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## THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE MIDST OF THE NATION'S CRISIS

**Twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time, World Mission Sunday  
21 October 1979**

Isaiah 53:10-11  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
Mark 10:35-45

Dear sisters and brothers, at this intense moment of our history as a nation<sup>1</sup>, the church is celebrating two events, and she does so with a serenity that comes from contact with what is universal and transcendental. These events provide us with an opportune message at this decisive moment. This Sunday, the next to the last in October, is the Universal Day of Missions, and tomorrow, October 22, is the first anniversary of the inauguration of the apostolic ministry of the present pope, John Paul II. Since he requested that this anniversary be celebrated without any special pomp, it was commemorated in Rome in a simple manner. In your name and mine, I sent the pope the following telegram: «To His Holiness John Paul II, Vatican City. Our archdiocese renews its sentiments of filial fidelity and delights in sending best wishes. May you celebrate the pontifical anniversary with evangelical simplicity. We ask your blessing. The archbishop». (Applause)

The pope himself, when he was preparing the message for this Universal Day of Missions, recalled the exciting moment last year when Mission Day coincided with the inauguration of his pontifical ministry, which used to be called the coronation. In his message the pope said this: «Amid all the intentions that were crowding in on my mind that day, the reality that most stood out was that the whole church was praying, meditating, and working at the very same time so that Christ's words of life would reach all men and women as a message of hope, salvation, and total liberation»<sup>2</sup>. The pope has taken the message for this year from his first encyclical: «Mission means not the destruction of values but the reassuming and rebuilding of values»<sup>3</sup>. The pope then presents three thoughts to explain the meaning of Mission Day. It is the day when the church reminds everybody that she has the responsibility to go forth to all nations, but she does so not to destroy people's values but to assume them, elevate them, purify them, and Christianize them. What results is a new construction that respects the disposition of each people and inserts among all peoples the universal Christian culture. By respecting the differences among peoples, the church creates a unique culture, the one brought by Christ, the culture of the new man and the new woman.

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<sup>1</sup> On 15 October 1979, around 400 officials of the so-called «military youth» carried out a coup against the president, General Carlos Humberto Romero. Two days later they set up the Revolutionary Governing Junta, made up of two military officers (Colonels Adolfo Arnoldo Majano and Jaime Adbul Gutiérrez) and three civilians (Román Mayorga Quirós, Guillermo Manuel Ungo, and Mario Antonio Andino).

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Message for the World Day of Missions», 14 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (16 September 1979).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

As we consider this perspective of the liberating word of Christ and the universal church's mission to the nations—which is not to squelch authentic values but to purify them and create something new in all countries—I think it quite opportune for us to apply this doctrine to the special moment our republic is experiencing. In a recent discourse for the Marian congress in the Basilica of the Pillar in Zaragoza, Spain, the pope expressed his ideas about the church and the Virgin. At one point he stated, «Impelled by the Spirit of God and following their ecclesial vocation, all members of the Christian community»—«all members» means you and me—«must be architects in society of the unification of all peoples, and they must be promoters of dialogue, reconciliation, social justice, and peace. By means of the presence and the testimony of Christians, the church fulfills her vocation as a sturdy seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race»<sup>4</sup>.

I invite you to take up this call so that we'll remain true to our Christian faith here in El Salvador and so that, as true Christian men and women, we'll communicate to others hope for salvation and liberation at this critical moment.

Today's biblical readings are presented in such a way that I would like to give my homily the same title I gave my fourth pastoral letter: «The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis». There will be three points, as is my custom: first, the church's mission; second, the nation's crisis and the sins of the people; and third, Christ as model and strength of the true human liberator, as found in today's readings.

### **The church's mission**

First, the church's mission. The Gospel of Saint Mark gives us a magnificent description of Christ this morning. In the verses just before the passage that was read, the gospel describes Christ going ahead of the apostles on the road to Jerusalem and announcing to them for the third time: «We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man must suffer and die at the hands of his enemies, and on the third day he will rise» (Mark 10:32-34).

He went ahead of them—notice the details that Saint Mark points out—as if he were in a hurry. He was marking out the path for all those who would follow him; he was showing the apostles, who were his church, what their own path should be and how they should happily embrace the vocation of suffering and persecution. This is also the destiny of the church just as it was for Christ. But the apostles were frightened.

