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THE FAMILY IS A SOURCE OF PEACE FOR SOCIETY

Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

7 October 1979

Genesis 2:18-24

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16

Dear sisters and brothers, Saint Mark, our gospel for this year, presents Jesus today discussing a difficult but very human situation, a man who cannot get along with his wife. Jesus discussed the problem in a concrete way, differently from the rabbis, who discussed it simply as a moral case of conscience. Jesus got involved in his society in order to apply God's designs to the heart of human problems, and even when others contradicted him, he didn't stop preaching. Wherever there were areas of conflict among people, wherever there was need of solid orientation, Jesus was present with his Gospel.

I say this because today I'd like to discuss with you today the meaning of the pope's trip through the United States, which you've been watching on the media. We can say that John Paul II is Christ today. The great nation to the north with its many problems—and all of us here on our continent—have seen Jesus pass through, and we are seeing him pass still. I believe that the divine radiance is so close at hand that, when the Gospel of Saint Mark throws its light on the problem of divorce, it is doing no more than telling us: there you have the everlasting word! Divorce was a problem twenty centuries ago, and it is still a problem today, but our current problems also include human rights, governments, social conflicts, and chasms that are opening up among us. The solutions to these problems are to be found only in the Divine Scripture, which has been preserved thanks to an institution founded by Christ in the midst of the world.

The passage of John Paul II through our American land is something marvelous. It has been called the greatest news event in the history of the world. Never before have fourteen thousand reporters covered an event such as they're doing today. There were three thousand reporters covering the return of Apollo 11 from its trip to the moon; there were six thousand five hundred covering the last Olympic Games. Who could have imagined that for the pope there would be two or three times as many reporters as for a trip to the moon or for Olympic Games that excited fans around the world? In the United States, where everything is measured, they report this curious fact: the measurement of the applause has broken all records. No rock idol has ever won the applause that the pope captured from the crowds of millions of young people and faithful¹. Those of you who are scandalized by applause, there you have your answer: with the pope in the United States! (Applause)

¹ *El Diario de Hoy* (5 October 1979).

These things are only part of the spectacle, but we mustn't forget them because they confirm for us this great truth: the Gospel is always good news, and the church herself is always news. This is true because the church's teaching throws light on our world and raises it up. We can say: not only has the pope's visit been the most spectacular news event of history, but it has also been a pastoral act of faith, hope, and spirituality. Perhaps no one has described it more beautifully than President Carter's wife did when she welcomed the pope with these words: «In these times when materialism and greed threaten to overwhelm the values of the spirit, your visit reminds us that the true meaning of life arises from the heart and from the soul, from purposes and beliefs larger than our individual lives». This is nothing less than the transcendence of religion, the reality that human beings cannot take in and the human mind cannot explain.

How fruitful and opportune is this message of the pope's visit! It would be interesting to analyze the pope's thoughts, but that is not the aim of this homily. Rather, by presenting the pope as Christ passing through our land, as I've done, we see that he teaches us, just as Jesus Christ did, the two ways of peace. The reason why the pope came to America was to continue the ways of Paul VI, the pilgrim of peace. There are two great themes that I want to emphasize right now; they are not the only ones, and perhaps there are other better themes, but for our present situation I think it fair to say that one great avenue of peace indicated by the pope is the defense of human rights. (Applause) He also pointed out—as Christ did and as Mrs. Carter said—that there are purposes and beliefs greater than ourselves, and these invite us to interior moral purity. And so we are led to the other great avenue of peace: upright behavior. So I think that we could sum up the great message of John Paul under these two headings: earnest defense of human rights and brave, bold signs of upright behavior, especially in a nation that can be characterized as rather dissolute.

Indeed, the pope's defense of human rights gives marvelous backing to the archdiocese of San Salvador. At the United Nations he stated, «It is of the utmost importance that the people of every nation and land, no matter what the political regime or system, have full and effective enjoyment of their rights. Only authentic validation of people's rights, without any discrimination, can ensure peace at its very roots»². In the same international forum he also said, «The Declaration of Human Rights has struck a blow against many deep roots of war since the spirit of war, in its most primordial sense, flourishes and matures where the inalienable rights of people are violated. This is a new, more profound, and more radical perspective on the nature of peace. It is a perspective that sees the origin of war in the more complex forms of violence arising from injustice in all its different aspects»³. Have we not been saying the same thing, namely, that the cause of all the violence in El Salvador is what the pope has called the root of all war? And that if we don't put the ax to the root, as John the Baptist said, then violence will break forth? And that if the remedy of justice is not applied, then this creature called war will soon be upon us?

That's why the pope also pointed out that one of the most serious threats to human rights is the unequal distribution of material goods in situations characterized by injustice and social deterioration. He stated, «Factors causing unrest are frequently present because of the frightful disparities between excessively rich individuals or groups and the great

² JOHN PAUL II, "Discourse to the General Assembly of the United Nations", 2 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (14 October 1979).

³ *Ibid.*

majority made up of the poor or indeed the destitute, those who lack food and opportunities for work and education and are for the most part condemned to hunger and disease.

