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THE DIVINE SAVIOUR IS THE SOLUTION TO ALL OUR PROBLEMS

Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

29 July 1979

2 King 4:42-44

Ephesians 4:1-6

John 6:1-15

The liturgical year, dear sisters and brothers, offers us an incomparable backdrop as we prepare for the feast of our heavenly patron, the Divine Savior of the world. The Gospel of Saint Mark, the gospel for this year, gives way for four Sundays, starting today, to the Gospel of Saint John, specifically chapter six. For the next four Sundays we are going to reflect on the famous sixth chapter of Saint John. You can read it in your Bibles at home and thus draw more fruit out of these reflections. The chapter contains the Eucharistic discourse of Capernaum, in which the Divine Savior is presented as the one who sheds light on our troubles and provides an effective solution to all the problems of history and those of our own country as well. The four Sundays are the two before August 6 and the two following. In this way our Divine Savior is provided with a superb setting for this feast that the church so enthusiastically prepares for Jesus Christ, her Divine Spouse!

The brilliant originality of the Gospel of Saint John makes it a special gift that God places in the hands of the people during these Sundays. It is the most ecclesiological of the gospels. It can be said that the whole Gospel of Saint John is a treatise on ecclesiology, that is, a treatise on the church. In Saint John the church is presented as a prolongation of the person of Christ. That means that the Gospel of John cannot be understood if it is seen as a biography of Christ. It can be understood only from the perspective of community, of any Christian community. That is why our archdiocese, with all its parish communities and ecclesial base communities, finds here an extremely rich and fertile ground for understanding the figure of Christ in terms of community and church.

Another characteristic of this gospel is that it is very sacramental; it is the gospel of signs and wonders. Christ is viewed as the culmination of the Old Testament, but at the same time he is the supreme sign of the ultimate redeeming power that has entered the world with him. The sacraments of our church find in the Gospel of Saint John their ultimate *raison d'être*.

Finally, the Gospel of John is the most original Scripture in presenting what we call «present eschatology». I have already mentioned this word several times. «Eschatology» is what is final, what is definitive; it is the end of history, the definitive kingdom of Christ. That's what eschatology means, but it is not presented as just a hope for something beyond death, as some kind of eternity we are expecting in the future. For the Gospel of Saint John that definitive kingdom is already present in history. We ourselves, by our conduct, are either making the kingdom or rejecting it. The definitive destiny of humankind is being forged in this eschatology that Christ has planted as a seed in history by his divine presence and by his church. Therefore,

what we read in this gospel about the Divine Savior of the world reveals to the ecclesial community of our archdiocese that it already possesses the beginning of a solution and that it must remain hopeful. What those of us who are Salvadoran Christians still need to do is learn how to perceive that sign and make it a reality in our country.

Life of the church

So today I first want to present the community that is doing this reflection. It is the church of today under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła, the first Slavic pope, a pope whom the world is just getting to know. From him are coming enlightened initiatives to orient this people of God, who should heed, respect, and love this representative of Christ on earth, the pope. This week John Paul II confirmed that he will make a trip to the United Nations on October 2. Let us accompany him with our prayers as he prepares for the journey because, as Pope Paul VI said on his own bold trip to the United Nations, the pope represents the church sent forth to all the world's people, and precisely at the United Nations are represented all the world's peoples¹. Let us hope that they will hear and heed the message of this Christ present in 1979 as the light of the nations. The pope also asked for hospitality for the Vietnamese refugees². You know that many are perishing as they flee Vietnam; the boats are carrying refugees, but there is no place for them to go. The pope's voice for the many refugees must be heard now more than ever. In a small way we can pay heed to the pope's call by helping our Nicaraguan sisters and brothers, as we mentioned last week.

Meanwhile, in our archdiocese preparations are being made to celebrate our patron, the Divine Savior. There will be a novena, as Monsignor Modesto López announced, and we hope that it will be broadcast on the radio at five each afternoon. The spirit of this novena and of the feast itself is not one of worldly amusement. Our country is suffering too much for us to be thinking about celebrations. Let us not slap the face of our distressed country with dances and parades and queens. There will be an opportunity for all that when peace returns to the nation. Today there is much suffering, and patriotism demands that we be a country offering prayers of reparation and asking the Lord to resolve our great problems. Let us not doze off like foolish folk who cannot see the reality before them: we are seated on a powder keg that can explode at any moment. Let us instead try to resolve these great problems. Such should be the church's spirit for these August celebrations.