The dialogue among the apostles makes quite clear how imperfect they still were. You heard how James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the two most fiery disciples, the ones Christ called «Boanerges» or «sons of thunder» (Mark 3:17), told Christ that they had something to propose to him. When Christ, who knew their hearts, bade them speak, they told him, «Master, when you are in your glory, we want you to allow us to sit beside you, one at your right and the other at your left». Jesus replied, «You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?» That's an Eastern expression which means: can you endure the tribulations I am going to endure? Jesus further asked them, «Can you be baptized with the baptism with which I am going to be baptized?» The original meaning of baptism was immersion; in baptism by immersion a person is dunked in a pool and then taken

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Message at the Closure of the International Marian Congress in Zaragoza», 21 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 October 1979).

out. Christ was referring to baptism in that sense, being submerged in the sea of suffering. The apostles told him, «Yes, we can drink this cup and submerge ourselves in that sea». Then Christ told them, «Well, you will drink the cup and you will suffer. That will surely happen, but what you're asking for, the glory of political power inspired by the vanity of your hearts, does not depend on me» (Mark 10:35-40). Everything is already determined by God's design. The vocation and the place of each person is already fixed. We would be acting very badly if we sought what we desire and refused to accept what God desires of us.

After Christ had analyzed the disciples' desire and the need to adjust it, he spoke to them some very wise words, «The rulers over the nations lord it over them, and those in high positions oppress them. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many» (Mark 10:41-45). This is the church's mission. It is a mission that follows after Christ valiantly. It imitates Christ by saying, «I have not come seeking privileges or honors or things that appeal only to vanity. I have come to serve». That's why today's first reading presents us with the prophecy of Christ as the Servant of God, the one who serves and gives his life as the greatest proof of service. «In my kingdom you will not be distinguished because you sit at my right or at my left but because you serve others out of love». This is the church's vocation of service. For Christ it meant a painful death to pay for the sins of humankind, as we are told in today's first reading, «By his suffering the people were acquitted of all their crimes» (Isa 53:10-11).

Regarding the vocation of the church in Latin America, Puebla has a text that is very important for this precise moment in El Salvador: «The church desires to remain free of opposing systems in order to opt solely for human beings. Whatever the misfortunes or sufferings that afflict our people, they will find their way toward a better future, not through violence or power games or political systems, but through the truth about human reality. Grounded in true humanism, Christians will find encouragement to overcome the alternative of violence and to contribute to building a new civilization that is just, fraternal, and open to transcendence. Such a civilization will also bear witness to the eschatological hopes that give vitality and meaning to our human hopes» (P 551).

Puebla continues: «For this bold and creative activity....» What adjectives could be more fitting! Today we don't want Christians who are timid, passive, herd-like. All Christians must be boldly and creatively active. «For this bold and creative activity», Puebla says, «Christians should fortify their identity with the basic values of Christian anthropology» (P 552). In other words, Christians have to learn to see human beings from the perspective of Christianity. If human beings are seen that way, then there won't be enemies preying on people; there won't be torture; there won't be disrespect; there won't be inequalities. Christian anthropology is notable for its absence in the unjust system in which we now live.

«The church has no need to depend on systems or ideologies in order to love and defend humanity and to collaborate in human liberation. At the center of the message of which the church is both trustee and herald, she finds inspiration for promoting fraternity, justice, and peace; for opposing all forms of domination, slavery, and discrimination; and for condemning attacks on religious liberty, aggression against human beings, and everything that constitutes an assault on human life» (P 552).

Let us hold on to these and not forget them: the church has no need to depend on systems or ideologies. At the center of her message is to be found the inspiration of Christian anthropology. So we shouldn't be striving for an atheistic or Marxist type of liberation, nor should we seek liberation brought to us by «national security» or capitalism. Right here in the bosom of El Salvador we need to discover, by the light of our Christian faith, the kind of society El Salvador truly needs and then make it a reality! (Applause)

The pope's message for this Day of Missions says something similar: «It is therefore clear that the renewal promoted by evangelizing activity, though essentially spiritual, goes straight to the heart of the serious and disturbing problem of the economic and social injustices and imbalances which afflict a very large part of humankind. And it can contribute to a solution of the problem. Evangelization and human development, though remaining clearly distinct, are linked to one another with indissoluble bonds»<sup>5</sup>.

