

162

TRUE INDEPENDENCE CAN COME TO US ONLY FROM CHRIST

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

9 September 1979

Isaiah 35:4-7a

James 2:1-5

Mark 7:31-37

Dear sisters and brothers, once again circumstances oblige us to celebrate our Eucharist in this church consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Actually, this circumstance fills me with great hope because the Heart of Jesus is a symbol of God's infinite love for humankind made visible in Christ. Why do we come to Mass each Sunday? We come as Christians to saturate ourselves with that mystery which is the foundation of our faith and our hope: the mystery of Christ. This mystery is nothing else than infinite love; it is God's infinite plan to save all human beings by raising them up and making them one single family with himself. We travel as pilgrims amid the vicissitudes of history, between the temptations and the flatteries of the world, but there is a danger of our becoming so comfortable on earth that we forget the loving call of a Father who awaits us with open arms—and who not only awaits us but gives us as a companion on our journey no one less than his own Son, Jesus Christ.

The circumstances of recent weeks move us reflect that this is the month of our independence. This word has a cynical ring to it in these times of such great slavery, and that is why independence is celebrated in such different ways among our people. There are some who seem to be planning spectacles of bloodshed and tragedy, and so a certain atmosphere of expectation makes us ask: what will September bring for El Salvador?

Personally I believe that September presents a challenge for us Christians: the challenge of independence. We must not fear reprisals or bloody deeds or painful tragedies. Rather we must place ourselves on God's side, along with Christ, and say, «Lord, you are the only one who can give us true freedom». The independence of our nation, which we celebrate on the fifteenth of this month, represents a challenge from God himself, who offers us his power to be free. The reaction of good Salvadoran Christians should therefore not be one of fear: «What will happen in September?» People can do nothing more than what God permits them to do, whether for good or for ill. «Not a hair of your head falls without God's consent», Christ has said (Luke 12:7), and the Lord has told us, «Fear not!» I believe that today more than ever we need this calmness, this assurance. Rather than fearing other people, let us rather fear being unruly in the hands of God.

This is the challenge before us: only united with God in Jesus Christ can we be true architects of our history. God is the master of history. Christ is the cornerstone of every civilization, and in him alone is there constancy. And so I say to you, sisters and brothers: for the love of our country, let us resolve to place ourselves at Christ's side and to reflect on what God wants of us. May we all unite ourselves to Christ who tells us, «Without me you can do

nothing» (John 15:5c)—and I think especially of those of you who are keenly sensitive to social and political problems but are going about them the wrong way. Only in Christ can we do all things, as Saint Paul reminds us: «I can do everything in him who is my strength, my hope, my guide, and the meaning to my life» (Phil 4:13). Without Christ human life is an absurdity; without Christ we become mere jackals, beasts, and demons. What a sad thing is the man or woman separated from Christ and estranged from God!

What I would like to do with today's reading, then, is have us concentrate on the central figure: Christ before the deaf man. The deaf man is the image of a person confined and marginalized; his inability to hear or speak or communicate is an expression of slavery. But Christ, touching his ears and his tongue, frees him.

And in the other readings we find the complementary image of the desert, which sadly reflects the condition of slavery. Imagine the desert! It is said that when the Bedouins are crossing the desert and hear the wind blowing in the distance, they describe it in their fanciful manner: «Do you hear the sound of the wind? It is the desert lamenting and crying because it wants to be a garden!» I don't think there is any more eloquent image for human neediness than the thirsty desert with its vast stretches of sterile sand. The desert truly represents the need we all have for independence and development.

Still another image appears in today's second reading from Saint James, who was a practical man. He talks about when a well-dressed man and a scruffy man both arrive at a liturgical ceremony at the same time. The well-dressed man is told, «Come right in», but the poorly dressed one is told, «Stay there by the door and sit on the ground» (James 2:3). We have here two figures representing estrangement and slavery: the despised man in tatters and the servile usher who is more attentive to the prosperous than to the poor.

Keeping in mind these figures in today's readings, I will give my homily the title: «True Independence Can Come to Us Only from Christ». And my three complementary thoughts will be these: first, Christ is God in person who comes to free humankind; second, God is concerned about saving the whole person; and third, the salvation that Christ brings does not destroy us but remakes us. I believe that these thoughts taken from today's readings are especially opportune for these tragic times that are becoming bloodier by the day. Let us maintain our serenity, and with faith let us begin this reflection on the word of God. And as we usually do, we will look at how all this applies to our archdiocesan church and to the situation of our country.

Christ is God in person who comes to free humankind

Christ is God in person who comes to free humankind. How beautiful the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah must have sounded to the exiles in Babylon: «Be strong, fear not! Here is your God; he comes in person with vindication; with divine recompense he will save you» (Isa 35:4). He comes in person! This was the extraordinary marvel of faith that the prophets proclaimed. Speaking in God's name, they told the people, «He is not going to send just prophets like us. He himself will come in person. What God is telling you through us is merely preparing the way and preparing your hearts so that when he arrives in person he will find truly fertile soil where his word will produce fruit».

These words were spoken during the time of the Babylonian captivity. Because of the sins committed in the Promised Land, the invaders had seized the rulers and the people and had cruelly deported them. And there they were in Babylon. There are psalms that tell of the sadness and nostalgia the Israelites felt living far from their homeland, such as that lovely psalm about the poplars by the rivers of Babylon which has inspired so much music and poetry. It captures well the nostalgia of people who loved their homeland but recognized that they had been exiled for their sins. Still, they were hoping that one day God would pardon them. «By the rivers of Babylon we sat mourning and weeping. When they said to us, “Sing a song of your land”, we responded: “How can we sing in a foreign land? May my tongue stick to my palate and may my hand become withered if I ever forget you, Jerusalem!” »(Ps 137:3-6).

Love of country brings us to reflect directly on what Isaiah has told us today: «Speak to those whose hearts are frightened. Declare to them that the blind will see and the ears of the deaf will be opened» (Isa 35:4a,5). That is our situation, dear sisters and brothers. People need the presence of God in their lives because he is our human destiny. Without God we live under oppression; we are overwhelmed by fear; our hearts are frightened. There are so many people like that now in our land; their hearts are frightened, fearful, terrified, insecure. That is a clear sign of our need for liberation. It is the desert groaning and weeping as it longs for a better world.

