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CHRISTIAN HOPE IS THE GREAT KEY TO OUR TRUE LIBERATION

Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

18 November 1979

Daniel 12:1-3

Hebrews 10:11-14,18

Mark 13:24-32

Esteemed messenger of the Christian love of millions of our brothers and sisters¹, please receive, with this applause of our beloved people, our gratitude and admiration for this gesture of ecumenical fraternity. On your return home, I want you to describe simply what you have seen and heard. Bear testimony there that with this people it is not hard to be a good shepherd. They are a people who powerfully attract to their service those of us who have been called to defend their rights and be their voice. That is why this ministry signifies for me not so much a service deserving profuse praise but a duty that fills me with profound satisfaction.

In thanking you and all those who organized the visit I was unable to make, I want to tell you that our church accepts your commitment to pray for us and to guarantee, as far as the Christian spirit allows, that that great power to the north truly supports our human rights. We feel a great impulse of enthusiasm as people and as church. We want to continue walking on the paths that Christ has marked out, the paths of dignity and freedom, the paths of human rights for every Salvadoran man and woman.

Dear sisters and brothers, Doctor Lara has called this celebration a «feast», and it truly is a feast. But let us also give it its proper name of «ecumenism», as the Second Vatican Council did. That's not a word the Council invented. A mutual striving for unity between Catholics and non-Catholics already existed, but the Council certainly gave it a great boost.

No one should be disturbed by this sincere and respectful partnership as the Catholic church stretches her arms toward the open arms of non-Catholic confessions. Our church has stated, with Christian honesty, that she will not betray the integrity of her own Catholic confession. She will, nonetheless, respect those confessions which, by God's design, do not share with us the fullness of Christian life as Catholicism conceives it.

This mutual esteem means respecting what our sisters and brothers profess in good conscience and as a result of study. Today we have heard a learned theologian address us, and his convictions certainly deserve all our respect. At the same time, we want to warn people

¹ Given the critical situation in El Salvador, Archbishop Romero decided to suspend his trip to New York, where he has been invited by the National Council of Churches of the United States. As a result, Presbyterian theologian Jorge Lara Braud visited El Salvador to transmit a message of solidarity in the name of the council. Before the homily Archbishop Romero ceded the microphone to Jorge Lara Braud, who ended his message with these words: «Archbishop, I have been going from one spiritual feast to another, but this is the greatest one of all, thanks to the invitation we extended to you. Thank you for not going! Thank you for staying with your people!»

about the danger of professions of faith that cannot be called sincere because they are mixed with fanaticism, opportunism, or resentment. Sadly, such are the professions made by many of our fellow Salvadorans, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

May our profession of faith be nourished by sincerity and by studious searching. May we all be convinced that we are truly searching for knowledge of the true God by means of God's sacred word. When we practice such sincerity, untainted by sin or by willful division, then God must give his blessing, for then we are living a truly Christian—and therefore ecumenical—spirituality, as the Council proclaims (UR 8).

Today's readings nourish precisely this common hope shared by Catholics and Protestants. What is more, there may be with us this morning some persons of the Jewish religion, who do not even believe in Christ. In this regard the first reading, from the Old Testament, also provides guidance for the theme that inspires our reflections. In fact, even if we didn't believe in God, we would be able to find in today's readings—which we know are the word of God—an appeal to the goodwill of all people, which is an appeal the Council makes as well. Even in non-Christian locales there are what the theologians call «seeds of the word», dispersed rays of divine revelation, for the Spirit of God alights also in the hearts of atheists and non-believers. God is the author of all, and glimmers of God undoubtedly appear in every man and every woman, even when they don't recognize them or even admit the existence of God.