For those of you who dream of a spiritualistic religion that is not concerned about politics or the things of the world, here you have the pope's thoughts regarding the missions. Precisely because Christians are called to religious and spiritual transcendence, they are better equipped to orient society toward human justice and to decry the sins of humankind. Christians are thus more enlightened than any ideology when it comes to helping people to be creative and bold. Have no fear of politics! Have no fear of social transformations! (Applause)

This Day of Missions is a marvelous time to consider how El Salvador has received this message brought by missionaries and has tried to make it a concrete reality for our own day and age. On this Mission Sunday of 1979 we need to hear this message and apply it to the politics of the present moment in order to be authentic Christians and not fall into the traps on either side. (Applause)

### **The nation's crisis and the sins of the people**

The second reflection concerns the crisis of the nation and the sins of the people. I already mentioned to you the key thought in the pope's message for this Day of Missions: «Mission means not the destruction of values but the reassuming and rebuilding of values»<sup>6</sup>. In the readings we heard today I find a clear indication of the roots of our crises and the sins of the people. In this second point, then, let us use the word of God to throw light on the reality of our Salvadoran crisis. Let us hope that we can discreetly define the church's position regarding the present moment in El Salvador.

Today's gospel tells us about two ambitious disciples (Mark 10:37). We might call them «opportunists», the kind of people that seek out the most important posts when there's a coup d'état. (Applause) In the gospel Christ also talks about the sinfulness of the authorities: «The rulers of the nations lord it over them, and those in high positions oppress them» (Mark 10:42). Do you see how Christ uses harsh words to denounce the sins of his time, the abuses of authority and force and money, everything that gives some people power over others? Often social and economic power and authority are not used for the common good; they are used to oppress and tyrannize. This is clearly stated in today's gospel.

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<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Message for the World Day of Missions», 14 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (16 September 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The first reading speaks of how the death of Christ is the expression of the sins of his people. We see there the image of the dead Christ on the cross, all his blood poured out upon our people. We see how the people's sins and the crimes find expression precisely in death. «He dies for the sins of the people», says Isaiah (Isa 53:11).

The second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, tells us that Christ understands our weaknesses because he suffered in the flesh; he identified with us in everything except sin (Heb 4:15). Sin degrades the human person. Christ identified not with sin but with human beings, in order to save them. Sin is the antithesis of Christ. Let us therefore use these biblical themes to analyze what has been happening among us during this very dense and intense week.

### Events of the week

The right to insurrection has been invoked, and in fact the seventh article of our constitution states that peoples have the right to rebel when the common good is endangered by tyrannical rule.

In my pastoral letter I recalled that principle when I state, «The encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI, cited by the Medellín conference, mentions the classical teaching of Catholic theology according to which insurrection is legitimate in the very exceptional circumstances of an evident and prolonged tyranny that gravely limits individual rights and seriously damages the common good of the country, whether this proceeds from one person or from clearly unjust structures» (PP 31; M 2,19)<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, I believe that the conditions for an insurrection actually existed in El Salvador. It is not the church's role to say when an insurrection should occur; she simply proposes the theological principle. When people experienced in politics and all those who can manage an insurrection believe that the conditions that the church stipulates are met—and in this case they were met—we have the case of a legitimate insurrection. This then is the first position of the church: we have every right to insurrection, and this insurrection was legitimate. (Applause)

Given this situation, the archdiocese issued a «Pastoral Call» on Tuesday, which it insisted was «a reflection of faith rather than a political statement»<sup>8</sup>. Thus, we lifted ourselves in prayer to God to thank him for his blessings, to ask for his inspiration, to call sinners to repentance, and to offer God the many sacrifices made by our people in the hope that they were sufficient payment for the liberation our people have so earnestly desired.

I then addressed the people and asked them to remain calm. Being calm is not cowardice. One radio station said that I had blessed the coup d'état. I protest that kind of manipulation of the truth. (Applause) What I asked of the people was calm, hope, and understanding. Concretely, I addressed both the extremism of the right and the extremism of the left. The extremists of the right, thinking their privileges endangered, can execute a counter-coup in order to maintain the unjust situation. I told them that they had to pay heed to the voice of justice and the demands of the poor. (Applause) And I told the extremists of the left

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<sup>7</sup> *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 74.