At four o'clock on the fifth, as you're all aware, there will be the famous *Bajada*. But I also want to tell you about a very beautiful tradition that will take place on the morning of the fifth: the Apostleship of Prayer will assemble in the basilica to review its past activities and plan new programs for providing spiritual strength to our country. You are all invited, then, to join the Apostleship of Prayer in the basilica next Sunday, the fifth, and spend the morning in reflection. You will be accompanied there by Father Santiago Garrido, who today is celebrating fifty years of priesthood. Since he is a venerable Jesuit, we'll be celebrating the event with him on July 31, the feast of Saint Ignatius. Father Santiago, I know that you are listening to me. From this cathedral filled with your friends and your Christian sisters and brothers, we offer our prayers and this Mass for you today on the occasion of your fiftieth anniversary.

¹ PAUL VI, «Message to All Humanity: Discourse before the General Assembly of the United Nations», 4 October 1965.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Sunday Allocution», 22 July 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (29 July 1979).

The solemn Mass will be on the sixth, and we have invited all the choirs of the diocese to be there for it. We'll have voices coming from many different communities, like those we are hearing today from the community of Tacachico. These are voices from our countryside; they are, as we've said, the voices of our people speaking to the God of our people with the language of our people. So bring guitars, accordions, and all the songs of our people so that we can have our Mass on the sixth there in front of the cathedral. It will a merry celebration in honor of our Divine Patron, in whom we place all our hope.

Also here with us today are representatives from the community of San Antonio Abad, who will bring up the offerings at the appropriate time.

We send greetings, therefore, to all the communities, hoping that they will be present next Monday to honor the Patron of our archdiocese. The cathedral is the sign of the unity that our faith teaches. The cathedral is the teacher of the diocese, and the bishop, despite his faults, is the sign of the church's teaching, her authority, and her unity. The cathedral is the site of the *cathedra*, and we should love it. I take this opportunity to request the assistance of all so that we can soon finish this building begun by Archbishop Chávez, who had the wonderful idea that it would serve as a symbol of the archdiocese and the seat of our Divine Patron. We have a magnificent opportunity to advance the construction work, which has already moved forward thanks to the coordination of Monsignor Modesto López, the beloved rector of our cathedral.

Right now we also want to invite everyone to attend the concelebration here in the cathedral on the eighth. The priests already know about it since their monthly meeting in August has been canceled so that they too can attend.

We regret that *Orientación* couldn't come out this week because of difficulties at the press, but we hope that next week, with God's help, we'll be able to offer you the special issue that was already announced.

Speaking about the press, we want to congratulate all our journalists, who celebrate their special day on the thirty-first. May the Lord grant them inspiration and rectitude, and may he give them above all the courage that the truth demands because journalists either tell the truth or they are not true journalists. (Applause) In this regard, I want to thank the Independent Journalist Agency (the API), which was kind enough to publish my homily from last Sunday and distribute it widely—I think it covered four full pages. That is something extraordinary since—I think we can say here –nobody is a prophet in his own land (Luke 4:24). I hear of my poor homilies being published outside the country, and people send them to me, even in English and French, but in this country I find no echo in the press. It's what we were saying before about how there needs to be more testimony to the truth. These homilies seek to be the voice of this people, the voice of those who have no voice. No doubt that's why they find no favor with those who have too much voice. But this poor voice finds an echo, as I said before, in those who love the truth and who truly love our dear people. I had the pleasant surprise of finding that one theological journal, *Selecciones de Teología*³, published a complete homily given here in the cathedral—among very scientific articles! Nevertheless, the church must still have her own mouthpieces such as *Orientación* and YSAX. Let us help sustain them.

³ «A Murder that Speaks to Us of Resurrection», *Selecciones de Teología* 70 (1979) 184-190.

They didn't let Father Astor enter the country. They gave vague excuses, such as «higher orders». And the poor priest, so loved in Santa Lucía, will have to remain in unforeseen exile. He will be leaving Guatemala for the United States.