(Applause) It is no secret that the abyss separating the minority of the excessively rich from the multitude of the destitute is the symptom of a seriously sick society. This must also be said with even greater insistence with regard to the abyss separating countries and regions of the earth. This grievous disparity cannot be overcome except through coordinated cooperation by all countries»⁴.

In discussing human rights, we could also cite the pope's condemnation of violence: «Every life and all lives are sacred, and murder is murder, no matter what the motive or the objective. Violence is unworthy of human beings»⁵. We are delighted with the way the pope ratifies our preferential option for the poor. In that nation of tremendous wealth he declared, «My heart reaches out especially to the poor, to the suffering, and to those who are all alone in these busy metropolises»⁶. This is Christ passing through. Yesterday in the United Nations, or rather in the OAS, the pope stressed the need in Latin America for pastoral practices that are similar to those of our archdiocese. He stated that he was convinced that on this continent all the problems can be resolved by peaceful negotiation, and he cited the example of his intervention there in South America. So we are right to believe that it is wrong for us to have recourse to violence before exhausting all the avenues of peace. The pope assures us that the avenues of peace and negotiation and reason are still open. That is where we must seek the solutions for our great crises, and we must do so with compelling urgency⁷.

At the OAS the pope once again strongly condemned the theory of national security, and he did so with vigorous language. He said that any nation or government which gives internal security priority over the common good of the people is creating barriers to finding reasonable solutions of the nation's problems. (Applause) And he stated once again, addressing all Latin American nations, that human beings do not exist for the state but rather the state exists for human beings. He reaffirmed afresh the dignity of every person in our lands, whether laborer, *campesino*, or someone even humbler. There are no first- and second-class citizens; all men and women are children of God, and all must be treated with dignity⁸.

Speaking about the relations between church and state, the pope said, «Everything you do on behalf of the human person will lessen violence and reduce the threats of subversion and destabilization. By courageously accepting the revisions demanded by this single fundamental point of view—the welfare of human beings, that is, the welfare of the person and the community—and by making the common good the basic factor and essential criterion of all programs and systems, you are directing the energies of your people toward the peaceful satisfaction of their aspirations. The Holy See will be happy to make its own disinterested contribution to this work, and the local churches in all the dioceses of the Americas will do the same, in accord with their diverse responsibilities. In this way all of us will be promoting the progress, the dignity, and the rights of human beings so that they may help the earthly city to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in Drogheda, Ireland», 29 September 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (7 October 1979).

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, «Allocution in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, New York», 2 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (14 October 1979).

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Organization of American States», 6 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 November 1979).

⁸ Ibid.

thrive while respecting its legitimate authorities»⁹. In other words, the church, by working on behalf of human rights and denouncing the abuses of authority, is fulfilling her proper mission.

«The church demands full religious freedom», said the pope, «not to oppose the legitimate autonomy and activity of civil society but to recognize and serve it»¹⁰. Of course, when the church's freedom is respected and when civil society is serving the interests of the common good, there will be no conflict between church and state. This is the freedom the church requests, but she will never use her freedom to promote subversion or to oppose any legitimate authority. Rather, she will respect such authority and collaborate with it, but always in the interests of the people, whom both the church and the state are bound to serve.

That is why the pope also said, «The more regularly all citizens are able to exercise their freedoms in the life of the nation, the more readily will Christian communities be able to dedicate themselves to the central task of evangelization, preaching the Gospel of Christ, the source of life, strength, justice, and peace»¹¹. In other words, if the church is currently involved in the tremendous task of defending the rights of poor people and giving voice to the anguish of those who are not heard, it is precisely because the people cannot exercise their freedoms. (Applause) This is what the pope said, and I hereby ratify my determination to be faithful to the pope. Conflicts will cease and the church will dedicate herself directly to the unalloyed preaching of her Gospel on the day when all the persons God has entrusted to the church enjoy their legitimate freedoms within the country. The church is fighting for these freedoms today precisely as a consequence of her evangelical mission. (Applause)

So the pope has given us a great example by his personal presence and by his discourse before the United Nations. We must pay heed to what he said about the «religious and moral dimension»¹² of the relations between governments and people. He stated, «Let us not confuse politics with those activities to which the church and the Gospel must impart religious and moral enlightenment, even in the earthly city of humankind. Politics should not be confused either with the privileges of a minority who trample upon the masses»¹³. Those are mistaken concepts. True politics is for the common good, and the Gospel must speak up for all the people in the name of that common good. Such was the discourse of the pope among politicians at the United Nations and among diplomats and politicians at the OAS, but his language was pastoral and evangelical.

The pope said that when individuals and peoples fully enjoy the freedoms the church has preached, the church will then be able to dedicate herself more directly to serene, untroubled reflection on her Gospel, which is a source of energy, peace, and spiritual joy. The pope also preached the path of upright behavior, and it's here that we reencounter the Gospel of Saint Mark. In the gospel that was read today, Christ touches on the great problem that is for me also a great hope at this moment in our own country. I now direct my poor words to you, beloved lay people, you who live with your families, you who are responsible for supporting a wife and children, all of you who know that when you leave church today you'll be going to

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the General Assembly of the United Nations», 2 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (14 October 1979).

