasing those above us. We must speak in the name of God, denouncing all the injustices and every form of complicity with criminal hands. The church cannot collude with that; she must speak out even when it angers people like Amaziah, the false prophet who wanted the king's voice to be respected more than the message of God.

¹ The National Forum was convoked by President Carlos Humberto Romero on 17 May 1979. See «Documents on the National Forum», *ECA* 368 (1979) 458-468.

What prophetic message do we, as the people of God, have for the world?

Finally, let us consider what our prophetic message as a people is. Remember I am trying to speak as a member of a people, as a member of a diocese. Even if it's true that I'm the bishop of the diocese, I am not the only one sent forth with this prophetic mission. The mission belongs to all my people, all my priests, all my religious, the Catholic schools, all those who form the Catholic community. (Applause) I speak in the name of all of you, beloved laity who are listening to me and reflecting with me, and I am telling you what our prophetic mission is and what we have to preach by our witness and our words to the Salvadoran people who are so in need of Christian light. You and I are responsible for making this message of Christ reach everyone.

First, there is a negative aspect. You heard in today's gospel how Christ sent the disciples to drive out unclean spirits: «So they went off and preached conversion. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them» (Mark 6:12-13). What does this mean? Here we see sin, the negative aspect of our message. There is a war to the death against sin. Sin has its roots in the devil and produces fruits like sickness, misery, illiteracy, malnutrition, and social injustice. All the evil we see is fruit borne by the tree of sin, which is rooted in hell and in the devil.

The struggle of the prophetic people, therefore, is against sin, against the devil, and against all the consequences they bring with them. The struggle is to free people from all forms of earthly slavery. That is why we cannot be a true people of God if we want to talk only about confessing our personal sins in order to be free of them, but then refuse to struggle also against the injustice around us. Besides trying to free myself from personal sins, I must also work against the power of hell and the devil in order to yank social sins out by the root. The Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and the apostles sent out on mission were limited to this negative aspect of evil, and that is why they went about curing the sick and driving out demons. But this was not the definitive mission; it was only preparatory for the more basic mission of human flourishing, which Jesus Christ was already teaching them.

According to the Gospel of Saint Mark (which is the gospel for this year), Christ reserved to himself the first mention of the positive part of this announcement: «The kingdom of God has arrived among you» (Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20). This positive aspect isn't limited just to rooting out sin and the earthly failings that are the consequences of sin. If religion talked only about those things, it would be very negative. The wonderful news is that the vacuum left behind when sin and hell and earthly servitudes are removed will be filled by the kingdom of God. And according to Saint Mark, the kingdom of God is not distinct from Christ. Christ himself is the kingdom of God. He incarnates the kingdom of God. Therefore, preaching the kingdom of God in the world means preaching that Christ is coming, as the pope said in his first homily after being consecrated pope: «Open the doors to Christ, you politicians, you economists, universities, culture—for only Christ has the words of eternal life»². That's why we're in such sad shape in El Salvador: because we want to build a civilization without Christ.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Homily on the Official Inauguration of His Pontificate», 22 October 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (29 October 1978).

We must therefore open our thinking, our love, and our minds to today's second reading, which Saint Paul offers us as a synthesis of the Christian kerygma. «Kerygma» is a strange word that means «proclamation» or «announcement». According to the Old Testament prophets, the kerygma was a definitive phase that would be initiated by the Redeemer himself, and it was in fact the Redeemer who came announcing, «The kingdom of God is at hand! Open the doors! Be converted!» (Mark 1:15).

What exactly is the kerygma that Jesus preached and that he entrusted to the church? Here we are, members of the church, and we are charged with bringing the kerygma to our society, to our homes, to our friends, to our people. What do we have to preach besides repudiation of sin? Saint Paul sums it up today in a beautiful phrase: «Recapitulating in Christ all the things of heaven and earth» (Eph 1:10). Saint Paul tells us that the mystery hidden in the eternal depths of God has been revealed to him. That mystery from before all ages is that God is «recapitulating all the things of heaven and earth in Christ». Before there existed heaven or earth or history or people, God thought of Christ as the key to heaven and earth and history. That is why Christ comes: to be the one who recapitulates all things. When I was searching for the origin of the word «recapitulation», I found that it was the word the Greeks used for a sum. When several numbers are added up, you get what we call the «sum» or the «total»—that is recapitulation. So Christ comes as the «total», as the summing up of everything that exists. Christ is the key for understanding humankind and human history. Christ is the final stone crowning an edifice, like the stone at the top of a Gothic arch that gives stability to the whole structure. That's what Christ is: the recapitulation of the whole universe.