Still another clear sign of human oppression is illness, which is why there will always be sick people in the world—people who are blind, deaf, or paralytic. The hospitals will always have work to do, and too often it is human cruelty that supplies them with work. We read with great sadness about the two leading causes of death in El Salvador; the first is diarrhea, and a close second is murder, people dying of homicide or as a result of wounds. That’s what statistics show: right after the consequence of malnutrition, diarrhea, we have the consequence of crime, murder. They are the two epidemics that are killing off our people.

It was in such a situation that Isaiah spoke in those days, and he would speak the same way to people today. He spoke to those who showed signs of oppression, the victims who were sick or whose hearts were frightened, and he told them, «Take courage! God will come in person. Behold, your God is coming!» (Isa 35:4). And now he is here among us! There is a beautiful parallel between this prophecy of Isaiah and the gospel passage from Saint Mark that was read today. Isaiah announced that clear evidence of the presence and action of God would be found in the flowering of the desert and in the healing of those who were sick. These were the messianic blessings that the prophets presented as signs of God’s personal presence in the world. The prophets could not discern these things clearly because they were viewing the eschatological signs and the blessings now present in redemption from far, far away. When history is finished and all the harvest of Christ is gathered in, then there will no longer be crimes, there will no longer be corpses. But the messianic blessings are beginning to be seen even now; already we can proclaim that the desert is blooming and the sick are being cured.

Christ himself pointed to clear signs when John the Baptist sent two disciples to ask him, «Are you the Messiah, or should we look for another?» Christ responded simply by indicating the signs that had been announced: «Tell John that the blind are already seeing and the dead are already being raised» (Luke 7:20,22). There were already clear signs of health! God has come! He is already here among us! In our own days we see death waving its banner and crime being glutted with blood, but death and sin have already been conquered! They are like those wounded whales that swim out to sea and eventually die of their wounds. «The last

enemy to be conquered is death» says Saint Paul (1 Cor 15:26). Death is already mortally wounded, and those who now lie in their tombs will escape its clutches. Let the sinners not sing of victory, because they are already defeated. Sin was crucified by Christ right there on his cross, and those who believe in Christ are already victorious.

So I say to you whose hearts are frightened: God is already here among us! To you who are sick: have patience that your illness will pass! To you who are oppressed: transform your suffering and your sorrow into redemption! This doesn't mean opium or passivity; it means legitimate struggle but without losing hope in God's active presence, without drawing apart from God and the guidance that the God of history keeps giving us.

We feel Christ very present in today's gospel, and this is very typical of the Gospel of Saint Mark, which lays less stress on Christ's teaching activity. For Mark the main thing was not Christ's doctrine but Christ's person; for Mark Christ was the embodiment of God's kingdom present on earth. It's a good thing that we are reading this Gospel of Saint Mark in the liturgy this year, which has been a year of tragedies for El Salvador, because Mark is telling us that what Isaiah announced in his prophecy has now become reality in Christ. All those who believe in Christ are already redeemed, and they have no reason to be cowardly or fearful. In this basilica of the Sacred Heart we find so many reasons to believe in his love! Now is the time for us Christians to fortify our spirits. Let us not be cowards or allow the circumstances to get us down. To the contrary, our weakness and disorientation should seek support in the Lord who is now already present in history. Let us hold tight to the hand of Jesus like people who are blind or deaf, and he will lead us to victory. Light will come to our eyes, and clarity will come to our Salvadoran history. Only Christ can give us true independence.

God's presence is also a theme in the second reading, in which James tells the Christians, «Do not try to unite two irreconcilable extremes: faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and personal prejudice» (James 2:1). It is inconceivable that people call themselves Christians and not have a preferential option for the poor, as Christ himself did. It is scandalous that Christians of today criticize the church because she thinks about the poor. That's not Christianity! True Christianity is what Christ tells Christians through James: «If you have faith in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, then treat your rich and poor brothers and sisters as equals. Don't be deceived by appearances». (Applause)

There are many people, dear sisters and brothers, who think that when the church says she is «for the poor», she is becoming communist and opportunist, meddling in politics. Not so. This has always been the doctrine! Today's reading was not written in 1979. Saint James wrote it twenty centuries ago. But we Christians of today have forgotten these sacred readings that should guide the lives of all Christians. When we say «for the poor», we are not taking sides with one social class. Pay close attention. What we are doing, following Puebla, is extending an invitation to all social classes, without distinction between rich and poor. To everyone we say, «Let us all take seriously the cause of the poor as if it were our own cause, or even as if it were the cause of Jesus Christ, which it truly is. For on the day of the final judgment he will declare that only those who helped the poor out of faith in him will be saved: "Whatever you did for one of these poor folks—the marginalized, the blind, the crippled, the deaf, the mute—you did it for me"» (Matt 25:40)¹. So Christ is the one giving us the example. His presence is still alive, thanks to God and thanks to a church trying to renew herself despite

¹ *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, 3.

persecution and incomprehension, and it will continue to carry out the same plan of God. This is true politics: it does not treat people as first-class and second-class but rather says, «There can be no personal prejudice among those who believe in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ» who has become incarnate in the miseries of humanity (James 2:1).

God is concerned about saving the whole person

My second thought therefore is this: God is concerned about «saving the whole person». This phrase comes from the church's recent documents, especially the Council documents and the encyclical of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, which states, «It is the whole person who must be saved, body and soul, heart and spirit, transcendent and temporal» (GS 3; PP14).

Unfortunately, sisters and brothers, we are the product of a spiritualized, individualistic education which teaches us, «Try to save your own soul, and don't worry about anybody else». We used to tell people who were suffering, «Be patient. Heaven will soon come. Hang on!» That is wrong. That is not the salvation Christ has brought about. The salvation Christ brings us is salvation from every form of bondage that oppresses human beings. We already stated what those forms of slavery are, as reflected in the desert imagery in today's readings: they are prejudice against persons and treating others according to worldly criteria. That is slavery!

We are living today under many forms of oppression and slavery. There is the fear that enslaves our hearts; there is sickness that oppresses our bodies; there is sadness and worry; there is the terror that constrains our freedom and our lives. All these chains must be broken! That is where we have to begin. (Applause) Don't you believe that servility is a truly humiliating form of slavery? To please the powerful the toadies humiliate the already humble. (Applause)

Notice that the first reading proclaims the liberation that God brings about: «God will come in person; he will come with vindication and recompense. He will restore health to your bodies, and he will make the desert bloom!» (Isa 35:4,6-7a). These are truly magnificent words that help us think about the true liberation that God desires.