<sup>8</sup> «A Pastoral Call Regarding the New Situation of the Country», 16 October 1979, in *Orientación* (21 October 1979).

that it was unwise to pass judgment before seeing what has actually happened and that taking premature action would be extremely ill-advised. Violence in this situation would not be legitimate insurrection because there is still a path open for peaceful negotiation. Some of them, however, obstinately refused to accept any path but the one they determine to be correct. I stated that at this moment it would be a grave sin against the common good to refuse to make an effort to negotiate with other parties for the welfare of the country. What is needed is political maturity and reflection and not just the pursuit of a particular group's interests. (Applause)

Addressing the people on the part of the church, I told them not to be mistrustful. The church was maintaining her promise to serve the people. History has taught us that, if there is conflict between government and church, it is not because the church is in political opposition to the government but because a conflict exists between the government and the people, and the church defends the people. (Applause) So I want to reaffirm the objectives of the church in order to avoid any mistrust, even among those who want to entangle the church or discredit her in the people's eyes. It is calumny to affirm that the church has blessed any particular movement. The church does not identify with any movement or any political party or any organization. She is autonomous, and she is willing to go it alone as long as she is defending the Lord. (Applause)

Finally, I addressed the officials of the new government. The proclamation they issued that morning seemed to contain a program that coincided with the people's aspirations<sup>9</sup>. Naturally, it can be improved, but we don't want to be given just promises. We're expecting deeds. (Applause) If the deeds show that the government is meeting the aspirations of the people, then we'll be able to engage in frank dialogue and collaborate with them for the good of the people. (Applause)

That position remains firm, but now I want to speak about what happened subsequently. Some members of the governing junta seem to me to deserve our full confidence, but this is not a matter of personal opinion. I am not the one who can give legitimacy to the new government; it is the people who must judge. (Applause) And the people *will* judge on the basis of the actions, the spirit, and the effectiveness of the new junta. (Applause)

I want to make this clear so that there is no misunderstanding regarding dialogue. The principal interlocutor of the church in any dialogue is the people. And the principal interlocutor with whom the government should dialogue is not the church hierarchy; it is also the people. (Applause) In speaking about «interlocutors» or «protagonists», my intention is to tell the people that *they* are the principal protagonists of the structural changes that they so urgently needed. (Applause) We are therefore insisting that the government never try to act behind the backs of the people. Rather, let them identify with the people as they have promised to do, and let their actions speak the truth. They should sound out the real feelings of the people in order to understand their needs and give them what they require and what they request. (Applause)

There were also many hopeful promises in Tuesday's proclamation and in the press conference. For example, the proclamation spelled out four very valid reasons for the

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<sup>9</sup> «Proclamation of the Armed Forces of El Salvador» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (16 October 1979) and *El Diario de Hoy* (17 October 1979).

insurrection: «First, the previous government has violated the human rights of people; second, it has generated and tolerated corruption in public administration and in justice; third, it has created a veritable economic and social disaster; and fourth, it has profoundly discredited the country and the noble institution of the armed forces»<sup>10</sup>.

Other compelling statements added further depth to these motives, such as the following phrases heard in the press conference: «Achieving a new, more just society of solidarity that rejects all actions characteristic of a decadent society». «Significant participation of the church, which has been castigated because of her defense of human rights». And this very eloquent phrase: «We want to do in a Salvadoran way that which we as Salvadorans must do». The author of all these phrases, Mr. Mayorga Quirós, said this: «We call upon God to grant us a climate of justice and peace so that we can forge a new and better country. May God help us to put aside irrational hatred and avarice!»<sup>11</sup> At the press conference Colonel Majano also stated, «We have a new, different government that will show that it has broken with the past. Human life will be respected as the most essential element of our common social life», and so on<sup>12</sup>. In my own statement, however, I said the following: «We want to make it very clear that this government will deserve the confidence and collaboration of the people only when it demonstrates that its admirable promises are not empty words but are reasons for true hope»<sup>13</sup>.

There is therefore a fourth point in the church's position. We must deplore certain actions of the security forces this week as seriously compromising those splendid promises. There was a very brutal removal of the workers who were on strike at APEX, ARCO, DIANA, LIDO, and DURAMAS. Even though the authorities have already released the sixty-eight workers who were arrested, they must still seek ways to resolve the conflict between labor and management, which remains without a solution. The extremely violent removal of the workers provoked protesters to set fire to three other factories that were also on strike, and there were deaths and injuries as a result.

We must also deplore the raiding of the church and convent in Soyapango and the arrest and maltreatment of the pastor, Father Modesto Villarán. I express my solidarity with the statements issued by the vicariate and the parish communities of Soyapango<sup>14</sup>. They are demanding the immediate release of the sacristan, Tomás Flores, who until now has not been seen, even though some people saw him wounded. They also demand economic compensation for the damage done and the money stolen, and they want the things confiscated to be returned. Finally, they want the armed forces to explain publicly what actually happened.