Saint Paul presents Christ under diverse aspects: «By his blood we have received redemption» (Eph 1:7). There is no redemption apart from the blood of Christ. If people are working today to defend themselves against an unjust society, dishonest politics, and the world's corruption (Applause), then they will find true freedom and true redemption only in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only in his blood! Coming to Mass on Sunday, then, is rendering homage to the blood that is our only hope for redemption and liberation (this word that is so controversial in our time but is mentioned by the Bible). Liberation for ancient Israel was departing from the slavery of Egypt for the Promised Land. Liberation for us Christians is Christ's paying with his blood the debt of our sins so that we feel free from sin.

But Christ, besides freeing us from sin, has made us children of God, as Saint Paul tells us today (Eph 1:5). Our adoption in Christ is another aspect of our kerygma, our announcement of the kingdom of God. All men and women are called to be children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, coheirs of his kingdom. This call invigorates us because it opens up for us new perspectives. The fear we now have of one another in El Salvador is not going to be permanent. True freedom will come when we all realize that we are children of God, intimately united as one family in Christ. That is what we pray for when we sincerely say, «Our Father, who art in heaven».

And there is still more! Christ did not make us children of God and then remain apart himself, like a trustee who signs a document in someone else's name or like a parent who adopts a child but remains distinct from the child. There is something greater still, what Saint Paul calls «incorporation into Christ». Christians are not only children of God; they are living members of Christ, members of the Body whose head is Christ (Eph 1:10). We are all that living organism! Let us incorporate ourselves into Christ so as to experience the beautiful unity of the people of God!

Finally, the kerygma, the announcement of the kingdom, assures us that all Christians, from the day of their baptism, have been sealed with the Holy Spirit.(Eph 1:13). That seal is like a voucher or a receipt that guarantees future payment of a debt. It's as if God has made himself our debtor: he has given us vouchers and receipts through the presence of the Spirit so that after our death we can claim our inheritance. This seal which we already bear during life will allow us to claim the beautiful inheritance of the children of God in the consummate homeland.

This is the announcement for which we are made responsible from the day of our baptism. This redemption in Christ is a fertile seed that sprouts also in those groups that are struggling for earthly liberation. That is why the church gives sympathy and support to every effort for human freedom, but she also criticizes the wrongs and abuses committed, lest the liberation movements lose their strength and effectiveness and become hateful. She tells them, «The cause you are fighting for is good, but the strategy you're using is not good».

We meet Mary here again for she had great faith and hope in the inauguration of that kingdom of God that is her own son. Sisters and brothers, the risen Christ has introduced into the bosom of history the beginning of a new world. By coming to Mass on Sunday you immerse yourselves in that new world which becomes present again when celebrated on the altar at Mass. As we go forth from Mass, we know that we have proclaimed both the death that saved the world and the resurrection of Christ, whose new life gives us hope that the whole universe of heaven and earth will be joined together, for God «recapitulates in Christ all the things of heaven and earth», that is, the universe.

You already know about the intimate union and relationship that exists between humankind and the universe. Go back to the first chapter of Genesis, verse eighteen I think it is, where God entrusts to humankind the land, the stars, and the planets with the words: «It is all yours. Take care of it!» (Gen 1:28). Human beings, with all their great inventions, are doing nothing more than fulfilling the command of God. In the twentieth century the human race has flown to the moon and has discovered the secret of the atom. What other things will be discovered? We are obeying the Lord's command: «Take care of the earth!» But the absolute dominion of humankind over the earth is the dominion announced today in Christ, who is recapitulating all the things of heaven and earth. That will happen when saintly people finally take this world that is now a slave of sin and subject it to the reign of God; they will place it at the feet of Christ so that Christ can place it at the feet of God. That is recapitulation. That was God's plan before the ages existed, and this will be the great accomplishment of God when history comes to an end: Christ, the recapitulation of all things.

Everything that history has been and everything we do ourselves, whether good or bad, will be measured by God's project, and there will remain in existence only what has contributed to placing all things under Christ's rule. Everything that has refused to abide by God's plan in Christ is false and will not last; it will be thrown upon the trash heap of history.