We will celebrate the forty-day memorial for Rafael Palacios tomorrow, Monday, at seven at night in the church of El Calvario in Santa Tecla. It will be a liturgy of atonement in that city where he met his death. I hope that city will respond to this effort to cleanse its streets stained with the blood of a priest.

Some good news: the Passionist Fathers will be returning to the archdiocese and will establish a house of formation since the Lord has blessed them with many Salvadoran vocations who will be joined by a group of seminarians from Spain.

We have visited or will soon visit these communities I take delight in greeting today: Santa Lucía in Ilopango, the minor seminary in Chalatenango, Apopa, Santiago Aculhuaca, the Colegio Don Bosco, and the Marriage Encounters in the Instituto Rinaldi. Before long I will visit San Antonio Los Ranchos, Chalatenango, Arcatao, and Los Sitios del Dulce Nombre de María—they already know the dates when I'll be there. Let us hope that the roadblocks don't keep preventing the people from using their most sacred rights: the right to believe and the right to assemble. Since the state of siege cannot be used as an excuse, we hope that these gatherings will turn out better than the one in San Miguel de Mercedes, which was thwarted by the security forces.

This archdiocese is a community that reflects with these people and with these realities, and my words are addressed precisely to this ecclesial community. My homily is meant to be the nourishment that the pastor provides for the people of God. If my message expands from the people of God to the people in general, then blessed be the Lord, but this message should not be obstructed.

Around Gotera they can pick up YSAX quite well, and a number of *campesinos* there have been beaten just for listening to it. I want to remind the security forces that it is not a crime to listen to the radio. If it were, then high government officials would not be listening to this homily, and I know they are listening. The soldiers should learn to respect the *campesinos* who are listening to the radio since the mighty powers of the state are setting an example right here. What I am speaking is not evil or sinful. Indeed, all Salvadorans would do well to hear what I'm preaching today.

Today's Scriptures, especially the sixth chapter of Saint John's gospel which we began to read today, provide us with the title of this homily that is dedicated to the Divine Savior: «The Divine Savior Is the Solution of All Our Problems». There will be three ideas, as usual. The first will be the multiplication of the loaves as a sign of our problems and the solution of Christ. The second will be the messianic kingdom signified by the multiplication of the loaves; the kingdom is a force present here in our country and contains important elements that El Salvador must exploit. And the third idea concerns the collaboration that Christ asks of us in order to be able to realize his redemptive signs and messianic realities.

The multiplication of loaves as a sign of our problems and the solutions of Christ

The first idea, then, is the multiplication of the loaves as a sign of the messianic kingdom. What is the sign? The seminarian already mentioned it before reading the gospel: it is a problem without an easy way out, a multitude hungry for bread.

Human solutions are so laughable! Philip made financial calculations: «Two hundred denarii would hardly be enough to give each person a mouthful» (John 6:7). Andrew searched for a solution but was aware of the limitations: «What can we do with so many people?» (John 6:9b). The response of Christ, going beyond commonsense calculations, is the miracle: he took the bread in his hands, blessed it, and personally began to give it out (John 6:11). But first he asked for collaboration: «There is a boy here who has five loaves and two fishes, but what good are these for so many?» (John 6:9). «Bring them here», Christ said, and the boy had to surrender all that he had brought for his own nourishment. Since Christ needed it, he gave it to him, and from that donation came the multiplication that satisfied everyone and even produced twelve baskets of leftovers (John 6:13).

Events of the week

I would like to apply this problem to the reality of our nation. Actually, the journalistic service I mentioned before, the API, has offered a consideration that helps me make the application from the gospel scene to El Salvador. A note they put out yesterday states the following: «There is general agreement that the political upheavals have caused an alarming increase in the hunger and misery of the marginalized sectors, which have neither sufficient nourishment nor the medicines needed to cure their children. The people are submitted to grave humiliations which only worsen their already subhuman conditions». This statement indicates that the multiplication of the loaves, which was provoked precisely by the hunger of a multitude, is also a miracle that El Salvador is in need of. Hungry multitudes—they actually exist in El Salvador!