We have here also an appeal from our Legal Aid Office: «We earnestly request of the governing junta the thorough report demanded by archdiocesan representatives concerning the military operations carried out in Mejicanos, Cuscatancingo, and San Marcos, with regard to the persons captured, wounded, and killed». (They say that there are more than thirty dead and many more wounded.) «We are especially interested in knowing the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (19 October, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> «A Pastoral Call Regarding the New Situation of the Country», 16 October 1979, in *Orientación* (21 October 1979).

<sup>14</sup> *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.

whereabouts of Tomás Flores, sacristan of the parish of Soyapango. Finally, we ask for the formal return of the items seized by the security forces on October 16 in the parish of Soyapango; a list of the items is attached<sup>15</sup>.

The National Guard carried out assaults in Arcatao as well, killing Ernesto Menjívar and arresting Elías Pineda simply because they heard him deploring the death of Mr. Menjívar. They also arrested Antonio Miranda of Tepeque. The three men were found dead. Still another contingent arrived on Tuesday, closing off the town and intimidating the nearby districts. In Las Lomas, they arrested the youth Santiago Ayala, who reportedly also appeared dead. A helicopter and other military vehicles were sowing terror. On Wednesday night at eight o'clock they carried out arbitrary searches of houses. The soldiers entered the convent in Arcatao and searched it. It is still not known whether they respected the property. Finally, they arbitrarily arrested Don Esteban Blanco Castillo in Tecoluca.

When these denunciations were presented to the new government, they explained to us that some things had escaped their control. They also told us that some of those responsible for these actions were punished by dismissal and that an intense effort was being made to purge the army and create a new mentality. We believe that this purging of the army and especially of the security forces is an urgent matter if they want to regain the credibility that has been lost with the people. (Applause) We also hope that they use very strict criteria in appointing military officials. (Applause) Some appointments have already created an unfavorable impression<sup>16</sup>. One phrase I heard was, «It's the same thing all over again».

While speaking thus about the military, we unfortunately cannot forget the civil sector. It's sad to say, sisters and brothers, but we can't blame only the military for the misfortunes of our people; there are also civilians who have caused great losses in our present situation. (Applause) Recalling that scene in the gospel of the opportunistic disciples seeking important posts (Mark 10:35-37), I want to advise you that there are plenty of opportunistic strivers in our own society. But this is all part of the challenge that the people are presenting to the new government. (Applause) My criticism is not meant to be destructive. I've already mentioned the hope inspired by the junta's promises and the respect I have for their persons, but what the people expect is action. Our denunciations should challenge the junta to be truly alert in choosing the individuals, whether soldiers or civilians, who will give a new face to the government. (Applause) And we do well here to tell both the military and civilians that this is a moment for sincere conversion in El Salvador. Creating new structures will be of no use at all if there are not new men and women to manage them. People don't trust changes that are only structural. No, all of us, including hierarchs and Christians, have to carry out a profound review of our lives and make the changes necessary to meet the demands of justice and love in our country. (Applause)

The fifth point of the church's position on our nation's crisis is this: another urgent challenge for the government is to make amends for the abuse of human rights. This same request is also made in the letter of Legal Aid that I already mentioned: «At the archbishop's request, we respectfully send you the list of political prisoners and disappeared

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<sup>15</sup> «Solidaridad» in *Orientación* (28 October 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Three days after the coup d'état, Colonel José Guillermo García was named Minister of Defense, Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila was named director of the National Police, and Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova was named director of the National Guard. *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 and 19 October 1979).

persons who are known to have been arrested by one of the security forces, with the firm hope that they will be freed as soon as possible. We include not only those in public prisons but also those in the prisons of the security forces or those in the clandestine prisons of the previous regime. At the very least we request information about the whereabouts of these persons since their families are constantly asking about them. They have been doing so with even greater insistence in recent days since the governing junta proclaimed a general amnesty for all deprived of their freedom for political motives».