Vindication does not mean selfish vengeance. It is about putting things in their place and telling the people, «You are all brothers and sisters. No longer is there any reason for some of you to debase others». The vindication of God will happen when everyone understands the greatness of God's love as he comes to bring recompense. It is the same as when someone, after offending another, comes to repair the damage and ask pardon. That is precisely the reason why Christ comes: to ask forgiveness of the Father because human beings have offended him by their great prejudice against persons and by spreading great fear and oppression, which have nothing to do with faith in God. When Christ died on the cross, he was making recompense and bringing vindication. The recompense and the vindication that God wants are those that unchain our hearts from our own sins, which are the cause of our problems. Those who cry out for freedom and work for liberation but then keep on oppressing, killing, and doing evil have not understood that the truly saving violence is that which we do to ourselves: making recompense to God for our sins from our hearts. (Applause)

Since the integral human person has both a transcendent and a historical dimension, I would like you to see these dimensions in what Christ does. First of all, Christ

showed concern for the deaf mute. If Christ's spirituality had been selfish or individualistic, he would have walked past the poor deaf mute without paying him any mind, like the priest in the parable (Luke 10:31). Instead, he stopped before him and, with the patience of one administering a sacrament, he performed those sacramental gestures: he put his fingers in the man's ears and placed saliva on the man's tongue (Mark 7:33). Behold the power that is in the body of Christ! Christ is God in person, God incarnate in a human body, and everything that Christ touches has the power of God. Christ's fingers are as human as mine are, but he has within himself what I don't have within me: the divine person of the Son of God. When his fingers touch an infirmity, they heal it. He could have made the desert bloom gloriously, just as he calmed the waves and the tempests (Mark 4:39). There is power in God. Perhaps that deaf mute couldn't speak because he couldn't hear, and that's why Christ made that gesture which said everything: «Touching the ears and the tongue, he raised his eyes toward heaven and sighed deeply» (Mark 7:33-34). These are gestures which still speak today to mute persons in need of a tongue and deaf persons in need of ears; they are signs of liberation. Christ was telling the man, «You have a transcendent destiny, which is heaven. I myself have come from there». How tenderly Christ must have gazed toward the Father! Such is the intimacy of God. The true liberators are those who do not forget that the destiny of human liberation is found only in God. The true liberators are those who know how to pray and how to raise up the hearts of those without understanding to sympathy with God. This is the redemptive dimension. What use would it have been if God had given the poor deaf mute an agile tongue and acute ears but then he failed to use them for God and so ended up condemned? What use is the beauty of the world? What use is the earth's wealth? What use are great possessions if there is nothing more? The flourishing that Christ wants for human beings is the expansion of their transcendent dimension.

But this doesn't mean that human beings are only transcendence. What we're especially striving for today is the liberation of their historical dimension. I'm hoping to make my pastoral letter available to you this week, but I want to give you a little preview of it by telling you what the church is offering El Salvador at this time of national crisis. One of the eight things that we offer is «promoting integral human freedom»², which is based on an integral conception of human nature. At Puebla the pope described it this way: «Humanity is the primary road that the church must travel in fulfilling her mission; humanity is the primary and fundamental road for the church» (RH 14).

«Humanity» means these concrete, historical men and women who are alive today. That is why at Puebla we attempted to look carefully at the people of Latin America, and that is why I try to look carefully at ourselves, the Salvadoran people, and at the people I visit in the slums, the people living there in misery, in poverty, in hunger. It is these people to whom we must announce, «It is true that as church we have neither silver nor gold, but we want to give you what we have. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk and flourish» (Act 3:6). We don't want a crowd mentality; we don't want people who can be manipulated. We want men and women who are true images of God, and we want them to be respected even if they live in the slums or in the mountains. They are worth the same as the well-off people who live in the capital. (Applause)

² The original text has «promoting integral human liberation». See *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 30.

I state the following in the pastoral letter: «This ideal brings together all the dimensions of human reality, without excluding any and without reducing faith to merely social and political development. Nevertheless we must nowadays emphasize the social and historical dimensions of the liberation that Puebla is asking of us when it says, “As we face the realities of our lives today in Latin America, the Gospel should teach us that we cannot truly love our fellow human beings, and therefore God, unless we commit ourselves at a personal level, and often at a structural level as well, to the service and the advancement of the most dispossessed and downtrodden human groups and social classes, with all the inevitable consequences on the plane of temporal realities”» (P 327)³.

The human dimension is therefore transcendent, but it is also historical, temporal, and concrete. We are talking about people who are called to eternal salvation but who today are dying of hunger or not receiving a just wage. Human beings have a vocation to heaven, but God has made them to be happy also on earth. Human beings will share eternity as sisters and brothers with one another, but now they still must learn to be sisters and brothers on earth so that they stop hating and killing one another. (Applause)

When Christ explains through Saint James why we should not despise the poor and give preference to the rich, he asks a question that could serve as an examination of conscience for every one of us: «If you do this, have you not made distinctions and become judges with evil designs? Listen, dear sisters and brothers, did not God choose the poor of the world to make them rich in faith and heirs of the heaven he promises to those who love him?» (James 2:4-5). Nevertheless, it is not enough to be poor. One must be poor and love God; one must be poor and in God’s grace. The church and divine revelation claim that in a way the poor have a greater capacity than do other social classes for receiving the message and the redemption of Jesus Christ.