Life of the church

It is at this point, then, sisters and brothers, that I would like to review the week with you. Our church is the one in which Christ is incorporated. You should feel honored to know that you and I, as the community of the archdiocese, are the flesh of Christ in history at this moment.

Christ is living today and becomes manifest in us. Christ wants to speak through us. Christ wants to act through us. This is the great prophetic responsibility we have as the people of God. Let us hope that no one shirks this mission!

On this feast day of the Virgin of Carmel, the faithful of the archdiocese sense with filial affection that their incorporation into Christ also makes them pleasing to the Virgin. The more the people of God are incorporated by grace into Christ, the more they are children of Mary who is the mother of Christ. We'll celebrate the feast of the Virgin of Carmel with the Carmelite Fathers in the Colonia Roma today at four o'clock, including first communions, and we'll celebrate it tomorrow at six o'clock with a Mass in their parish. We will also celebrate with the Carmelite Sisters of San José at eleven o'clock today, when there'll be a beautiful profession of novices who will begin their lives as Carmelite Sisters. We'll also honor our Mother of Carmel with the Carmelite missionaries from Spain who are working in the Polyclinic and in two communities of our archdiocese. May God reward them for all the good they're doing. The same goes for the Carmelite Missionaries of Saint Teresa, who have the school in La Gruta and work especially in the Divina Providencia Hospital. The Virgin is doing so much good through them! We send greetings to the church of Mount Carmel in Santa Tecla and to the one in Cuscatlán, where they're also celebrating the feast. And remember that we also have a Carmelite jewel in the church of La Merced. The image of the Virgin of Carmel that is venerated there in the church of La Merced has received a pontifical coronation, a gesture the pope made to show his sympathy for our Carmelite devotion in El Salvador. He expressed that sympathy by crowning the image of Our Lady of Carmel in the church of La Merced, and we'll celebrate there tomorrow at seven o'clock with the confraternity of the same name.

God is alive in the souls of other communities as well. In El Paraíso the Bethlehemite Sisters gave me a very enjoyable reception, and around the church and the convent there I saw a great multitude of the faithful flourishing, especially the young people who are the great hope of that town of Chalatenango. There is also great hope in the vicariate of Mejicanos, where people are meeting together, getting organized, and working more as a team. The Spirit of God was also alive yesterday in Comasagua, where we celebrated a confirmation ceremony with Father Gonzalo Orellana.

This afternoon at six o'clock, in the church of San José de la Montaña, we will install the new pastor, Father Cortés, and his collaborators. At the same time our archdiocese will place its vocational work under the auspices of Saint Joseph. So today at six o'clock we'll be consecrating to him the vocational mission of our archdiocese.

There were two other gatherings that manifested the spirit of our archdiocese illuminated by God. One was a meeting of the families of the priests who have been killed. I was deeply moved to be able to spend time with the parents and the brothers and sisters of my deceased colleagues. The families, all very Christian, told me about the origins, the childhood, and their own memories of these five priests whose lives the diocese has offered as a holocaust. The other meeting, a very lively one, was that of the seminarians from the major and minor seminaries of the archdiocese; it took place on one of our beautiful beaches, where the young men spoke sincerely about the problems of young people and searched for a greater unity among themselves.

Our diocese also extends an invitation for a Mass next Friday at twelve noon, when we will celebrate one month since the death of Father Rafael Palacios. I invite all the

priests, communities, and faithful to participate in this concelebration next Friday at noon. I also want to announce and support an initiative of the vicariates of Mejicanos, Aguilares, and La Libertad. They are proposing an extended prayer vigil here in the cathedral, beginning on Friday at six o'clock in the morning and continuing until the following Saturday at one o'clock in the afternoon. This will take place here in the cathedral. The vicariates I mentioned will provide more details about their programs. I am only repeating their invitation and asking you to support this wonderful initiative, especially since the prayer and the reflection during the vigil will be around the question: why have we reached this extreme of a society that kills its priests?

As his friend I also want to mention the death of Don Avelino Álvarez. He is being waked now and will be buried this afternoon. He was a hard-working collaborator of *Orientación*. May God reward him for all he did for our social media! We send our condolences to his family. We send them also to our friend, Virgilio Aguilar, and his wife, Doña Agustina—the Mass for their son was celebrated with great feeling.