There would appear to be goodwill in the junta's proposal to form a commission to investigate the cases of disappeared persons so as to provide information to their families and other interested parties. But I insist that goodwill is not enough. A commission that is separate from government agencies is not the most effective way to find those still surviving. Presumably they are being kept in secret places which will be found more easily if the security forces are obliged to provide information on the whereabouts of the 176 people who have disappeared. (Applause) The archdiocese can give proof of these arrests. The investigation should not start out by asking *whether* there are disappeared persons. That is quite evident! There *are* disappeared persons! (Applause) What the people need to know is where they are and what has been done with them. (Applause)

It is also imperative to punish the intellectual and material perpetrators of the tortures and the disappearances, both those directly and those indirectly involved. (Applause) As an incentive, penalties should be reduced for those who help to reveal the whereabouts of the disappeared. In this way they can help undo the great evil they have committed. (Applause) There is no intention here of naming specific persons. Everyone knows the identity of the directors of the security forces who can be brought before the courts; everyone knows who should be called on to make declarations. In this matter I don't think it is a question of breaking with the past. If the past was unjust and if people are still suffering its painful consequences, then the existing laws must be used to judge the ways in which those laws were abused. Breaking with the past would mean forgetting those sufferings, and that would truly be a new injustice. (Applause)

Some mothers have sent me the following statement, which seems to me to speak clearly of suffering and injustice.

In light of the offer of general amnesty for political prisoners proclaimed by the present Revolutionary Governing Junta, the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons of El Salvador states the following. Although this offer has still not been spelled out, we hope that positive actions will give substance to what was requested by the leaders of the Committee of Mothers in their recent visit to the Casa Presidencial. However, we are saddened by the slowness and the complexity of the procedures to be followed for obtaining the freedom of our children. Our cries as mothers are supported by the faithful testimony of the Salvadoran people, who realize that the rights of their best sons and daughters have been trampled on and that this situation should not continue for even one day longer. The people also recognize that, even though this evil has been inherited from past regimes, the Revolutionary Governing Junta now has the responsibility for making concrete, unavoidable decisions regarding the release of the political prisoners. Only by making those decisions will they demonstrate that they have broken all ties with the previous governments. Therefore, in light of the offer of general amnesty for political prisoners proclaimed by the

Revolutionary Governing Junta, we mothers of the Committee repeat our plea that you inform us of the day, the hour, and the place where we should go to receive our beloved children. (Applause)

The new government should be grateful for all these suggestions and incentives. I would like to read to you another letter I received that expresses well the anxiety that exists in the midst of hope.

These are times when the blood of our martyrs can finally produce fruit so that the light of truth will rise above the clouds of darkness. These are times when we should all admit and repent of the errors we have committed. But there is still no sign of the reparation which in justice is due to a people as noble and longsuffering as ours and to the our admirable guides and leaders. The social means of communication, especially the radio and the newspapers, owe this people a clear explanation for their complicity in the murderous and corrupt ways of the previous government. (Applause) It is difficult to forget the cunning attacks, the ignominious calumnies, the vile accusations, and the cowardly offenses that these media facilitated against honorable institutions and persons, faithful collaborators of the church, and concretely against the dignity of the archbishop. Taking advantage of the opportunity to profit from the same corruption, these media permitted the publication of the rants of a powerful, wealthy minority that hid behind phantom persons, groups, and institutions. It is the duty of the written and spoken press, by virtue of the noble mission it has, to reveal the identity of the persons who are responsible for these crimes. (Applause) The whole Salvadoran people, especially Catholics, are awaiting a statement that will clarify and define the attitude of the mass media. The silence they have observed until now in this regard reveals their ideological complicity with the previous regime and with those sectors of society that are still opposed to the people and to a new homeland where the people can live in love and justice and peace. (Applause)

Another valuable letter that I want to make known to you suggests a way to test the good will of the new government. It states, «The present government should be asked to restore the fifty million *colones* that was taken away from other ministries and institutions in order to squander the money on armaments. (Applause) I also call for justice to be done in the cases of the seven priests who have been murdered, including Father Rodríguez»<sup>17</sup>. The fact is that until now only the UDN has made such a request<sup>18</sup>. I have not heard any other commentary in this regard. (Applause) Nevertheless, what Colonel Majano said is very instructive: «We do not want vengeance, but we do want justice». (Applause)

Another, more incisive notice, concerning the role of the government of the United States, appeared in *La Prensa Gráfica* on the seventeenth under the title, «United States Characterizes Coup in Country as Encouraging». The text reads, «The United States will consider renewing its military aid if the new junta improves the human rights situation». But it then goes on to ask, «Are they going to forget what the pope requested for poor countries on

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<sup>17</sup> The reference is to Father Nicolás Rodríguez, who was murdered in Chalatenango in December 1970 when he was on his way to attend to a sick person. At first his death was considered a common crime, but «subsequently it was understood to be a political crime, committed with the aim of intimidating all the clergy». See RIVERA DAMAS, A., «The Pastoral Work of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, Especially the Ecclesial Base Communities and their Work for Justice—and Persecution within that Context», ECA 348-349 (1977) 809.