We therefore cannot forget the earthly dimension, but always with a view to conversion. For Saint James says, «He chose them to make them rich in faith» (James 2:5). Those who are truly poor are also «rich in faith». By their love for God they already enjoy their eternal destiny, which God saw as their preference while they were here on earth. Our beloved poor make up the majority of those now participating in this reflection, and I want to count myself also among the poor because I know that only on this path and in this situation will we truly be able to come together with sincerity and authenticity. Let us try to be worthy of this favor of God. Let us be the poor folk who are worthy of being made «rich in faith» by God and rich in love of the Lord. This is our true wealth. Let us not strive for any other riches unless they be also for the growth of our historical dimension. For I don’t want to be opium of the people, as someone in the People’s Revolutionary Bloc has said. Never! These advances to transcendence that I am talking about are aimed precisely at motivating the people to progress further in their historical, social, economic, and political development. What I am saying is that God has not only made heaven for our life after death, but he has also made this earth for all human beings. That is not opium! (Applause)

There is one detail that I would like all of us to go into more deeply. I won’t spend much time on it, but please reflect on it seriously. When Christ was trying to help the deaf mute, the gospel tells us that «he took him apart, away from the crowd» (Mark 7:33a). What a significant gesture for our time! Saint Mark was being faithful to his theological conception

³ *The Church’s Mission in the Midst of the Nation’s Crisis* (6 August 1979) 55.

when he showed Christ as bearing the mystery of God's kingdom, but it was something that the people couldn't understand. That was why Christ concealed many things that would have made him conspicuous. He kept them secret! Often he reproached those closest to him, the apostles, because they weren't really trying to understand the mystery. With the crowds he was even more reserved because he was awaiting the hour when God would speak the word the people needed in order to recognize him as the Son of God.

So Christ took the deaf mute apart from the crowd in accord with this theological understanding of the kingdom of God as a hidden mystery. But I would like you to consider this other aspect: around Jesus there was the crowd of people, a noisy world, people shouting, deafening music—all that was totally bewildering! There was only one way that the poor deaf mute could encounter God and that Christ could touch him with gestures of transcendent love, and that was in a place of solitude and interiority, as we were saying last Sunday. These days there is so much noise, sisters and brothers. There are seizures of churches, demonstrations, shouting, gunfire, and that endless din from loudspeakers that exhausts the whole neighborhood. None of that is saving us. If those things don't lead us back into interiority, reflection, and discernment, then they serve no purpose. They are only ruining us even more.

The Council tells us, «What the world lacks today is not only expertise in technology, science, and liberal arts; its main lack is expertise in humanity» (GS 15). What civilization needs today is wisdom and reflection, and that's why I go about everywhere begging people, «Pray hard for the church! Reflect!» And it's true that here I'm using loudspeakers, but they are necessary for communication. The problem is things do not serve the purposes they should. Loudspeakers exist to transmit a message of reflection, serenity, and peace, and also to broadcast messages of justice and bold condemnation. That's when they're well used! But when they're used just for demagoguery, they do no good. (Applause) Keep fixed in your mind this saying of Pius XI, a pope of short, succinct phrases: «What is good makes no noise, and what makes noise does no good». That saying could well be a commentary on how Christ took that man apart and cured him (Mark 7:33a).

The salvation that Christ brings does not destroy us but remakes us

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, my third thought is this: the salvation that Christ personally brings us is not a salvation that destroys us but one that remakes us. «Remake» means «make anew». When Isaiah in today's reading announces the Messiah through the mysterious figure of the Servant of Yahweh, he says something that many people don't understand: «He does not break the bruised reed; he does not quench the smoldering wick» (Isa 42:3). These poetic phrases are telling us that Christ is not a wrathful man who, on seeing a bent reed, breaks it off and throws it away. Rather, with the tenderness of a physician, he straightens it up and supports it so that it can grow strong again. Neither does he douse the fire when there is only a slight glow among the ashes; instead he patiently brushes the ash aside, blows on the coals, puts a little kindling in, and the flame leaps up again. This is a representation of Christ: he is the one who «remakes» us.

What else can we say about the Christ who walked among the deaf and the mute, among lepers and sinners? The hypocrites reproached him, «Look, your master is eating with sinners, which is prohibited by the law». And Christ responded, «You hypocrites, it is not the healthy who need a physician but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous for they are already on the way to heaven. I have come to call sinners» (Mark 2:16-17). We put on quite a

display in El Salvador these days as we throw plates at one another, with everyone blaming someone else: «It wasn't me! I'm the victim!» It would be better for us if we looked within ourselves and saw how much we need Christ. The self-righteous are convinced that they don't need Christ or the pope or the bishop or the church, but they are the very ones about whom the Virgin is speaking in the *Magnificat*: «He scatters the proud of heart and lifts up the lowly with love» (Luke 1:51-52). Christ is the one remaking the history of his own people. We could say that Christ takes hold of the remnant of Israel, the human dregs, the cord that's about to bust at its weakest point—he catches it in time and binds it together, and from there flows salvation for all the world.

What else is incarnation? As Saint Paul says, «God did not hesitate to abandon divine dignity in order to become one of us—to the point of becoming a slave and dying on a cross, as slaves are made to die» (Phil 2:6-8). Roman citizens never imposed the sentence of crucifixion on one of their own; it was dishonorable for a free citizen of Rome to die crucified. Death by crucifixion was the death sentence of slaves, criminals, outcasts, and the dregs of society, but this was the death that Christ accepted, the death of a criminal. That's why the first Christians were so reluctant to represent the crucifixion, because people were saying, «If that man died in this manner, he is not worthy of being adored». But this was how Christ demolished his own dignity in order to go deeper into the depths into which human dignity had fallen—and then raise it up! «Therefore», Philippians continues, «God exalted him and gave him the name above every name so that at his name every knee should bend in heaven, in the abyss, and on the earth» (Phil 2:9-10). This is our hope: the Christ who becomes incarnate and unites himself with us. We also, dear sisters and brothers, must take on human reality just as it is. Blessed are the Salvadorans who at this time are not ashamed of their own country but take it on, not to make it worse but to remake it! Blessed are the Salvadorans who on this day and in this month of independence confess, «Not everything in our nation is glorious. The national hymn we sing often sounds like horrible sarcasm, but one day in the future we want that hymn to be sung proudly, and we'll do our part by helping people to flourish in all their dimensions».