¹³ Ibid.

your homes. I speak to all you idealistic young people who are perhaps preparing to form a home. I speak to all you men and women whom God has allowed to share in his love, the most precious gift he can give. Who doesn't feel capable of loving! And what else is the family but a testimony to God's infinite love on this earth!

The theme Saint Mark takes today from the mouth of Jesus is monogamous matrimony, and so the title I give my homily is this: «The Family is a Source of Peace for Society». As is my custom, I will take several thoughts from the readings. The first is matrimony in the original plan of the Creator, as we hear in the first reading from Genesis. The second thought we take from the gospel, where Christ explains the reasons that were given for issuing a bill of divorce when a man no longer got along with his wife; divorce of that type obscured the original design of God and did not exist in the beginning. «It was because of your stubbornness», Christ told them, «that Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife, but in the beginning it was not that way» (Mark 10:5-6). My third thought, which comes from the second reading united with the gospel, treats of how matrimony is redeemed by Christ and raised up to transcendence.

Marriage in the original plan of the Creator

So my first reflection comes from Genesis, the wonderful text cited by Christ himself when he was asked, «Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?» (Mark 10:2). This was a question much discussed among the rabbis because Moses discussed in Deuteronomy a custom that already existed. Permission to divorce was given as a lesser evil, but to prevent the repudiated woman from being left abandoned, Moses ordered that she be given a bill of divorce to document the fact (Deut 24:1-4). So the main objective was religious legality. When a man separated from his wife and she had relations with someone else, then she could not remarry the first husband. It would be illegal according to the religion, an offense against God.

So they asked Christ: «What do you say about this situation that is so greatly discussed among us today?» Christ responded clearly, «Moses permitted that because of your stubbornness» (Mark 10:5). That is to say, it was a lesser evil, but it was not the will of God. Today we're going to put matrimony in its proper perspective and see it the way God wanted it. In the beginning it was not the way it is now. What existed in the beginning is explained in the text from Genesis that was read today. This is a beautiful passage that we shouldn't interpret as some childish tale about God making clay dolls and then blowing on them so that they'd come to life. Rather, it is a very ancient way of speaking about the profound psychology of matrimony.

We hear how God created a man and all kinds of animals and then told the man to name each animal. The man went about analyzing all the forms of non-human life in the universe, but he found that among the animals there was no being like himself. God then said, «It is not good for man to be alone» (Gen 2:18). When speaking of human dignity, the Second Vatican Council comments that God did not create man to be solitary but made him capable of forming a union, and he made woman as the primary element to fulfill that natural human need for sociability (GS 12). Matrimony, therefore, was the first cell of what eventually became society.

The description in Genesis of how God took the woman from the side of the man should not be understood literally (Gen 2:21-22). Rather, it is a vivid parable showing that her

life is the same as the man's life; together they form one single principle of life with mutual attraction. In God's mind, when they are united as a pair, they are to become one flesh so that no one can separate what God has united. When Genesis refers to Adam's being «asleep», it is using a religious expression to describe the sublime creative action of the Lord in making the first woman. After that comes the first love that unites the man and the woman. How marvelous it is to realize that matrimony arose from the initiative of God!

The Council comments as follows, «The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of the community produced by marriage and family. Yet the excellence of this institution is not reflected everywhere with equal brilliance since many disfigurements have an obscuring effect. Yet, the power and vigor of the institution of marriage and family can be seen in the fact that time and again, despite many difficulties, the profound changes in modern society reveal the true character of this institution in one way or another» (GS 47). In other words, the Council is telling us that, even though there have been many vicissitudes in history from that first page of Genesis until now, the institution of love between man and woman has always been preserved. So whenever a marriage is celebrated, the priest reminds people that it is the only institution that was never abolished, not even at the time of the flood. Sins can destroy a matrimony, but the institution has survived all the catastrophes of history. I imagine it like a forest that has been cut down: from those felled trees new life will always begin to sprout. Likewise, there will always be matrimony in accord with the mind of God. Even when people try to destroy this institution that is so holy and noble, the word will remain: «What God has united, no one can disunite» (Mark 10:9).

I would like to stress also that matrimony is an institution that is beneficial for our present situation in Latin America; it is an important element for the changes needed in our society. Puebla has stated:

In order to function well, society must fulfill the same needs as the home. It must form insightful persons who bond together in community in order to promote the development of all. Thus the prayer, the work, and the educational activity of the social cell which is the family should be geared to eliminating unjust structures and replacing them with a spirit of participation and communion among people and with celebration of the faith in daily life. «In the mutual interaction that is established over time between the Gospel and people's concrete personal and social lives» (EN 29), each family must learn how to put into practice the clear message concerning the rights and duties of family life. The family therefore both denounces and announces; it commits itself to changing the world in a Christian direction, and it contributes to progress, peace, community life, and the exercise of distributive justice (P 587).