<sup>18</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 October 1979).

his recent visit? We are sick and tired of arms and bullets. (Applause) The hunger we have is for justice, medicine, education, and effective programs of equitable development. If human rights are truly respected, then weapons and other instruments of death will be the last thing we need». (Applause)

I repeat that my intention in all these matters is to encourage and support the aspirations of the new government in following the true path of justice and attending to the desires of the people. It is the people who must judge. The government will therefore do well to guarantee security by walking on the path of justice.

At the same time we do not approve the irresponsible and precipitous actions of the ERP and the LP-28 in calling for a popular insurrection last Tuesday and Wednesday and then giving arms to those who responded to their call. By doing this they caused the death of at least thirty-one persons and the wounding of eighty others. (Applause) We have since been informed that they have now desisted from this rash approach and are willing to collaborate and to act with greater political maturity. For their part, the security forces need to learn to control these aborted attempts of insurrection in less violent ways. I repeat that insurrection is allowed only when all reasonable means have been exhausted. Speaking at the OAS, the pope said something very instructive: «In Latin America there is no situation that cannot be resolved through peaceful negotiations». Today in El Salvador it is within our power to do this, as the pope suggested, and all of us have the duty to collaborate generously. As long as all peaceful means are not clearly exhausted and as long as the just demands I mentioned are being met, no one has the right to promote further insurrections or to declare that the present insurrection is ineffective.

So I appeal to all of you—not just to the political groups but also to all the professionals and to all men and women who are able to help the situation. As I said in the call I issued, we have to build, among all of us, a common platform of justice to serve as the foundation for the true monument of national peace<sup>19</sup>.

The final point of my position is this: while there is an urgent need for change and for solving our many problems, we should not pronounce a definitive judgment about government policies before allowing the junta a reasonable time to organize the government and begin to act. (Applause)

At this time, we must deplore the assassination of Colonel Martell at the hands of the FPL.

As a service to the people I want to thank the newspaper that offered an explanation of the state of siege, which many people are confused about<sup>20</sup>. It poses the question, for example: «What consequences result from the suppression of guarantees? One of them is that, when the guarantees are suspended, it is the military tribunals that deal with cases of treason, espionage, rebellion, sedition, and other crimes against the peace and independence of the state». Another practical question is this: «Can people enter and leave the country during a state of siege? In general terms, yes, they can, but the authorities have the

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<sup>19</sup> «A Pastoral Call Regarding the New Situation of the Country», 16 October 1979, in *Orientación* (21 October 1979).

<sup>20</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (20 October 1979).

legal power to limit this right, that is, to prevent the entrance or departure of persons in special cases. They can also restrict movement within the country by means of a curfew». Another question: «Are social and cultural meetings and sporting events prohibited? No, but written permission should be requested at least forty-eight hours beforehand». One final question is very helpful because many communities have told me that they are confused about this and therefore afraid to meet together: «Is permission needed to attend sporting events and religious services? No, players and spectators can attend such events with no prior permission since sporting activities are authorized by the corresponding sports authorities. The same applies to religious activities. In other words, there are no restrictions for people participating in Mass, prayers, worship, and community meetings of the religion a person belongs to». Don't be confused about this because many people exaggerate, and there's no good reason for that.

### **Life of the church**

Continuing with information of an ecclesial nature, we share some of the great joys of the people of God. I rejoice to tell you that Mother Teresa of Calcutta has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I sent her the following telegram to congratulate her and also to thank all those who had desired this honor for myself. It states, «Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India. I am happy Nobel Prize awarded to you for preferential option for the poor as effective path for peace. Those generously desiring same honor for me are equally satisfied for having supported same cause. My blessings. The archbishop». (Applause)

I am also delighted with the human rights awards given by the Bruno Kreisky Foundation of Vienna. The recipients were Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez of Chile and Archbishop Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua. (Applause)

Our own church continues to receive expressions of solidarity such as this telegram from Holland: «During a meeting in Holland, we, the one hundred representatives of local Christian communities gathered together by the Council of Churches under the slogan, "The Power of the State Against the Force of the Church", have decided to inform you of our heartfelt union with your person, your church, and your people. We hope that your call for momentous social change will lead to social justice in your country. One Hundred Representatives of Christian Communities». (Applause)

Among these news items, I want to make known the appeal of the Carmelite Sisters of Divina Providencia Hospital. They still need 290,000 *colones* for their charitable project of building a home for the orphans of the sick women who die there. The Nobel Prize unfortunately went to India—otherwise the sisters would already have the funds they need! (Applause) But in India as well as in El Salvador, the way of the poor is the way of peace. I therefore beseech you: let us all help this great project for it will no doubt bring many blessings of peace upon our people. Likewise, I want to thank you for the generosity with which you're responding to the appeals of YSAX and the cathedral. The work is continuing with the help of many contributions from our people.