Jesus has risen, and his resurrection offers eternal life. The new history of humanity began on the day Christ rose gloriously from his tomb, and all peoples can experience his redemption to the extent that they believe in that eternal risen life in Christ. The Council states that «the transformation of the world began with the risen Christ» (GS 2), so now the church's task, every Sunday and in every Mass, is to preach, «We announce your death. We proclaim your resurrection. Come, Lord Jesus, come!» (Applause)

So let me sum up what I have said so far. First, God is coming in person to save us through Christ, who is there in the midst of the world's needs. Second, the human flourishing that Christ wants to bring about includes human beings in their transcendent dimension, their historical dimension, their spiritual dimension, and their bodily dimension. We are to be saved as whole persons, including our social relations. Therefore we shouldn't consider some people more human than others but should see all people as our sisters and brothers and give preference to those who are weakest and neediest. This is the integral humanity that the church wants to save, but it's a difficult mission! She will often be branded as communist or revolutionary or subversive, but the church knows what revolution she is defending: the love revolution of Jesus Christ. (Applause)

And because the church's revolution is the same as Christ's, my third point was this: Christ does not want to destroy or demolish anything; he wants to remake us, and to do so out of our own human weakness and misery. That's why he calls us to conversion. The person who today is a criminal can be an apostle tomorrow. Think of how Christ remade Paul, the persecutor! A severe church official would have decreed excommunication against Saul, but Christ, who does not quench the smoldering wick, sent him to a spiritual director, where he was baptized. Then he sent him into the desert to meditate, and Paul returned as someone different, as the apostle who could say, «I am not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church, but the grace of Christ in me has not been in vain» (1 Cor 15:9-10). How wonderful it would be, sisters and brothers, if all those who are now sowing terror among us were one day to be converted after profound reflection, as Saul was in the Holy Land! Think of the men who have been sent out to kill people or those who sent them out—what if, before giving the order or executing the order for pay, they were to reflect a little and ask, «What am I about to do?» If they did so, I believe that many would stop, for this violence is insane. (Applause)

Life of the church

I will now try to apply these lessons of the word of God to our own history. I invite you to take a look at the mission of Christ in his church today. Let us look also at the desert of this bloodied, sorrowful world filled with frightened hearts. All this speaks to us of the need for liberation. The church can bring liberation to this world because inspired voices rise up from this world like winds in the desert. They may not be Christian declarations, but I keep reading in the papers expressions of the people's demands and petitions. It is the desert sighing, and we must attend to those voices. The church sees in these statements outbursts of the Holy Spirit, who speaks also in the secular world. Carried by the force of the Spirit, the church seeks out these noble hearts in the world that can help to bring about the miracle of making our desert bloom.

What is the church like? Let us try to describe this church of our archdiocese and the universal church. We should not confuse the people of El Salvador in general with the people that Christ has chosen by baptism to form the church. We should never, dear sisters and brothers, confuse the church as people of God with the people of the country of El Salvador. They are different things even though someone can be both a Salvadoran and a member of the people of God; they are two aspects of one's personality. As members of the church, Christians must believe and place all their hope and confidence in Christ our Lord; they must try to help the church to understand and serve the world without betraying her own identity; they do not sell out their Christian ideology and transcendent faith for earthly gains. This is the church I'm reporting about.

There was a clergy meeting this week at which the priests of the whole diocese studied ways to form ecclesial base communities. Dear lay sisters and brothers, please support our beloved priests by joining these small reflection groups. We're not doing anything bad. We're just reflecting on the word of God and on what that word requires of us as we commit ourselves historically to this world.

This church of ours also regrets the sickness of several priests. Father Cristóbal Cortez, who still resides in this basilica, had an operation and is now recovering. Father Antonio Vides, the pastor of Fatima in the Colonia La Rábida, has also been sick for several days; let us pray for his health. Father Raúl Flores had a slight cerebral hemorrhage, but he is

now recovering, thank God. And Monsignor Óscar René Campos, who is a very good friend of our diocese though he doesn't belong to it, is also recovering from an illness.

Among the priests, I want to mention one who was maligned this week, Father Bernardo Fernández Trejo, the young pastor of the parish of Corazón de María. He was defamed by a false Catholic who called him «a wolf in sheep's clothing»⁴. I don't want to try to respond to such an insolent article, but as pastor I most sincerely want to express my warm solidarity with Father Fernández Trejo himself and with his Claretian congregation. I want to take this opportunity to tell everyone who is listening to me that your archbishop is very happy with the Claretian congregation, and most especially today with Father Bernardo Fernández Trejo. They have the responsibility for that parish, and they're doing an excellent job there. (Applause) In this regard, we repudiate the slander, and we're grateful for the many expressions of solidarity that have arrived. I especially want to make mention of the Council of Coordinators for Nocturnal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament of El Salvador, which is based in that parish; they work very closely with Father Bernardo, and they are far from thinking that he's a «wolf in sheep's clothing». They certainly know that being Catholic does not mean believing in «angels and virgins»⁵. Being Catholic means being more respectful of priests and being willing to follow the guidance that pastors provide for their parishes. As the adorers explain, what happened was that, just as Father was beginning to celebrate Mass, some people at the door of the church were having kind of a social reception; they were paying more attention to worldly friendship than to worship of God. Father Bernardo noticed this and it bothered him. That happens often when the church acts out of zeal for God; she is naturally reproached by those who don't have the same zeal. So I want to express my thanks for the expressions of solidarity that have arrived from various sectors of that parish.

I also want to speak about our religious sisters because religious life among us is a sign of the church's presence and we should esteem it highly. We rejoice in the sisters' successes, such as the profession and the patronal feast that the Passionist Sisters will be celebrating today. Also, the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Teresa are receiving six postulants into the novitiate. This month the Franciscan Sisters are going to have graduation for a class of women religious. The Bethlehemite Sisters are also accepting new novices into their novitiate—or rather, into profession of vows. And there are so many more things to report—I'm delighted that religious life in our archdiocesan community is flourishing so wonderfully for women. Let us hope that our young women and their families pay some attention, in the silence of their meditations, to see whether their lives might someday embody the presence of Christ through the consecrated religious life.

There are very beautiful things also in the communities, such as last Sunday in Ateos and Tepecoyo, where Father Manuel Loarca and the Sisters of Charity prepared some young people for confirmation, all of them quite aware that the coming of the Holy Spirit meant for them a renewed Christian commitment.

The Sisters of the Assumption who work in the zone of La Chacra took me to see the difficult situation of the people there, especially during times of heavy rain. Many of the

⁴ MARROQUÍN A. D., «Beware the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing in Corazón de María Church» in *El Diario de Hoy* (5 September 1979).

⁵ Ibid.

little houses near the ravine are naturally drenched by the storms, so that the people's health is affected, especially the children's.