There is also news about the church community at the global level. The pope analyzed the situation of Latin America and Eastern Europe with the prime minister of Federal Germany. Latin America has been the object of much commentary by the pope and by many others who realize that the hope of the church is here, on our continent. The pope also named a new archbishop of San José, Costa Rica. On August 2 the new archbishop, Román Arrieta Villalobos, will take possession of the diocese; until now he has been the bishop of Tilarán in the same country.

I also give thanks for the gesture of solidarity on the part of several bishops from South America who were meeting in Ecuador. They were expecting Archbishop Obando and me to attend the meeting, but we couldn't go because of our situation here in Central America. Nevertheless, they sent a very nice letter in which they expressed their solidarity with the peoples of El Salvador and Nicaragua and told us they were praying sincerely for our situation. May God reward them!

The bishops of Nicaragua have cautioned the people that, in pressing for their just claims, they should not commit abuses that could be considered war crimes. The bishops of Venezuela have also taken up a collection to help the church in Nicaragua. In that regard, I also want to thank all of you for everything you're doing, and I urge you to keep helping because Nicaragua is in great need of our charity and our fraternal love.

Events of the week

Turning now to our social situation, I felt great sadness this morning. They called me on the phone to report the news that the press where *La Crónica del Pueblo* is printed had been burned down. I expressed my regrets to the director of the paper, and I do the same here publicly. I join him in his suffering and also in his strength of spirit. He told me, «They won't succeed in discouraging me in my determination to continue serving the people. I want to help», he told me. (Applause) «I want to use the modest means I have to continue serving truth and justice». He said that part of the rich inheritance he will leave his children will be their knowledge that he has tried to be faithful to his convictions and has not sold out to the highest bidder. I congratulate him, and I truly hope that the people will help make up for his loss, which they surely will, and that his paper will once again be a voice on behalf of freedom.

It's a shame that brute force is used so irrationally against the social media. How much better it would be to have a true dialogue, one in which dissenting voices could be heard! Not everyone thinks the same way. By listening to one another and offering criticism, we can enrich our experience. We're not going reach any kind of agreement by burning down newspapers or planting bombs in radio stations. So I also regret the sad news that arrived from Manuel Montes of Radio HH in Santa Ana; their plant was also destroyed, laying to waste the fruit of many years of effort.

Another event this very morning that alarmed my poor spirit was the murder of a worker named Ana Silvia Olivera Otón; she was a member of the Industrial Electricians Union of Sonsonate. Her companions have asked me to invite people to her wake and burial, which will take place at 630 Avenida Cuscatlán.

We express our solidarity with the families suffering a repression that becomes crueler with each passing day. Arrests and killings have continued, and there are no signs that the government is taking any serious measures against the violence, whatever its source. Government inaction is the real source of the violence that is tormenting our poor *campesinos*! We hope that limits are put on this awful cruelty, but we're frightened because not only does the cruelty not cease; it becomes even more sadistic.

You probably read in *La Prensa Gráfica* about the three bodies that were found near Chalchuapa. The paper reports, «They were buried without being identified»³. However, I've received news from their families, and they *have* been identified! They are Miguel Ángel Osorio Velázquez, José Fermín Albayero Ortega, and Roberto Hernández. Their own families identified them after searching for them for several days. They found them in that same place where corpses are being dumped. The horror of it! Miguel Angel Osorio Velázquez lived in the Colonia Montevideo in Sonsonate; he was twenty-two years old and was to be married at the end of this month. Very early Monday, after eating breakfast, he left for work—he was a mason—but he didn't return home. Later that same day eight agents of the National Guard searched the house he was building as his future home. The family says that that police search makes them believe that they had captured him already and used his key to get into his house. His mother found his body beside the other two; his face was disfigured, one hand was missing, and he showed signs of torture on various parts of his body. They buried him in Sonsonate. Another victim, José Fermín Albayero Ortega, was from Izalco; he was thirty-one years old, was married, and leaves four children. Monday morning he left for work and never returned. His wife recognized one of the three bodies found on Las Cruces Street as that of José Fermín. She found him horribly mutilated: his eyes were gouged out, he had no tongue or ears, his body had been burned with acid, and his feet showed evident signs of torture. He had no bullet wounds. The third victim, Roberto Hernández, was twenty-seven years old and leaves two children. There were evident signs of torture, and his body was horribly mutilated.