«But this economic misery», say the politicians of our land, «will not be resolved unless the political crisis that engulfs our country is first resolved. If the political crisis is resolved, then there will be the confidence and the support needed to confront the other problems. If it is not resolved, then all the governmental projects will be totally useless, nothing more than the songs of Sirens»⁴. I am happy to say that this description of reality coincides with what the church has been saying for a long time. A social and political transformation is necessary. The church is not able to bring it about, but she points out how urgent it is. The task must be carried out by those who are responsible for it.

Still, it is sad to witness the facile optimism with which people so often talk about the tragic realities of the people. Commenting on the ending of the state of siege, the president stated, «The people have in their hands the rights they are due and respect for their freedoms». He said that he was «quite satisfied with the thoughtful consideration with which the people have received the government's decision to return to them the full exercise of the civil rights that had been withdrawn by the state of siege legislation, a measure aimed at stopping the wave of violence that had prevailed for a little more than two months»⁵.

Why speak in the past about something that is quite present? Why fantasize that the state of siege was some kind of medicine rather than a measure that made things worse?

⁴ «Bulletin of the Independent Journalist Agency» (28 July 1979).

⁵ *La Prensa Gráfica* (26 July 1979).

Now that this pretext for harassing the people has, thank God, been eliminated, why not make people's rights and freedom a reality? I would say that now there exists an opportunity for the government to make credible its plans for liberating the country. There is a chance for the government to gain credibility if it stops making the lifting of the state of siege look like a romantic gesture and instead truly restores to the people their constitutional guarantees: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom to migrate. Let those who are abroad return! Let the disappeared reappear! Let us be informed of their situation!

The fact is that the threats of the UGB have continued. For example, the teachers Alberto Salvador Palacios, Saúl Villalta, and Nelson Martínez have come to the archdiocesan offices to report threats, and they are holding the authorities and ORDEN of San Matías responsible if anything happens to them. Another ridiculous thing is that flyers of the UGB stating, «There are guerrillas here! There are subversives here!» have been tossed outside the novitiate of the Somascan Fathers. Father Cataldo Papagno, speaking for the Somascans, has written a letter to the president of the republic and the ministers of defense and the interior, telling them, «There are no subversives here. I point out to you that my religious family includes the Somascan Fathers, who are Italian; five clerics studying philosophy, who are Salvadoran; and two Salvadoran novices and one Mexican novice. We deny the accusations of subversion and declare that we are doing nothing more than following the pastoral guidelines of the Second Vatican Council which this archdiocese is trying to put into practice». Father Papagno then asks for protection, and in a certain sense he is saying, «If something happens to us, you will be responsible».

I want to express my complete solidarity with these persons being threatened and make an urgent appeal to the UGB: «Enough is enough! Enough playing with human life in El Salvador!» And if, as people believe, there is any connivance on the part of government forces, then it is their responsibility to put a stop to these threats, which are a true assault on people's lives. People cannot live in peace! (Applause)

The panorama surrounding the Divine Savior in the multiplication of the loaves is also seen in our national reality when we consider that arrests are still carried out despite the lifting of the state of siege. On July 25 they arrested José Isidro Chicas, Sabas Concepción Claros, her son Guillermo Claros Flores, Napoleón Velázquez, Facundo Hernández, Felícito Vigil, and another person with the same last name. All of them were captured by commandos from the military base at San Francisco de Gotera and handed over to the National Guard in that same city. The visit I received from their families made a great impression on me. Imagine how difficult and costly it is for poor persons, carrying their children in their arms because they can't leave them safely at home, to come from Gotera to tell me, «Our situation is desperate. We cannot stay in our homes because they are being constantly raided and searched. We have to live exposed to the elements, sleeping in the mountains, because if we stayed in our houses we would risk being captured by the military operations that are constantly being carried out there. We also come to denounce other atrocities in that district».

On the twenty-sixth José Evaristo Cabrera of Villa Victoria was also arrested, and his mother—I hope mentioning her won't bring her harm, but her testimony is gripping—his mother says she cannot sleep but has been sick since José Evaristo Cabrera disappeared. «That is why I come to you», says her letter, «to ask for your help in making this new injustice known and to ask the Almighty to make the Guard free this lad whose life is dedicated to working his fields». Why are the hearts of people who cause so much harm not moved by these words?