Aguilares continues to be a community where martyrdom is making its sorrowful but glorious selection of victims. The catechist Jesús Jiménez was killed there; you can read an excellent testimony in *Orientación*⁶. I will go there soon to unite with those people in rendering him the homage that in all justice he deserves from the church, for he placed himself at her service even though he knew the risk he was running.

Tonight at seven o'clock the parish of San Francisco in Mejicanos, which was left priestless when Father Rafael Palacios was killed, will be entrusted to Father Juan Macho Merino. As a member of the congregation of Passionists, Father Macho plans to have working there with him a group of young theology students belonging to his congregation. He will attend to the parish for us and will collaborate with that vicariate.

I also want to commend the Christian Cursillo movement. I met with their diocesan secretariat and have taken note of the great Christian maturity that is evident in those who have persevered. The movement is a wonderful method for Christian maturation if it doesn't just follow routines but keeps people's spirit alive and works closely with the local pastors, who are the ones responsible for the diocesan pastoral ministry. In this regard, sisters and brothers, I want to stress that true Catholics are known by being united with their bishop; people who are not united with their bishop cannot be called good Catholics. (Applause) This doesn't mean that the bishop can act in a despotic manner and command, «Do what I tell you to do!» Rather, the service the bishop gives is in relation to the people. For example, in my meeting with the Cursillistas, the reflection we had was so deep that I realized that the bishop always has a lot to learn from his people, especially about the charisms the Spirit gives to the people. That is where the bishop can find a touchstone for his humility and his authenticity. So I want to thank all those people who, even when they don't agree with the bishop, are brave enough to dialogue with him in order to convince him of his error or else to be convinced of their own error. (Applause)

The Social Security nurses made a wonderful gesture in asking for a Mass to be celebrated in thanksgiving for the peaceful solution of their labor conflict. As I gave thanks to God, I told them, «Let us hope that one day it is not only you nurses who are in this chapel but the whole country of El Salvador, giving thanks to God because both sides in the conflict have found reasonable paths of true dialogue and understanding. How wonderful are the solutions when they are guided by reason instead of by brute force, for it is reason that distinguishes human beings from other animals!» (Applause).

This weekend in the districts of Los Martínez and Jardín in the parish of Tejutla, the Christian communities assembled in their chapels to celebrate vigils of prayer and fasting for peace in the nation and for unity in the church. These activities give me great satisfaction because prayer and fasting and reflection on the word of God are what give strength to our church.

⁶ «Jesús Jiménez, Apostle and Martyr of Rural Evangelization in the Communities of Aguilares» in *Orientación* (9 September 1979).

I want to thank the CUTS for the solidarity it manifested toward this church of ours when it stated, «We workers should especially promote solidarity toward the Catholic Church, which has been fiercely persecuted in recent years. Her priests have been killed and exiled, and a propaganda campaign has been waged against the positions defended by the Catholic Church in El Salvador, positions that in our judgment are just»⁷. The statement then refers to something regarding my person, for which I thank them profoundly.

I'm also grateful for a letter that arrived by means of a distinguished courier. Miss Teresa Drumon, accompanied by a Methodist pastor, brought me a letter from Doctor Jorge Lara Braud. He was, you will recall, the pastor who shared the homily with me when we celebrated the funeral of Father Octavio in front of the cathedral. His words still resound in our hearts, and mutual sympathy has united us with him in love of Christ. In his letter he expresses profound feelings of solidarity not only with me personally but with all of you who form this community, which was totally charmed by his words. (Applause)

This church of the archdiocese needs everybody, for we all make up the church. Where I would like to request your help most urgently is in the distribution of our newspaper, *Orientación*. We've never published so many copies as we're doing now, but much work is still needed to get it distributed everywhere. So if there are any Christians, either in the city or the countryside, who want to help us, even at some risk, they should come to our offices any day of the week and make a commitment to help us propagate the word of God. Naturally, since it's the true word of God, it carries explosive material, and many people don't want to touch it. If it were dead dynamite, no one would be afraid of it. But that's what the publication *Orientación* is for: it is meant to give people true orientation and move them in the right direction of the church's life. If the church wants to promote the historical dimension through her communications media, then she will inevitably meet up with clashes in history. The transcendent dimension is not enough, though it's nice to write about it also. The historical and the transcendent have to be kept in balance, and that is what we're trying to do with our communications media.

Therefore I also take this opportunity to tell you about an effort that's being made to improve YSAX. One of the things I'd like to recommend to you, perhaps a little egoistically, is the new program containing parts of my homilies. The program takes a small section of the Sunday homily and replays it at six-thirty in the morning, eleven in the morning, and five in the afternoon. It lasts just a quarter of an hour, and I recommend it not because it's mine but because I'm grateful for the kindness and the patience with which you listen to me and spread the word, and I'm happy that I can be of some use to you through the radio. I really am trying to make my Sunday homily a powerful moment of evangelization for our archdiocese, and that's why I'm grateful to YSAX for prolonging, by way of echoes, this teaching moment of the Mass of the archdiocese. The truth is that I celebrate my Mass united with the whole archdiocese. I feel that all the pastors, the religious communities, and the communities of the faithful are here with me in the Mass. When I know that people are listening to me there in Arcatao, in Chalatenango, in Cuscatlán, I feel that I am not far from those places, because I am present there also in spirit and with affection. (Applause)

⁷«Bulletin of the Agency of Independent Journalism». See *Manuscripts of the Schemas of the Homilies of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero*, in the Office for the Cause of the Canonization of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero, Archbishop's Office of San Salvador.

Departing now from the realm of our archdiocese, I want to congratulate Bishop Barrera of Santa Ana because he has been promoting in these days a campaign of prayer and true love for the nation. His statements were published in the paper⁸, and I would ask all of you who want what is good for the country to support the options of my beloved fellow bishop: prayer and true love for our nation.

The pope is urging us to pray for an end to war. He said that this will be his intention during his next trip to the United Nations. He will make this trip as a follow-up to the one that Paul VI made on 4 October 1969⁹. The pope laments that the history of this century has been a history of war. He experienced, as I did when I lived in Europe, the sad years of the Second World War¹⁰.