The list of those arrested grows longer, and I mention them here because it's possible that this voice reciting their names will make their captors realize that, if they have them in their power, recourse has been made to the Supreme Court of Justice. If they do not bring the captured individuals forward but keep them hidden away, besides committing an outrage against human beings, they will be offending against the Supreme Court of Justice and

³ *La Prensa Gráfica* (14 July 1979).

the very constitution of the country. The arrested individuals include Crescencio Antillón and Herculano Antillón, two brothers; the first was used as bait to capture Herculano, the one they really wanted to arrest. Others arrested are Roberto Antonio Olmedo Nóchez, Ángel Rigoberto Hernández, Manuel de Jesus Valle Abrego, Juan José Abrego, José Álvaro Zelaya Rivera, and Luis Alberto López Alvarado. I'm especially concerned about the case of Juan Francisco Ruiz, who is related to a priest, and also that of Carlos Iván Burgos, who is a teacher with *Fe y Alegría*. Also arrested were the *campesinos* Faustino Ayala and Ernesto Menjívar. With regard to the case of Carlos Antonio Mendoza, which I mentioned last Sunday, his family has received reliable reports that he is being held in the police barracks.

I also wanted to refer to the various labor conflicts, but time is running out. I would simply like to appeal for reasonableness and calmness on the part of both labor and management. Intransigence on either side makes any collaboration or agreement impossible. Try to understand one another. Even when workers feel a sense of solidarity with other factories, I ask them to think of the autonomy that each factory has and not to be excessively demanding. We agree that workers should be honored for their sense of solidarity, but they are dishonored when they are simply intransigent. For the sake of the families on both sides and for the peace of the country, resolve these labor conflicts quickly!

Here I want to denounce two other matters. Some revolting things have occurred there in Santa Tecla, right near the human development center of the Dominican Sisters. A man named Mauricio Hernández Martínez, thirty-six years old, works on a farm during the day, together with his wife, and at night the two of them seek lodging in one of the center's corridors. Some unidentified persons, who thought that the couple had denounced them for threatening to rob the sisters, dropped a huge rock on Mauricio's head while he was sleeping. The man was taken to the hospital unconscious, and he died there three days later. The Dominican Sisters of this community and the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul—who are dedicated to caring for the infirm, the elderly and children in Santa Tecla—are being threatened by the dreadful «white hand»⁴. It's as if the sisters were putting obstacles in the way of the true progress of our society. I would ask people to put aside their stupid party prejudices and take a good look at the work being done by these sisters and the Christian communities. I believe that's why the vicariates are proposing these long vigils of prayer and reflection. They're trying to help people to view the situation of the country more sensibly, so that we aren't just beating the air and letting ourselves be moved by a stupid and tragic desire for revenge. Even though the valuable lives of so many of our sisters and brothers have been tragically taken away, we don't want revenge.

The ERP has announced that Carlos Rafael Nieto, who has been kidnapped since June 14, is in good health and is hoping that the conditions for his release will be met. For our part, we have called upon the ERP to help restore the health of that young woman who was shot in one of their operations and who should be justly compensated.

We're receiving many commentaries about the present situation of the country, and I especially liked the comments of one letter that stated, «How sad it is to behold the state we've come to! How will we be able to teach our children the value of life when no value is placed on it here? If we as parents are angered by this bloodshed, how can we be silent?»

⁴ A reference to the White Warriors' Union, one of the paramilitary groups of the extreme right, better known as «death squads».

Dear sisters and brothers, we have not exceeded the boundaries of what a homily should be. All of you who have been kind enough to share this reflection with me are the people of God, and the Lord is presenting us with a tremendous challenge. His teaching is about love and peace, and his message is one of salvation and eternal life, but he is thrusting us into a world where people appear to be wolves and wild beasts. So that is our mission: to try to convert all those criminal bands, all those terrible forces of hatred and silence and secrecy and evil, into children of God who are incorporated into Christ. Who are they? Many know who they are, and the people have their suspicions. May the Lord, who knows this better than we, hear the prayer of this people today. Let us reflect on this great desolation in the light of a word that cries out for God to act in the midst of a people who have forgotten God.

May all Christians and all members of this church imitate Mary, for she knew how to wipe away tears and console the sorrowful, but she also was courageous in her prophetic profession. Let us therefore know how to unmask wickedness and condemn injustices, because as the Virgin's own canticle tell us, the redemption of humankind is closely linked to the justice we do here on earth and the respect we pay to God's truth. Let it be so.
(Applause)