I want to conclude, dear sisters and brothers, by sharing with you news about the ecclesial life of our own archdiocese. In the vicariate of La Resurrección there was a beautiful confirmation ceremony for young people in the church of María Auxiliadora. The parish of San Juan in Cojutepeque had a wonderful event: a biblical contest among the students in the parish school. I want to send cordial congratulations to Father Mundo Brizuela and his

excellent collaborator, Don Luis Tarcisio Molina, as well as to the teachers at that exemplary school. In the church of San Ignacio I was pleased to preside over the graduation of the Colegio de la Sagrada Familia, and I take this occasion to congratulate again all the schools that have seen their efforts crowned with graduation. The day before yesterday in the parish of San Rafael Cedros we attended a gathering of the pastoral ministers, during which there was an exposition of the work of the sewing and culinary academy. At the school in the Barrio Lourdes, the Assumptionist Sisters celebrated a beautiful first communion. On October 15 the Carmelite Sisters celebrated their great patroness, Saint Teresa of Jesus; they say she is the protector of the coup d'état! Yesterday the Passionist Fathers and Sisters celebrated their founder, Saint Paul of the Cross, the great saint who left us a wonderful theology of suffering. Understanding this theology will help us not to protest futilely against suffering but rather to endow the cross and suffering with redemptive meaning. I want to remember with special affection the death this week of two great friends, Don Marcelo Weill and Don Joaquín Cuéllar. May the Lord grant them their eternal rest.

Lastly, the Legal Aid Office is inviting national and international journalists to a press conference tomorrow, Monday the twenty-second, at five o'clock in the afternoon in the Externado San José. Most of the families of the 176 political prisoners and disappeared persons will be there. Information about the capture and disappearance of these persons will be offered to the national and international press.

### **Christ as model and strength of the true human liberator**

On this Day of Missions, sisters and brothers, let us conclude with this final reflection of our homily: Christ as model and strength of the true human liberators. Today, as we declare that El Salvador needs men and women who are sincerely inspired to seek true liberation, we are encouraged by the pope's thoughts. He declares that this Day of Mission is the day when the universal church prays, meditates, and works so that all men and women will receive the message of Christ's living word as a message of hope, salvation, and total liberation<sup>21</sup>.

As we search today's readings for support for this thought, we find in Christ the model of the true liberator. So closely did Christ identify with the people that commentators on the Bible cannot tell whether the Servant of Yahweh proclaimed by Isaiah signified the suffering people or Christ who comes to redeem us (Isa 53:11). How beautiful it is when a liberator identifies so profoundly with the people that it is impossible to distinguish his cause from the people's cause!

Christ is the perfect model because by his incarnation he took upon himself the faults of the people. Instead of denouncing and reproaching others, he took on himself the sins and the weakness of everyone, and he carried them to the cross to pay God the debt that we owed. In him all of us sinners were pardoned. Christ felt moved to sacrifice for the sake of cleansing and creating a people worthy of God. He is the model of a person who genuinely seeks his glory in pursuing the liberation of his people.

At this time I urge all of us—the new government, the collaborators it is convoking, and all people of good will—to look to Christ and try to imitate him in our various

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<sup>21</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Message for the World Day of Missions», 14 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (16 September 1979).

responsibilities. Let us identify with the cause of the nation and be willing to die so that our people may be happy.

That is our strength, I say, because Christ did not come to be a demagogical liberator. «I have come», he says in today's gospel, «not to be served but to serve and to give my life for the people» (Mark 10:45). Christ gives his life so that we will all have eternal life.

Let us conclude with the superb perspective of the second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews. It speaks of Christ, the eternal Priest, who has entered into heaven wearing the mark of suffering. He understands the weaknesses of human beings, and so we can approach the throne of grace with confidence (Heb 4:14-16). He is ready to pour out the force of his salvation through this church that is us. We are not alone in our efforts to find liberation. The eternal Priest works with us, and we can go to him to be empowered and to be truly the liberators that our country needs at this time. Let it be so. (Applause)