The longing referred to in today's readings is the pulse of the human will; it is the sound of the longing called hope. Joyful hope is now a great virtue in our country, for we are in a difficult situation where many people have lost all hope. The word of the Lord responds to our goodwill by telling us that we must nourish hope. This message of hope is one we want to understand better on this thirty-third Sunday of the Catholic liturgical year. We are very near the end of the year, so the liturgical context speaks to us about the coming end. Next Sunday, consecrated to Christ the King, will be the final Sunday, crowning the whole of our liturgical reflection. What we're attending today, therefore, is a kind of end-of-year celebration, but instead of seeing things come to a definitive end, we are moved by the ebb and flow of things and of time to strongly embrace Christian hope amid all the vicissitudes of life.

Therefore the title I want to give my homily this morning is this: «Christian Hope Is the Great Key to Our True Liberation». It is the great key to our true liberation because Christian hope is based on three great convictions: first, the goal of our hope is the kingdom of God; second, the force for our hope is liberation in the Son of God; and third, that goal and that dynamic force correspond to attitudes that make convinced Christians into valiant liberators of the people.

The goal of our hope is the kingdom of God

The goal of our hope is the kingdom of God. Today's gospel describes the concerns many Christians had shortly after Christ had died and risen. They felt that the kingdom that Christ had announced was very close at hand, and many were tempted to think it was coming soon. But Christ had told them that not even the Son knew the hour or the day (Mark 13:32). The pastors during those first years of Christianity worked hard to explain to Christians that that strong sense of the kingdom's nearness was intended to keep them living in expectation. That's what Christian faith is: a tension called hope. It means hoping in Christ, who has promised that

he will return. It is what we always repeat in our Mass: «Come, Lord Jesus!» The Christian people keep moving forward, encouraged by hope in the kingdom of God.

The passage from the Gospel of Saint Mark that was read today is set in the last days of Christ's life. One day, as he was leaving the temple for Bethany, where they were hosting him with gracious hospitality, he admired the construction of the temple of Jerusalem. It must have been in the afternoon, when the sun was glancing off that mountain of marble that made the famous temple seem eternal and indestructible, an appropriate symbol of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. But listen to what Christ told the apostles as they stood in awe before that marvelous building: «I tell you that no stone of this temple will be left upon another». Astounded, the apostles asked him, «When will this be, Lord?» (Mark 13:2,4). In reply to their question Christ gave the famous eschatological discourse, which is what this speech of Christ is called, one of the longest preserved in this gospel. The discourse is called «eschatological» because it is about the last times, the end of time. That's what «eschatological» means: what is ultimate and definitive.

Christ sees in the temple the image or the symbol of the history of Israel, a people to whom God had promised eternal protection. But now Christ was saying that no stone of that temple would be left upon another. His prophecy was not referring to the symbolic temple but to that concrete temple that was undeserving of immortality, precisely because it had also become the symbol of the people's betrayal of their God. Thirty years after Christ spoke these words, the armies of the Roman empire crushed a Jewish insurrection by destroying the temple and the whole of Jerusalem. They even brought in mechanical devices to make sure no stone was left upon another.

After predicting the destruction of the temple Jesus speaks of the destruction of the universe. The universe itself is not definitive, not the sun, not the moon, not the stars—they also will cease to shine. Everything will pass away. «Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away» (Mark 13:31). His word is the only thing that will remain. Christ was speaking here of universal destruction, and the gospel captures his message with apocalyptic language. The apocalyptic style was much favored by biblical authors; it sometimes referred to historical realities by using symbolic numbers that could be understood only by a select group of people. That's why we don't fully understand the book of the Apocalypse and all those other writings using eastern images, but we do understand what Christ meant to say.

Christ is using the symbol of the temple's destruction and the prophecy of stars falling from the sky to tell us about the events that will prepare the world for eternity. What stands out especially in today's gospel is Christ's statement: «Then they will see the Son of Man coming with great power and majesty, and he will send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds» (Mark 13:26-27). This is the important thing for us to realize as we end the liturgical year: by being united with Christ we are the «elect». We become the elect when we freely cling to the Lord, who will not pass away. We are *not* the elect when, instead of clinging to the eternal Lord, we cling to idols, which will pass away along with heaven and earth.