Miguel Angel Terezón remains among the disappeared, and I have just now learned that the printing shop by which he earned his living was ransacked and his car and equipment were confiscated. All this in addition to the personal assault he has suffered and despite the plea we made that his property be respected. Let us hope that Mister Terezón and his family soon again find peace and that those responsible for this injustice desist from their criminal behavior. Another case is that of Carlos Antonio Mendoza Valencia. His sister told me, «The situation gets more and more difficult. We can find no solution to this great injustice. Neither lawyers nor military officials will listen to us. Only a great faith in God sustains us». And it is precisely for this reason that I am speaking of the God who can find solutions for us now, just as he solved the problem of hunger, if we only fulfill the conditions he asks of us.

But I want to make special reference to the case of Gonzalo Segundo Merino, who was arrested by the Guard. A member of his family is doing something that has never been done in previous cases like this, and he is exposing himself to death in the process. This is the first case—and I congratulate him for it!—in which the Guard is being charged criminally in court. (Applause) The letter is so courageous that I very much want to read it as a magnificent example for all of us who are citizens. It's addressed to the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, Doctor Rogelio Chávez, and states:

My brother, Gonzalo Segundo Merino, was arrested in Tejutepeque on July 3 of this year by six uniformed agents of the National Guard. The arrest was witnessed by a great many persons, especially members of his family with whom he was relaxing at the time of his arrest. I personally saw my brother at the National Guard in Tejutepeque, but later they denied that he was there, as is customary in this country. I have filed a writ of habeas corpus, but all has been in vain. My final recourse was to file a criminal charge before the judge of Ilobasco, but I have done so with fear and anxiety since the relatives of arrested persons generally do not press charges because they fear they will be persecuted for telling the truth and seeking the freedom of their loved one. I hope that both you and the Supreme Court of Justice, as the authorities principally charged with administering justice, will adopt a correct and courageous position in response to these evidently unjust actions, in accord with the sacred function that is your responsibility. Yours truly. (Applause)

Many times we have told the president of the Supreme Court of Justice that his role in the country is of supreme importance and that history will pronounce judgment on his disregard of these urgent matters.

There continue to appear persons murdered after being captured by the security forces. On July 20 the body of Pablo Cortés was found above the Izalco bypass; he had been arrested on July 17 in Santo Domingo de Guzmán. Also found was the body of Celso Cruz, who was arrested the following day. I have here also the testimony of a poorly written but tremendously eloquent letter, perhaps from some *campesinos*. It ends by saying, «May God our Lord give you strength»—«strent», it says—«so that a kingdom of peace and justice will be established on earth, where we will all love one another as sisters and brothers and where the sun of justice will shine and the shadows disappear». (Applause).

At the last minute the case of Alejandro Ochoa has also been presented to me. This youth was arrested in the district of San Francisco Agua Agria, and his body was identified by his own mother who is now sick in the hospital as a result of this frightful trauma.

I have already spoken too long, but we could also mention the various labor conflicts that are added on to this pile of problems that I'm trying to present to the Divine Savior of our country. Like the apostle, we want to say to him, «We are so limited, Lord! What good are two hundred denarii for so many people? What can we do with five loaves? (John 6:7). What can we do with the plea of these humble *campesinos* who want the sun of justice to shine? This is the voice of our people! You cannot ignore it!» Let us therefore dedicate ourselves to this vision of a church that is growing, thanks be to God, in faith and hope but which is still surrounded by a world of shadows, injustices, and crimes.

The messianic kingdom signified by the multiplication of the loaves

Dear sisters and brothers, members of the people of God, the multiplication of the loaves by which Christ fed people was simply a sign, but what is contained in that sign? This is my second thought. There are two interpretations of how Christ solved the problem of hunger with the collaboration of other people.

First is the temporal and political interpretation of those who followed Christ with an imperfect faith. They thought, «This is the great prophet who is able to feed us» (John 6:14-15). They sought to make him king because they wanted immediate solutions: «He will always give us food whenever we are hungry». These people were content with worldly liberation.