In other words, God's original plan in establishing matrimony was to offer us, in our homes, a plank of salvation for situations of crisis such as El Salvador is experiencing today. This is the appeal I make to all you here, sisters and brothers, you who are creators of so many families, builders of so many homes. Let no family in El Salvador be an obstacle to the urgent changes our society needs. Let no family isolate itself from others in order to maintain its own private comfort. Couples don't marry just to be happy by themselves. Marriage has a great social function; it is meant to be the torch that brightens other paths of liberation and helps other couples. The home must produce men and women who are capable of being active in politics and society, who will walk the paths of justice seeking the changes that are needed but

won't be undertaken if there is opposition from the family. Change will be easier when boys and girls are inspired, in the intimacy of each family, to place their hopes in *being* more rather than in *having* more; they should be educated for love, so that their desire is not to grasp everything but to give generously to others. The family is nothing else but loving, and loving means giving; loving means committing ourselves to the welfare of others and working for the happiness of all. (Applause)

That's the way matrimony was in the beginning, and that's the way it is when people remain faithful. That's a hard word, but it must be spoken because fidelity and love are inseparable, and that's why matrimony must be like this: «What God has united in love, no one can disunite» (Mark 10:9).

The meaning of marriage is obscured by the perverse will of human beings

Then came the perverse will of human beings, which is the second point of our reflection. Christ told the people, «Moses allowed it because of the hardness of your hearts» (Mark 10:5). As I mentioned to you before, John Paul II dedicated a major portion of his message to defending the sanctity of love against this perverse will of human beings. There in Philadelphia the pope said, «In today's society we see many disturbing tendencies and much laxity with respect to the Christian view on sexuality. Recourse is had to the concept of freedom to justify behavior that is contrary to the true moral order and to the church's teaching»¹⁴. In this regard there is so much to say!

In denouncing the present situation of marriage, the Second Vatican Council declared, «The dignity of this institution is not reflected everywhere, but is overshadowed by polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love, and similar blemishes. Moreover, married love is too often dishonored by selfishness, hedonism, and unlawful contraceptive practices» (GS 47).

When the situation of the family in Latin America was discussed at Puebla, some very regrettable aspects were pointed out: «The family is one of the institutions most affected by the process of change in recent times. The church is aware that the most negative effects of underdevelopment have great repercussions on the family, such as depressing indices of sickness, poverty and even destitution, ignorance and illiteracy, inhuman housing conditions, chronic malnutrition, and countless other realities that are no less deplorable» (P 571).

Puebla went on to declare that «the family appears to be also a victim of those who make power, wealth, and sex into idols» (P 573). This is the great defect of our time: the idolization of power, wealth, and sex has eaten away at a great many marriages. When those highly relative values are divinized and made absolute above all else, what perishes is the holy tenderness of love, fidelity, and marriage.

«Contributing to this situation are unjust structures and above all the communications media, not only with their messages promoting sex, lucre, violence, power, and ostentation, but also with their propaganda in favor of divorce, marital infidelity, abortion, and the acceptability of free-love and pre-marital sex. (P 573).

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the "Logan Circle" in Philadelphia», 3 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 October 1979).

«At all social levels families are also suffering the deleterious impact of pornography, alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, and trafficking of persons, as well as the problem of single mothers and abandoned children. With the failure of chemical and mechanical contraceptives, there has been a shift to human sterilization and induced abortion, which are promoted by means of insidious campaigns» (P 577). The church will never cease to condemn these anti-life policies, which sometimes have covert political aims. Speaking of those who are carrying out these policies with our people, a medical student told me, «They are castrating our people».

«It was not that way in the beginning», Christ tells us; «all that is because of the hardness of your hearts» (Mark 10:5-6). We have deified pleasure so that children are a bother. Sex is divinized so that what we have is not a spirit of poverty but a spirit of ostentatious consumption. Therefore, if we want to have families and homes that truly transform our civilization—and it urgently needs transforming—then we must pay attention to the message the pope preached to young people in the United States and to everyone who cultivates hedonism and pleasure. Freedom cannot be called freedom when it serves immoral purposes. We need a profound revision of our morality and our honesty so that we can return marriage to the true, original state in which it was created by God as a testimony to his infinite love.¹⁵ God's love is holy, and God's fidelity is most worthy. God wants to create on earth mirrors that reflect the beauty of love's infinite worth, and that's why he created holy matrimony.

And so I repeat this message to you, sisters and brothers. Forgive me for calling to mind here the pope's message on this topic that is so difficult to discuss since people don't want to hear it. All we can do is make an appeal for everyone to help raise up this terribly neglected institution of the family so that we can carry out a united campaign among all of us to redeem the holy love of matrimony. Let us bring it back to the original state that God wanted when he created the first man and the first woman. He wanted all men and all women to love one another with the same love with which he loves his eternal family. For, as the pope said at Puebla, God is not a solitary being any more than we are, for we are not meant to live in isolation but in family. We are all persons with a divine calling to communion in love. From the pleasant richness of our home life we are called to participate in life, beauty, communion, and happiness and to communicate these values to a world that is sadly lacking in them.