That is why the church insists so much on preaching the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ. This naturally creates in the human heart a virtue called hope, which is a theological virtue that unites us with God. By this virtue we hope for things which by their nature would be unattainable if it were not for God's promise. God's promise alone is the basis for hope; otherwise it would be madness. Since people without faith cannot understand the

nature of the divine promise made to us, they believe our hopes are in vain, and so they seek to build a kingdom on earth. We understand, rather, that what is primary is the kingdom of God that Christ came to establish in our time, and so we say that the seeds of eternity are already there in the human hearts that hope and believe in our Lord, the eternal Jesus Christ.

The second reading also presents us with the same tension between the temporal and the eternal. It tells us that after completing his sacrifice Christ «sits at the right hand of God»—that is a biblical image meaning that he participates in God’s power—«and he waits until his enemies are placed beneath his feet» (Heb 10:12-13). In other words, Christ exists in an eternal, immutable situation that can suffer no harm. Meanwhile, the waves of history roll over the earth for as long as it takes for God to submit human sinfulness to the power of his kingdom. The victory of his kingdom is certain, and blessed are those who wait for this time to pass. What is needed is for the sins of the world to be placed under the feet of God’s kingdom. Those living in sin or mired in a situation of sin, injustice, and disorder will pass away, along with the heaven and earth that are passing away.

The beautiful passage from Daniel in the first reading is quite remarkable because it is the first reference in the Old Testament to the great mystery of the resurrection of human beings. It would be good for us this morning to consider what must have inspired the prophet Daniel when he wrote this passage that was read today as the first reading: «Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting disgrace. The wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who led many to justice shall be like the stars for all eternity» (Dan 12:2-3).

This revelation concerning resurrection arose among the people of Israel even though they didn’t have a clear idea of what existed beyond death. They believed in some kind of survival, but it was beneath the earth in some reduced form. When the Jews suffered persecution during the time of the Maccabees, however, they began to reason, «It is not just that this nation survive only as a collective people. All those who fight for its liberation must also have some personal participation in the kingdom of heaven». Remember when we quoted here one day an atheist who said, «I’m not satisfied with a communal idea of revolution, one in which some people die while the survivors go on to enjoy what was won by the suffering of the dead who no longer exist. There has to be a reward for every person who fights. A revolution that’s simply collective is not acceptable». Christians have great respect for the conscience of every individual, and they confess that all humans will receive their just reward. This idea emerged vaguely in the earlier revelation, but it was only in the New Testament that Christ announced with noonday clarity that after our death there is immortality. It was during times of persecution that the two options described in the first reading became defined: «They shall awake from the dust, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting disgrace» (Dan 12:2). It is not the same immortal fate that awaits those who have done injustice and those who have suffered injustice, the oppressors and the oppressed. The martyrs and heroes of earth’s great battles will be the victors if they have placed their hope and trust in God. The victory will be theirs even if, to all appearances, they have died in silent suffering and ignominy.

We should also be encouraged by the way God teaches us through the prophets. According to this reading from Daniel, the persecution of those days would pass by, and then would come God’s kingdom, the most glorious thing humans could hope for. Nevertheless, a hundred years passed before Christ came to offer another redemption and another resurrection. Someone might say that God is deceptive. But no, this is the way a father teaches

a son who's accompanying him on a long trip. To encourage the boy, the father tells him about how beautiful the city is to which they're traveling, but the child still gets bored. Then the father begins to tell him, «Look, as soon as we reach the top of the next hill, we'll see the beautiful place I described». When they reach the hilltop, the father tells the boy, «It's just a little farther, right over there». That's the same way the prophets were leading the people, and the church follows that pedagogy of the prophets. That's why the church cannot say, «Yes, this political system that has been achieved with so much bloodshed is now the definitive one!» No, the church cannot undertake to define the kingdom of God here on earth. She continues to encourage the liberation forces; she continues to advocate better government; she continues to campaign for better political systems. But the church is not political but inspirational. The church is the father who leads his boy a little farther, and then a little farther, to keep his hopes alive. In political terms this is what is known as aiming to make the systems ever more perfect.