Today we are going to learn the other interpretation, the theological one that Saint John gives us in his Fourth Gospel. This interpretation of Saint John has ecclesiological aspects, as I said before, for Christ and the church constitute one single life. In the account of the multiplication of loaves, it is John's evident intention to show that the church, united to Christ, is the way to resolve problems.

The mountain, for example, is a symbol of Sinai and Moses (John 6:3). The Moses who saved the people in former times is Christ today, and the mountain where the law of God was once promulgated is now the Gospel that Christ is preaching. The mountain is the church, where Christ continues to teach, where the divine Moses continues to lead the people, where the Divine Savior continues being the great hope of Salvadorans.

Another sign that Saint John mentions with definite ecclesiological intention is the Passover: «The Jewish feast of Passover was near» (John 6:4). This existential relationship also shows us that for John the feasts of Israel were an expression of the desires of the Jewish people, which were then transferred to the Christian people. The Jewish Passover, which Christ made into the Christian Eucharist, is precisely the church. Why are we here this morning in the cathedral? Precisely to celebrate the Easter Passover. Every Sunday is Passover, the resurrection of the Lord. When John says that the multiplication of loaves occurred when Passover was near, he is inviting us to live ecclesologically: to be church and, as the church in which Christ lives, to find solutions for our problems.

Still another marvelous sign occurred after the multiplication of the loaves: Christ sent the Twelve to collect the leftovers, and they filled twelve baskets with them (John 6:12-13). This is a symbol of the hierarchical church that collaborates with Christ in teaching, in distributing the bread, and in administering the sacraments. This is the priestly church, the church that gathers the people together in all the places of worship. How beautiful is the gesture of the multiplication of loaves that is repeated in our churches! Soon we'll see the bishop and his collaborators share the bread out, gather what remains so that nothing is lost, and then keep it in the tabernacle—such care is taken so that there will always be bread! Bread will never be lacking as long as there is a Christ and a church that are becoming incarnate in men and women, even in the most critical of times.

In Saint John's theological signs we can see signs of the sacraments. Commentators on this sixth chapter of Saint John point out that John is the only evangelist who doesn't include the Last Supper in his gospel; he does not narrate what the other evangelists say about the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He gives us the beautiful farewell discourse of Jesus, but he says nothing about the moment when he took the bread and changed it into his body. He did not include that account because he was writing after the synoptics and did not think it was necessary. But he did think it was necessary to explain the idea of the Eucharist, and the sixth chapter of Saint John is precisely his effort to do that. Consequently, the whole account of the multiplication of loaves has a lovely eucharistic sense to it. It is the Passover becoming Christian. The lamb that Moses commanded to be immolated would no longer be an animal. It would be Christ, the Lamb of God who was nailed to the cross and whose Body and Blood would be nourishment for the redeemed people of God.

«Gather the loaves» (John 6:12). The narrative of the loaves is a sign of the Eucharist, as was the manna in the desert (Exod 16:15-19). In what we read this morning everything speaks of Eucharist, especially the liturgical gestures of Christ. I invite you, sisters and brothers, to see Christ today behind that altar—don't see me! Hiding behind my poor human features let your faith (and mine) discover the eternal Priest who takes the bread in his hands, blesses it, and changes it into his Body, which he gives as nourishment to the people and which is then gathered up so that it remains for future generations (John 6:11-12). These are the eucharistic gestures of Christ that the priest has the honor of repeating at the altar. Do not come to Mass because of the bishop or the priest but because the bishop and the priest are the medium through which the hieratic figure of Christ is revealed, the eternal Priest offering the bread and the wine that you offer him as you bring them forward in the offertory procession.

This inspiring interpretation of the miracle is telling us that Christ will resolve the hunger in El Salvador. Christ will resolve the injustices in El Salvador. Christ will make to shine that sun that the *campesino* in Sonsonate wants to shine, the sun of justice and truth. The day when we interpret his message this way—not just as a message of earthly liberation but of ultimate liberation—then our faith in Christ will not be like the faith of those who followed him imperfectly because he solved their immediate problems by giving them food to eat. During the next three Sundays we will continue to learn about Christ's way of thinking.