Marriage redeemed by Christ and raised up to transcendence

Finally, when Christ redeems, he is a priestly figure raising up the divine values of matrimony in his sacred hands. (Remember that we have compared the figure of the pope in the United States to the figure of Christ.) These values have been thrown on the floor, but Christ redeems them and returns them to their proper stature. Thus I can base my third reflection on the second reading, in which Saint Paul—or if not he, then the author of the letter to the Hebrews—describes for us the culminating moment of Christ's mission. After passing through his passion and death, the risen Christ gathers together all those who believe in him, and he presents this whole family of the redeemed to the heavenly Father. Let us hope that we will all be present there, among that blessed number that Saint Paul speaks about today. Christ is the guide leading this great family of sisters and brothers to salvation. When the Scripture says, «Sanctifier and sanctified all have the same origin» (Heb 2:11), we should understand that we

¹⁵ Ibid.

are all the same human family descended from Adam. We are all one family that has multiplied thanks to conjugal love, which has populated the whole world. That family has now been redeemed by Christ, thus giving a special meaning to every matrimony.

That is what I would like to leave with you, sisters and brothers, as the message of my homily today. Why is marriage also a sacrament? Why isn't it enough for a man and woman just to live together faithfully? After all, there are many very good people who, even without receiving the church's blessing, are completely faithful to one another, united in a love that stands every test. That is the reason why we don't say it is evil to live that way, but we do say that it is incomplete because it's lacking in sacramental meaning. The union is incomplete because the mutual love of a man and a woman, as noble and faithful as it may be, is not fully signifying what God wanted it to be when he created love between man and woman.

Why did God create man and woman in the beginning? Why did God make men and women sexually attractive to one another? Why does God want the love of a man and a woman to be permanent and to bear the fruit of children and a family? It wasn't just so that he could take delight at the sight of human beings flourishing and multiplying. His reasons are more divine than that. God wants the love of a man and a woman and their children to reflect the infinite love he has for humankind, the same love that moved him to send Christ to redeem us. Every matrimony reflects the love of Christ for the church, the love of the Redeemer for his redeemed people, and when conjugal love has not been sacramentally blessed, then it has not yet been elevated to being a sign of divine love.

Several times I've used the comparison of the host on the altar. There we find the tasty hosts of wheat, but they are not the Body of Christ until the priest consecrates them and makes Christ himself present under the sign of bread. The love between a man and a woman is somewhat similar: there is the simple, delicious bread of love; it is not bad, but it is not complete. Only when the man gives himself over to the woman before God, and when the woman gives herself over to the man before God, does God bless the love of his two children. That is when their love is consecrated. God has united them forever, and he has transformed that love of man and woman into God's love for humankind.

And that is why every marriage blessed by God has a mission to fulfill when it ventures forth into the world. Whenever people see a man and a woman married by God walking along the roads of this earth, they can say, «Love still exists. That is how God loves us: the way those two love one another». Consequently, when a couple is not faithful in their love, they are not fulfilling their matrimonial mission. Every couple has a sublime mission that is not limited to their children and their home; every couple must radiate out into society for society's own benefit.

In this reflection I don't want to pass over an exquisite statement of Puebla: «The couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony bears witness to the paschal presence of the Lord» (P 583). What does that mean? It means that every marriage blessed by God is a paschal presence, that is, a redeeming presence of the risen Christ, who lives in the love of those spouses.

«The Christian family promotes the spirit of love and service. There are four fundamental personal relationships that find their full development in family life: being parents, being children, being siblings, and being spouses» (P 583). Parenthood is the relation

of parent to child. With what tenderness the parents see themselves prolonged in their children! In turn, children relate tenderly to the parents who are their origin. The children love one another as sisters and brothers and recognize their common origin. When they grow up, the young person leaves mother and father to become united to another young person, and they leave their old homes to form a new home.

Puebla states, «These four relationships are precisely the ones that constitute the church» (P 583). That means that the church is born in the home. We will have a holy church with true filial devotion to God when children see the image of God in their fathers and the tender image of infinite love in their mothers. And we will create a harmonious society when we have learned in our homes to love one another as sisters and brothers. And when young people are called to form a new home, we'll know that that was how Christ loved his church, for they will not only give themselves to their own family but will unite with other families in order to form one great family of families, one homeland uniting everyone in the spirit of love. Thus Puebla says, «Family life reproduces these basic experiences of sharing in miniature; they are the four faces of human love» (P 583). Human love has four faces, and they are all experienced in the family. Such is the holiness of marriage that Christ came to vindicate, and that's what he explains in the problem of conscience found in today's gospel passage.

We have tried to illustrate this figure of Christ redeeming matrimony by comparing him to the figure of the pope preaching humane honesty to the people of the United States and to all the peoples of the world. We have seen, sisters and brothers, how Puebla protests that the mass media and the environment in which we live seem to be totally contrary to the primeval plan of the Creator. Instead, everything conspires to favor the stubbornness that Christ says made Moses allow the curse of divorce. But all that is now history, says Christ. In the beginning it was not that way, and now matrimony is redeemed and elevated to a sacrament. It is an exalted vocation that must be lived, now more than ever, according to the full dignity of our people. Dear sisters and brothers, this is not a time for immorality but for austerity. If matrimony is above all an image of God's infinite holiness, then that holiness requires of us all the austerity of life that is needed in these times of change. Let us therefore realize that we all belong to a single family—each one of you and I as well. Let us not consider only the little preserve of our own family, but let us look to the church, and let us try to create church from our own home.