An atheistic system is therefore blind when it offers people a paradise on earth—it doesn't exist. Beyond all our efforts there is God. Perfection will come only beyond death, with the definitive liberation of immortality. That doesn't mean that we should stop working, draw apart, and die, nor does it mean that we should conform to the system. The first Christians railed against the attitude of people who didn't work because they expected heaven to come any minute. Saint Paul stated it bluntly enough, «Those who don't work shouldn't eat» (2 Thes 3:10). In other words, hoping for heaven shouldn't encourage laziness. People must work and follow the vocations they have. All of us must make an effort here on earth to improve our political, social, and economic situations, but always with our eyes set on eternity. Hope encourages us to create here earthly reflections of the beauty, the justice, and the love of God's kingdom. Still, they will simply be reflections because hope holds back what is ultimate and definitive and so encourages us to work harder.

Christian hope is a proper virtue for politicians and for all those who struggle. Without hope in God earthly forms of liberation remain truncated. Without hope for eternity earthly liberation results simply in a change of masters. We have no confidence in atheists who have no faith in God but seek after power thinking only of the blessings of this earth. They cannot offer an earthly paradise because such doesn't exist. What does exist is the hope that by working hard we can make the earth a better place. That is why the church nourishes your hope, sisters and brothers. She doesn't rely on analysis of political systems and strategies, but she does encourage all systems and strategies not to get sidetracked but to stay always on the road leading to true liberation, a liberation that will be found only within the horizon pointed out by today's revelation.

The power for our hope is liberation in Christ

My second thought is this: the power for our hope is liberation in Christ. Complete liberation is not within our reach because, as we've repeated a thousand times, true liberation is not simply a matter of better wages, lower prices, and changes in governments and systems. Those are temporal forms of liberation; they are part of the total liberation. The church does not discount them but sees them as very partial. Of course, the church points out the causes of the injustices that exist. Why is there violence in El Salvador? Why are people discontent? Why are the people's demands quite justified? Why is it selfish for some to control everything and not think of others? Certainly, these are phases of liberation, but they are not total liberation.

As we wrote in our pastoral letter, we support the political pressure that the people's political organizations exercise, and we support the just demands of these organizations. At the same time we reproach those organizations when they abuse their power and when they use their demands as demagogic banners instead of genuinely struggling for the people's liberation. We criticize their deficiencies and support the good things they do because we realize that earthly forms of liberation have a root that only faith can discover, and they have a goal that only hope can discover. The root is sin, and the goal is the kingdom of God. The root is sin because sin produces selfishness, social injustice, and violence. All these are the fruit of sin. And the goal is beyond history and beyond all these earthly forms of liberation because human beings cannot be content with finding happiness on earth. They aspire to ultimate freedom, to life without death, to the matchless dignity of being children of God. Who then leads us to these depths, and who raises us to these heights? Only Christ. Without Christ there is no true liberation.

The marvelous thing about today's readings is that they reveal God's free initiative at work in the great successes that come after the conflicts in Daniel and after the destruction of the universe announced by Christ. Our hope is based on what God has promised. We don't have to put pressure on God so that things will turn out the way we hope. God is free. He has freely offered to free us from our sins, and he has also promised to bestow on us the dignity of children of God. In today's readings we find that only God's power can do all this. «No one knows the day or the hour or the manner», said Christ; «only the Father knows» (Mark 13:32).

The first reading tells us that when the people of God, inspired by their faith and confidence in God, were struggling for their freedom, they were closely accompanied by what the Old Testament calls the presence of God. Saint Michael the archangel was the power of God alongside his people, and it was only by this power that they could move forward (Dan 12:1).

I especially want to use the second reading to illustrate this second reflection, that we can hope for liberation only in Christ the Liberator. The letter to the Hebrews presents Christ to us as the reason for all our hope for liberation: «Other priests exercise their ministry daily because they can never take away sins. But Christ offered one single sacrifice for sins and took his seat at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated» (Heb 10:11-14). Notice the amazing way he uses these two verbs: «By one offering he has made perfect»—the past tense—«those who are being consecrated»—the present tense, indicating what is still happening. Christ has set things in motion, and blessed are those who take advantage of his initiative.