But for now, sisters and brothers, let this be quite clear: in giving us food to eat, what Christ wants is to be with us, to be concerned for us. How can it be that Christ will not weep close to the mother who is grieving over the disappearance of her son? How can it be that Christ will not suffer with the poor man who dies amid tortures? How can it be that Christ will

not condemn the crimes of the members of the Guard or of ORDEN who leave a family forsaken by shamefully capturing their son? Certainly, those things will have a price!

It is precisely for that reason that Christ invokes eternal justice, which is not found here on earth where things remain the same despite the letters written to the president of the Supreme Court of Justice. The judge is not Christ, but there is a Christ above him who will ask him to render an account, just as he'll ask all the accomplices of this unjust situation in El Salvador to render an account of themselves. Christ invokes a situation that goes beyond history, and so I ask you sisters and brothers who are suffering imprisonment, tortures, and abandoned homes not to despair. Christ is with us! The Divine Savior of the world is here, just as he was there with the multitude that was hungry. He knows what the solution is, and he will make it happen. Let us hold on a little longer; the solution will come! Christ can make it happen!

What I want to make clear to you, sisters and brothers, is that this message of Christ is both transcendent and immanent; it is transcendent because it goes beyond our reality, and it is immanent because it is also here within our present reality. Christ is here right now, but he is also beyond us in eternity. It is dangerous for us to lose sight of this balance between immanence and transcendence. Some people interpret the miracle in today's gospel in what might be called a worldly, reductionist way, which is wrong, but spiritual reductionism is also wrong.

I'm going explain myself a little because this is very important. Some publications are claiming that the pope is advocating spiritual reductionism, but I want to defend the pope in the face of these irresponsible declarations that are being spread about⁶. The pope is not asking his priests to reduce everything to spirituality, and the proof is that, when speaking about evangelization, Pope Paul VI used another phrase which I wish they would also publish in a paid advertisement. (Applause) Paul VI spoke about the church «preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it» (EN 14). Take note of what he says: the church preaches liberation and also associates with those who are working for liberation and suffers with them!

In my pastoral letter I say the following: «Even when the people's political organizations abandon the church and criticize her, the church will continue to support what is just in all those organizations». The church accompanies them (Applause) because I hold the same conviction that Paul VI and John Paul II did, namely that «when preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the church certainly does not want to restrict her mission only to the religious field and so dissociate herself from the temporal problems of people»(EN 34). What could be clearer? The church cannot turn her back. I would therefore urge those who have published cleverly selected texts of the pope's speech to be honest and publish the complete discourse that the pope addressed to the priests in Mexico.

In Mexico the pope *did* tell the priests to be careful about reducing everything to temporal factors. That is true. And if they want another text for publication, I offer them my

⁶ The reference is to the paid advertisement mentioned in the previous homily, which quotes John Paul II as stating, «You are priests and religious; you are not social organizers, political leaders, or functionaries of any temporal power».

own pastoral letter, where I say very much the same thing to priests: «Be careful about being temporal reductionists!» What I tell them is this: «The inestimable service of the priest and the primary purpose of his vocation is to encourage and guide the people in faith and in the justice that faith demands, according to the great Christian principles that we have recalled here»⁷.

I don't want to go on at length, but I do want to indicate to you that paragraphs 101 and 102 of my pastoral letter contain some statements that deserve to be published, but if they ever published them they would probably mutilate my thought just as they have mutilated the thought of John Paul II. They distort the pope's ideas when they seek to present them as recommending a type of priesthood that is so spiritualist that it hardly touches earth. Those who think they are owners of the earth clearly desire to have the Gospel preached in such a way that it never touches on the things of the earth. (Applause) John Paul II himself, when speaking to us bishops at Puebla, enunciated what is in effect the pope's command to Latin American bishops:

Who can deny that today there are individual persons and civil authorities who are violating with impunity fundamental rights of the human person, such as the right to be born, the right to life, the right to responsible procreation, the right to work, the right to peace, the right to freedom, the right to social justice, and the right for citizens to participate in the decisions that affect peoples and nations? And what are we to say when we are confronted with various forms of collective violence, such as racial discrimination against individuals and groups and the physical and psychological torture of prisoners and political dissidents? The list grows longer when we add the instances of kidnapping of persons and holding people for ransom, which have a terribly deleterious effect on the family and the social fabric. We cry out once more: respect the human person who is the image of God!⁸