Life of the church

It is therefore from this perspective of family that I would direct our sight now toward our church and the realities of our church so that we will love her as family and experience her as a home for all.

I regret that this week for reasons of health I was unable to fulfill several commitments, so I owe a visit to the Carmelite Institute. I congratulate the vicariate of Mejicanos for the course in biblical Christology that was given by Father Arias; yesterday they gave out diplomas to about sixty participants. There were confirmations in the Children's Home.

The feast of Saint Francis of Assisi was celebrated in La Concepción church and in the parish of San Francisco in Morazán. I take this occasion to congratulate the Franciscan

Fathers and Sisters as they celebrate their great founder. The Colegio Santa Inés in Santa Tecla enriched the church with more confirmations, well prepared by the Salesians.

The Sacred Heart Sisters have taken up residence in Jayaque, and another group of sisters is presently preparing a wonderful group for confirmation in Zaragoza. Meanwhile, the young men of the seminary are organizing a youth gathering in the parish of San José de la Montaña.

Let us not forget that today, October 7, is the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. In the parish of El Rosario the Dominican Fathers, who preserve for us that extremely popular devotion, are inviting us to attend today at twelve noon the traditional devotion of the «three graces». We shouldn't do this as some sort of superstition but with a true desire to pray before the Virgin. October has always been a month of much prayer, and both our nation and our church need a lot of prayer. Also today in the parish of El Rosario we will celebrate, God willing, the wonderful confirmation of young people at six o'clock.

The clergy are continuing to make their spiritual exercises; this week it will be the turn of the vicariate of Cuscutlán. I unite myself also to the joy of the schools that are now having their graduation ceremonies and closing exercises.

On October 2 the members of Opus Dei celebrated the fifty-first anniversary of their founding. They are a family that is growing among us for the purpose of sanctifying professional life and work in the world. Let us hope that their beautiful witness results also in changes in our society, which badly needs to be changed through Gospel values.

We have received support for our social media. Last Sunday I spoke about the threats against our radio station, which had scared away some sponsors. I want to thank all those who have supported us with their advertising, and I assure them that we understand their fears. Still, I call again on all Catholics to support our station so that it can become a cultural medium that will operate without depending on commercials. We have seen enthusiastic responses to our appeal, especially from one couple in the district of El Progreso in Santa Tecla. From the same place Gabriela Quintanilla and Bonifacio Recinos have sent contributions to help sustain the radio station and the newspaper. There were also nice letters from Ego Serrano Montes, Diego de Paz, and Pablo Miranda; they sent a contribution and said that they're in favor of developing a cultural station. I know that several people will make this work possible.

I want to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with Father Fabián Amaya, who is being dreadfully harassed in Chalatenango. Once again he was summoned to the military headquarters, or more accurately, he was, for no reason at all, taken as a prisoner to the departmental headquarters.

I promised you I would gather more concrete information about the news that the papers were reporting so scandalously, about the pope's reprimanding the Jesuits¹⁶. We received a complete copy of the pope's address to the Society of Jesus. Among other things he

¹⁶ *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* (22 September 1979). The Authentic Catholics Front also published two paid advertisements against the Jesuits. See «The Jesuits: Wolves in Sheep's Clothing» and «A Little More on the Wolves in Sheep's Clothing» in *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* (1 and 6 October 1979).

says, «From information coming to me from all over the world, I know about the great good that many Jesuit religious are accomplishing through their exemplary lives, their apostolic zeal, and their sincere and unconditional fidelity to the Roman Pontiff»¹⁷. Naturally, the pope says that it is not unusual, at a time of crisis such as we're now experiencing, that the Society has had to pay a high price because of the difficult situation. Nevertheless, he affectionately urges them to pay honor to the great hopes he has placed in them. The pope then recalls «the recommendations of my immediate predecessors, Paul VI and John Paul I, whose great love for the Society kept it close to their hearts, and I make those recommendations fully mine»¹⁸. (Applause) John Paul II goes on to say, «I know what a vigorous force the Society represents, and therefore I earnestly desire that it grow and prosper in keeping with its authentic spirit, setting for everyone an example of profound spirituality, doctrinal soundness, and fruitful priestly activity. Accordingly, may the Society carry out the full mission the church expects of it and render valuable services to the Holy See according to the spirit of its own Institute»¹⁹. So the pope's message is extremely favorable to the Society of Jesus. (Applause)

On behalf of our church I also want to echo the denunciation of the Colonia El Pepeto in Soyapango; they claim that someone dressed as a priest, but whom they think is with the military, is visiting children, supposedly to prepare them for first communion. What he really wants is to obtain information about the catechists. He shows the children literature about Fidel Castro and other pamphlets contrary to our true pastoral work, and then he asks them if those are the catechism lessons they're learning. The people are protesting this trickery and warning people in El Pepeto to be very careful. I would say further that care needs to be taken throughout archdiocese to keep from falling into some unfortunate trap.