The pope also spoke about the people injured in the Dominican Republic and asked that we help them morally and economically¹¹. The disastrous hurricane David claimed a thousand lives and injured three thousand persons; four hundred are missing—hurricanes also «disappear» people! There are 150,000 refugees, and economic losses come to 1.5 billion dollars. How is that poor nation going to rebuild itself? We hope that the creativity of that Caribbean people will be able draw forth from their fertile earth what the hurricane swept away.

Events of the week

The hurricane also had very tragic consequences here among us. In our country the storm took a heavy toll. In the marginal colony Renson-Irca seven persons died, all members of the same family, the Vásquez family. Nelson Armando Rojas died at the end of the Pasaje Arriaza in the Barrio Lourdes. Three more persons died in El Calvario in San Pedro Masahuat when a mud wall fell on them. More than 750 families residing in the settlements near the mouth of the Paz River in Ahuachapán were displaced when the river overflowed. Their crops were washed away.

All these affected people, brothers and sisters, weren't victims of the storm as much as they were of our sad living conditions. I felt truly horrified reading the newspaper description of the house that collapsed: «With improvised mud walls and an old zinc roof, it was located about ten meters from the wall facing the open area in front of the Treasury Police. The train line passes nearby, and about one thousand families have settled in the depressed area not used for the market. The buildings begin in front of the police station», and so on¹². That is to say, they are houses that are not worthy to be called houses, and that's the way thousands and thousands of people live. So the letter of Saint James is frighteningly applicable to our situation.

⁸ *El Diario de Hoy* (6 September 1979).

⁹ The visit of Paul VI to the General Assembly of United Nations was actually on 4 October 1965.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, «A Cry for Peace: Sunday Allocution», 2 September 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (9 September 1979).

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Message at the General Audience of 5 September 1979» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (9 September 1979).

¹² «Eight Persons Perish in Landslides Caused by Heavy Rains» in *El Diario de Hoy* (5 September 1979).

The politically motivated violence has increased among us this week. I feel sincerely grieved by the murder of the teacher José Javier Romero, the president's brother. I am in full agreement with the commentaries of YSAX which have condemned the crime¹³.

Regarding the president's declarations, I would like his words to be taken seriously. He recalled that in previous political crimes the victims have been either government officials or businessmen. «But now», he said, «they have struck at my own family in open provocation, as if to force me to react and then to justify my actions. But they will not achieve their objective»¹⁴. This is a magnanimous statement. Let us put an end to this violent contest of foolish vendettas in which the victims are innocent persons.

Some *campesinos* of the People's Revolutionary Bloc caused damage at the Talcualuya estate in Opico, which is administered by the ISTA. They wounded the administrator, Raúl Valencia, and set fire to furniture and equipment. At that moment I recalled a recording that Father Ástor Ruiz had sent me from Estelí in Nicaragua, where he is working. He said he was living in the church sacristy because everything there had been destroyed. Some guerrillas had destroyed the school, but they had been punished by the liberation movement because the foolish attitude of those young men was not in keeping with the movement's rejection of anarchy and crime. Certainly there were excesses, as there are in every war, and the bishops have pointed out those excesses. But what prevailed mainly was an intelligent, united demand for justice. In this regard I believe our own national struggle is distorted because it is not by burning estates and burning buses that we will build a nation. I remind you that Christ brought liberation not by destroying but by remaking.

We lament also the murder of the teacher Miguel Ángel Flores in Santa Tecla and the murder of three police officers on the highway to San Marcos, where a radio patrol car was also set on fire. The killing of the police officers was attributed to the FPL. In San Miguel six students were fired upon, and a new outbreak of violence is feared in these days.

I would like to issue a general call. I know you are listening. I am not sowing opium, I am sowing peace when I tell both sides, «Be sensible! It is not by destroying but by remaking that we will build the nation—that is what Christ is telling us. We won't achieve anything by the craziness of struggle and war, which make us irrational. We need to take time to reflect calmly. Let us take into account the true spirit of the Salvadoran people who are now wandering in the desert. They long for true independence, not by the paths of bloodshed and violence but by the pathways of reason». (Applause)

This is what I was told by representatives of the cooperative association of the transportation industry, who visited me and asked for my collaboration. They stated, «In recent months we have been victims of groups and persons who have dedicated themselves to burning our vehicles for carrying passengers. We do not see how our service has anything to do with the crisis affecting the country. The only possible reason is that ill-intentioned or misinformed persons are trying to make it appear that our enterprise belongs to the former president of the republic, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina. We therefore ask you to make known to public opinion that the doors of our cooperative association are open to all to reveal

¹³ «El Salvador between Terror and Hope: The Events of 1979 and Their Impact on the Salvadoran Drama of the Following Years», UCA Editores, San Salvador, 1982, 468-470.

¹⁴ «Murder is Open Provocation, Says Romero» in *El Diario de Hoy* (8 September 1979).

the nature of our business and to show that the previously circulated opinion is mistaken»¹⁵. *That* is dialogue instead of violence. That's why I tell you: please take time to reflect, even just a few minutes, before setting fire to a bus. Reflect just a few minutes before pulling the trigger of the machine gun. Take a few moments to reflect before giving a bloody order like Herod's «Go kill him!» Why, even Herod felt shame in giving that order! If he had but reflected a little, he would not have decapitated John the Baptist. But lustful passion for a lewd dancer often blinds men's reason (Mark 6:17-29). Pride in an organization and pride in not yielding can lead to a more terrible humiliation: having your hands stained by homicide.

I also want to address the public transport association that is demanding that «the ecclesiastical authorities speak out»—I take note of that detail because they claim to be surprised by our silence¹⁶. To you I say, «Forgive me, but since last May I have been declaring that it is wrong to burn buses. The church has spoken her word on this matter and has maintained it. And today I am ratifying it». I am in complete agreement with that statement of the bus drivers: there must be dialogue between those groups seizing the buses in order to make their claims and the owners who are innocently suffering losses for themselves, their workers, and their families. Dialogue! Talk! Don't act secretly. What is being sought honestly must be declared openly, not clandestinely. People must talk with one another so that some agreement is reached among all of us about how to seek solutions to the country's problems. No one is opposed to that except those who want to maintain the present unjust order, and to them also we issue a call. That unjust order with its institutionalized violence must also change so that it stops producing all the other forms of violence which arise from the present situation.