And listen to these words: «Evangelize so that this becomes a reality, so that the Lord will transform people's hearts and humanize the political and economic systems through the responsible efforts of men and women. We must encourage pastoral commitment in this area with a proper conception of Christian liberation»⁹. The pope also said that, while it is true that people have a right to property, we should not forget when preaching that «there is a social mortgage on property»¹⁰. These words of the pope cannot be ignored by those who would like to portray him as reducing everything to the spiritual. Do you see why I tell you that we have to learn how to judge critically what we read, especially in situations where even the most holy discourses are twisted?

The proper balance is to be found, then, in what the pastoral teaching of our time recommends to us. Paul VI stated that evangelization, which is a natural work of the church, cannot be separated from human advancement for anthropological reasons. This is so because the injustices that the church denounces are not abstract; they are concrete injustices committed by concrete human beings. And evangelically, the love of Christ obliges us to love

⁷ *The Church and the People's Political Organizations*: The Third Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero and the First of Arturo Rivera Damas, Bishop of Santiago de María (6 August 1978) 102.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Inauguration of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

our neighbors as we love ourselves, and it would not be true love if we just preached spiritual theories without working for the advancement of the human person.

The collaboration that Christ asks of us

Finally, sisters and brothers, we reach our third point: the collaboration that Christ asks of us. It is true that Christ, and Christ alone, has the solution to our problems. Let us not forget that. And that's why I again call on John Paul II, whose thinking I am at pains to communicate here. I will never betray the pope! God deliver me from that! I want to be his echo, his voice. I always remember with joy and gratitude the moment right after he received the miter. (Now it is not a tiara because in his simplicity the Roman pontiff has also made a preferential option for the poor.) Wearing his simple miter, the pope, like any other bishop of the world, pronounced the words that all bishops say: «Open the way for Christ, you who are politicians, businessmen, and investors! Open the way for Christ! He alone has the words of eternal life!»¹¹. For Christ did not want to multiply the loaves all by himself. He began by discussing the matter with Philip, then he asked Andrew for his opinion, and finally he took the five loaves from the poor lad.

Here I cite also the beautiful example of the first reading, where a *campesino* brings a bag full of loaves made from the first fruits and gives them to the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 4:42). God desires the participation of the people. If the people have no chance to participate, then the problems of the nation will be ever the same. Those who are in government or in positions of economic power should therefore realize that they are not gods. (Applause) The more they worship the false clay idols of earth, the more repugnant they are to God. If they were more humble and united with God, they would soon solve our problems.

This why we call for conversion. Our language in the cathedral is not hateful. Never! It is loving. As a mother, the church speaks as mothers do when they get angry. Mothers correct their children but still love them; they don't want their children to be bad but to be sisters and brothers to one another. Because the church is a mother, she also speaks to the rich and the powerful: «Be converted, my children! Be converted! Only Christ has the solution. Unite yourselves to Christ, and if you want to find Christ, you will find him by paying special attention to the poor. Don't make laws to defend only the few. Make laws to defend people against poverty. (Applause) Be disposed to allow dialogue not only with people who think as you do, but dialogue also with the *campesinos* who are dying of hunger and so are organizing, not for subversion, but just to survive». (Applause)

In summary, sisters and brothers, the precious message of today's gospel—and today we've reflected only on the gospel—is telling us this: the multiplication of loaves represents the problems that only Christ can solve, but he does so with the collaboration of others. We have to consider Christ's way of thinking in order not to get lost in purely earthbound kinds of politics. We need to wage our just struggles instead from the perspective of the universal liberation of Jesus Christ. Only in this way will we be able to celebrate the feast of the Divine Savior. He bring us liberation not so that he can be a king of the earth seeking earthly solutions. The Lord flees from such a position. He does take on our earthly concerns, however, as I explain in my pastoral letter, but he does so in order to incorporate them into the great, transcendent liberation, the lasting liberation that will make us truly and profoundly

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the Official Inauguration of His Pontificate», 22 October 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (29 October 1978).

happy. So let us now prepare our spirits to celebrate worthily the approaching feast of the Divine Savior. Let it be so. (Applause)