Events of the week

Let us now look at civil society, sisters and brothers, from the perspective of our church family. I'm delighted that you and I can reflect together on this moment of our lives. Our Sunday Mass allows us to insert our Catholic Church into the concrete problems of our society. If there are people who are not committed to the Gospel and to their faith in ways that allow their lives as Salvadorans to shed light on the present situation, then they cannot be said to be practicing Christianity in the way desired by Christ—for Christ made an utterly intense commitment to his sisters and brothers. And so, with the same authority with which the pope addressed the United Nations, I declare here that I do not come to speak as a politician. Rather, I come to deliver, in its full religious and moral dimensions, the message of Christ to the society in which we are living.

We came across a curious item this week: «Coffee Growers Reject the New Taxes»²⁰. It's interesting how the coffee growers draw attention to the expenses and the squandering of the government of El Salvador when they're defending their own interests. They say, for example:

Don't you think it is wasteful to spend millions on the sports facilities in San Salvador, which will be used by only a small number of persons, while the other cities of the

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Audience with Father Arrupe and Several Representatives of the Society of Jesus», 21 September 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 September 1979).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *El Diario de Hoy* (1 October 1979).

republic lack playing fields? And to expand the Hotel Presidente, which is practically unoccupied? Don't you think there is tremendous waste in the large number of luxurious official vehicles that circulate in vacation spots on holidays, not to speak of the cost of fuel and payment of wages? And what about the excessive number of persons attending to the needs of government officials while in so many places the schools don't have enough desks and teachers? (Applause) Has not money been badly invested in the Jiboa factory and the new airport, which cost hundreds of millions but are practically unproductive? Don't you think it's a waste to spend millions for studies on traffic lights, agrarian projects, and the other things undertaken by economic planners, not to speak of the money wasted on the projects of INSAFI and FIGAPE?²¹.

Of course, if the coffee growers are making this denunciation out of true love for the country, then they truly deserve your applause because many expenditures are indeed a waste of money. But the truth is that the coffee growers are saying all this not because these things are of much concern to them but because they don't want to pay their taxes. (Applause)

I believe the commentary of our radio station YSAX was quite right when it said, «As long as the national dialogue consisted only of meetings at the presidential residence, where there was an exchange of abstract discourses against violence and against the corruption of teaching and preaching, and as long as nothing more was required of the owners of the means of production than abstract declarations of optimism and solidarity and things of that nature, then the national dialogue could continue unobstructed. But now that the government is trying to reform a few tax rates in order to do something constructive in the country and to avoid bringing total and definitive discredit on itself, and now that the hour has come to make concessions and sacrifices and to collaborate in practical ways in order to improve the situation of the masses and so of the whole country, the dialogue is finished»²².

At the same time, this episode is instructive. It is fine for the coffee growers to speak up and to unite in defense of their interests, but now I ask: why are the coffee growers allowed to run paid ads in the publications and to hold meetings whereas, when our poor *campesinos* make such an effort to better their precarious situation, they are denied the right to organize, they are refused space in the publications, and no one listens to their pleas? (Applause)

The government is caught between two fires. On one side, an ever more impoverished people will no longer put up with the brutal repression and the effects of the lopsided distribution of wealth, and they are demanding justice. On the other side, a few economically powerful persons, seeing their personal interests endangered, are attacking and threatening the people; they are demanding that any measure aimed at correcting injustice be abandoned. It is essential that the government take a stand, and the stand it takes must be in favor of the greater majority of people. (Applause)

In the midst of this conflict I would like everyone to listen serenely to these words that the pope spoke in the United States: «God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and all peoples. All created things should

²¹ United Patriotic Front, «Why More Taxes?» in *El Diario de Hoy* (4 October 1979).

²² «El Salvador between Terror and Hope», UCA Editores, San Salvador, 1982, 518.

therefore be shared equitably by the whole of humanity according to norms of justice tempered by love (GS 69)»²³.

Another event this week which we as Christians must examine critically is the murder of four leaders of the Federation of Rural Workers: Apolinario Serrano, José López, Patricia Puerta de García, and Félix García Grande. These were four of the most beloved leaders among our *campesinos*, and as you all know already, their lives were cruelly taken from them. The Legal Aid Office published an informational bulletin explaining how these four *campesinos* were found, how they were killed, and how the national press offered completely contradictory versions of what happened. For example, on October first one paper reported as follows: «According to investigations, the occupants of the first car opened fire on the guards at the wall, and these responded immediately, killing three men and one woman. The incident occurred as a group of soldiers was about to leave for routine operations; when one of the soldiers halted the movement of vehicles, the car at the head of the line gave the impression that it was not going to stop», and so on²⁴.

Legal Aid has raised questions about the official version and has stated the following: «When an inspection was carried out by the Second Justice of the Peace of Opico, no bloodstains were found inside the vehicle, indicating that the occupants did not open fire from within the vehicle and, more importantly, that they did not die within the vehicle, despite what the official version says»²⁵. Second, the judicial document does not contain the name and rank of the soldier who, according to the official version, was wounded. And third, various neighbors of Opico say that they never saw the bodies which were supposedly there and that they were possibly taken directly from the Calvary Regiment to the cemetery²⁶. (Applause)