There are new complaints about disappearances. We have spoken about this often before, but we are moved by the perseverance of these mothers and wives and children who arrive at our offices. Let us do something! Nothing is known of Carlos Antonio Mendoza Valencia, who was in his final years of medical studies; he was arrested seventy-two days ago and has still not been found; his wife is pregnant, and she is hoping that he will see the child. Miguel Ángel Terezón Ramos disappeared fifty-two days ago. Santos Ortiz Asencio was arrested on July 26. Luis Alfredo Amaya was arrested on May 17 there in Usulután. I receive letters and visits that are very sad, and I share people's feelings of being helpless to do anything. But those of you who can do something, those of you who know where these people are: say something, please, and relieve the anguish of all these people! Thanks be to God, they freed Rafael Nieto Alvarez, who was kidnapped eighty-four days ago¹⁷.

Regarding the labor conflicts, I want to state two things briefly. First, there is an urgent need for proper legislation. For a long time now, we have united with the workers and the unions in calling for a revision of the labor code, but not a revision that is imposed from on high¹⁸. We need a revision that takes into account the voices of those who experience the problems first hand: the unions and the workers. This reform should be carried out through a dialogue which respects the mutual interests of employers, workers, and government. The

¹⁵ «Letter of the Cooperative Association of the Transport Industry». See *Manuscripts of the Schemas of the Homilies of Archbishop Óscar A Romero*, in the Office for the Cause of the Canonization of Archbishop Romero, Archbishop's Office of San Salvador.

¹⁶ «Call of the Salvadoran Association of Bus Owners to Those Responsible for the Burning of Buses» in *El Diario de Hoy* (7 September 1979).

¹⁷ Carlos Rafael Nieto Alvarez was kidnapped by the ERP on 14 June 1979 and freed on 7 September 1979.

¹⁸ «Labor Code To Be Reformed, Says Ministry of Labor and Social Security» in *El Diario de Hoy* (4 September 1979).

workers should be given greater participation; otherwise the explosive labor situation that we have today will produce more conflicts with businessmen, more hostages in the factories, and more problems for the families. This violence continues daily because there are no legal channels that allow for satisfactory expression of labor's interests. But I also want to tell you workers to be careful. Imagine that Christ is calling you apart to reflect. Don't allow yourselves to be manipulated by outside forces that have no interest in your labor demands. Be fair in your demands, taking into account the overall social situation and not just your own personal situation. You can read about other particular cases in *Orientación*¹⁹.

Finally, I want to consider two declarations which do not come from the church or the Christian faith, but as I was telling you before, they are voices in the desert where the Spirit is crying out on behalf of life. I would like you to pay attention to them as well.

There is, for example, the statement of FENAPES, the National Federation of Small Businesses. They declare, «On one side there are the workers' strikes and the occupation of factories, properties, and churches; on the other side, there are abductions and murders of teachers, students, priests, etc. The flight of capital and the belligerent attitudes of some publications, far from contributing to understanding and calm, foment and encourage a state of collective psychosis that is thoroughly detrimental to the attainment of the objectives desired by the people»²⁰. I am quite in agreement with this statement of the middle class, which in El Salvador, as in any country, is a force for salvation. Let us not destroy them or despise them but rather revitalize them. Let them be revitalized with Christian criteria so that they can truly be a providential class for the national situation. Moreover, they believe that «it is necessary to remind all citizens that social peace will be attained only with the cooperation of all Salvadorans, even those acting simply as passive spectators. The professional and trade associations should speak out, offer ideas, propose alternative solutions, and recommend reasonable legal mechanisms for the pacification and democratization of El Salvador»²¹. I fully agree. We have always said that no one can remain passive at this time and that those who have received more must contribute more. The professionals and their associations should not think only of themselves, their interests, and their families but should contribute to the common good of the country from the benefits they have received.

The other statement is from the Center of Judicial Studies and deplors the fact that the Supreme Court of Justice has made mockery of the petitions for habeas corpus²². Some people don't know what habeas corpus is. It is the petition made by a family when one of their loved ones has been arrested. Some relative presents a denunciation with witnesses, saying that such and such a person, from such and such a place, at this particular time was captured and taken prisoner by such and such agents, and it asks that the person be presented publicly. That is what is called habeas corpus. Well, countless such documents have been presented to the Supreme Court of Justice, and I believe the Supreme Court of Justice is gravely accountable for the present situation of our country. It is guilty of negligence, irresponsibility, and complicity in dealing with these serious violations of the very constitution of the country. (Applause) Habeas corpus is an institution protected by the constitution. Not respecting it—

¹⁹ «Solidaridad» in *Orientación* (9 September 1979).

²⁰ «FENAPES Condemns Present Situation of Violence» in *El Diario de Hoy* (7 September 1979).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² «Habeas Corpus and the Center for Juridical Studies», 28 August 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 September 1979).

and even worse, prostituting it and combining it with military operations—is a horrendous sin against the constitution. (Applause)

This is our church, and this is the panorama within which the church carries out her mission. Let us hope, dear sisters and brothers, that during this Sunday's Eucharist we will all make a commitment to Christ the Liberator, whose main concern is to come in person to save us. And he wants to save us whole and entire, in our transcendent dimension and in our historical dimension. His method of saving is not negative but thoroughly positive for he does not destroy but remakes. And that is precisely what we're about to do today. The Eucharistic sacrifice on the altar makes present for us the dead and risen Christ. That is where the history of restoration began. All of us, if we are incorporated into this death and this resurrection, become useful members of the homeland, no matter how sinful and treasonous we may have been in the past. Let us hope that this call is heeded by those who until now have done nothing but spread bloodshed, desolation, death, sorrow, and crime. Now is the time for you to be converted and live! The church loves you too much, and God loves you too much, to allow you to keep walking along those paths of bloodshed and violence.

Our homeland is a beloved mother who is hoping that her children will heal all her wounds. She doesn't want us to keep beating her and injuring her. Even though we have betrayed her, let us speak to her as the converted Saint Paul would have: «I am not worthy to be called your child, but if you reach out to me and I am converted, then I can make amends by living patriotically and contributing positively to the common good. I can help to repair the enormous ruins that this irrational, violent situation has created among us».

Lord Jesus Christ, even though we are deaf and dumb, we see you lifting us up toward heaven, and we feel your divine hands touching our limbs that have been numbed in horror at the tremendous misery around us. Save us, Lord, for we are perishing! (Matt 8:25). (Applause)