At the request of the families, Legal Aid was able to get the bodies exhumed, and they were identified by the parents of one of those unfortunate bullet-ridden victims. The Legal Aid bulletin also stated that «the official report claims that they were carrying two weapons and that they intended to attack the Cavalry Regiment. This regiment is made up of at least 300 well-armed soldiers. The relatives of the deceased say that they always carried their legal documents. According to the law, the weapons and all other objects with which they were supposedly mounting their attack should have been turned over to the judge, but until now the two pistols with which they were going to confront the 300 G-3 rifles have still not been turned over»²⁷. (Applause)

This event has had a tremendous effect on me personally because I knew one of these *campesinos* extremely well. He was truly a man who was loved by many, and he had great hopes that justice would be done by the *campesinos*. I believe that an extremely serious blunder has been committed. It is an injustice that cries out to heaven because they are

²³ A text from *Gaudium et Spes* quoted in the «Homily of Pope John Paul II at the Mass Celebrated on the Esplanade of the Living History Farm of Des Moines», 4 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 October 1979).

²⁴ «Investigation into the Deaths of the Attackers of the Military Post» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (1 October 1979).

²⁵ «Bulletin of the Legal Aid Office of the Archdiocese on the Murder of Four *Campesino* Leaders» in *Orientación* (7 October 1979).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ This part of the Legal Aid bulletin was not published in *Orientación*, perhaps for reasons of space, but Archbishop Romero had it in his hands and read the complete text. 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.

eliminating the persons who can speak to our people of hope even amid situations of oppression. I also want to state that this is a crime, as the pope has said, simply because it has destroyed human lives that are sacred, but it is even more criminal since it is also an attempt to destroy the leadership of the people's organizations. They are trying to leave the people without a voice as they organize to defend their rights, and that also cries out to heaven. And what in my view makes the situation more serious still is that the army has made itself an accomplice in this crime. (Applause)

In this regard, let me shed some light on this event with the part of my fourth pastoral letter where I state that the absolutization of national security, which the pope condemned in the United States, brings with it horrible perversions and prevents true pursuit of the common good. What I wrote in my pastoral letter seems to me quite applicable to this recent event:

The interests and privileges of a few are made absolute, and this process of absolutization is given a mystical aura, as if the national security regime, which seeks to cloak itself in a subjective profession of Christian faith, were the only or the best «defender of Christian civilization» and the democratic ideals of the West. The noble function of the armed forces is degraded when they become the guardians of the interests of the oligarchy instead of serving true national interests (Applause); in this way they foment their own ideological and economic corruption. Something similar is occurring with the security forces: instead of maintaining civil order, they have basically become organisms for repressing political dissidents. Finally, the military high command has contravened the constitution by replacing the democratic political bodies which should decide the political course of the country²⁸.

Despite the evidence indicating that the army has murdered four *campesinos* who represented the hope of their fellow *campesinos*, I would not like to think that all parts of the army are similarly corrupted. I want to believe that there is still hope there. (Applause) Let us hope that these four brothers of ours—so uselessly sacrificed, thus frustrating so many hopes of our people—may say something to these same Armed Forces and move them to vindicate the honor of their noble military profession. (Applause)

In light of these events, therefore, I am pleased that the Human Rights Commission has written a memorandum to the Assembly urging that it fulfill its obligation to defend human rights²⁹. The commission also calls on the church to speak out, and I for my part believe that for some time now I have spoken about this. I have urged not only the Assembly but also the Supreme Court of Justice to make this sacred obligation a reality, and I have often claimed that much of the evil we suffer is due to negligence on the part of those supposedly democratic—but now prostituted—powers. (Applause)

We received a telegram from Nicaragua: «We repudiate the vile assassination of four leaders of the Federation of Rural Workers, and we stand in solidarity with your struggle against all forms of oppression. We look forward to the advent of a climate of justice and freedom worthy of the Christian people. Sincerely, the Religious of Nicaragua». (Applause)

²⁸ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 47.

²⁹ «Statement of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador to the Secretaries of the Legislative Assembly», 29 September 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (5 October 1979).

Concerning the labor conflicts, I want to refer to the hostages at Pan Lido who are asking management to enter into negotiations in order to resolve this situation. We also want to make mention of yesterday's kidnapping; we hope that it will be resolved favorably and that the life of this new victim of violence will be respected³⁰. There are many other denunciations, but the time has passed quickly. I just want to conclude by saying with the pope that the present violence and all the other paths that militate against peace and rational resolution of our problems are not worthy of a civilized people.

In today's gospel the Lord gives his full backing to the striving for morality that the pope preached about in the United States. Since we have stressed so much the great institution of marriage and the family, I would truly ask you, sisters and brothers, to take our reflection on today's word to your homes and your families, to where you live and where you share. And from there let each one of us become an instrument for the urgent social changes that our country needs. Let each one of us—as mothers or fathers, as sons or daughters, as couples in love, as grandparents, or simply as guests in a home—be architects of peace! May we truly be instruments of those paths of reason that lead toward solutions of justice and peace in our society! I believe firmly in what the pope has said, namely, that we Latin Americans are capable of finding solutions to our problems by the paths of reason. Of course, we must also pursue freedom, peace, and happiness and never leave out the foundation of all of these: justice. Let it be so. (Applause)

³⁰ Luis Escalante Arce, president of the Banco Agrícola Comercial, was kidnapped on 6 October 1979. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (7 October 1979).