Christ has set redemption and liberation in motion through his sacrifice, which paid for our sins and obtained for us the heights of heaven and the everlasting friendship of God. By this force, therefore, all those who believe in him are being made perfect. Our hope should be great, knowing that we don't have to rely on our fragile reed and that our cries for liberation are not inspired by demagoguery that looks only to violence, weapons, and earthly things. Ours is a hope that is stronger than all violence.

Sometimes reporters ask me about those who believe that change will come about in El Salvador only through violence, the ones who think that history has always shown that demands are met only when backed up by violence. Let me now tell you my response to

the reporters. History is often violent because people have believed more in brute strength than in the love the Lord has given us. History is that way because people have still not made good use of all their energy, their intelligence, and their capacity for dialogue and understanding. It is good to remember this at the present time in El Salvador: only Christ and his love will produce the inspiration needed for things to change here in our country. If the only alternative is to seize by force what others don't want to give out of love, then we have to learn quickly this great lesson of the Gospel: we must place our faith and confidence in the only author and designer of our liberation, Christ our Lord.

That's why the pope said in his first papal discourse, «Open the doors to Christ, you who are politicians, leaders, business people, and rich moguls. Open the doors to Christ! He alone can bring redemption to humankind»². And those of you who are struggling from deep within the people's misery, from the pain of torture and atrocities, don't trust solely in your physical strength and your ingenuity. Bring these into play, but more than anything rely on Christ our Lord and his invincible love to obtain the freedom we strive for. (Applause)

The attitude of those who have hope

Let me bring this reflection to an end with my third thought, the attitude of those who have hope. Hope is not a passive attitude. I was telling you the other day that Puebla reminds us that there are two ways that people can react to what Latin Americans are facing, which is similar to what El Salvador is experiencing today (P 275). Some people react passively: they expect everything to come to them from God. They do nothing but lament and deplore the situation; they don't make a concrete move. Others, in contrast, are activists. They say, «God is very far away. Let us take care of things by ourselves». And from them come displays of violence, godless activities, and even crimes and bloodshed. That can't be the price of our redemption.

The Puebla document then goes on to indicate the way of the Gospel as taught by Christ, who placed his hope in God's providence (P 276). He believed that God clothed even the birds and the flowers and provided them with food (Luke 12:22-31). On the other hand, human beings were meant to be shapers of history. They were to collaborate with the Father, waiting on him and committing themselves wholeheartedly to his timing and to his will. When God asks of us a sacrifice, we say, «In you, Lord, I have placed my hope», and throw ourselves into the struggle with great confidence. God and people together make history. God saves each people within its own history. Whenever we Salvadorans search for the presence of God the Savior in our own history, then the history of El Salvador becomes the history of salvation.

The truly hopeful attitude of the faithful Christian is summed up by Christ at the end of his eschatological discourse when he insists that we «stay alert!» (Mark 13:33). In advising us to «be watchful», he uses comparisons like the one we heard today: «You know when spring is coming» (Mark 13:28). Here in El Salvador, where we have eternal spring, we don't notice these differences, but in the countries where the seasons are well defined, winter is a kind of death; it's as if all the trees have died. But when spring arrives, the plants come back to life; the leaves burst forth, and then come the flowers and the fruits. Christ says, «Observe carefully, for spring is drawing near» (Mark 13:28-29). He also says, «Take note of the times of God. You must wait for the moment when God passes by in order to collaborate

² JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the Inauguration of His Pontificate», 22 October 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (29 October 1979).

with him». At the very end of the discourse, which was not read today, Christ says, «Be like the servant who awaits his lord who is expected back at night. He doesn't know at what hour he will come, and so he doesn't sleep but keeps watching out for him. Or be like the owner of a house who's afraid that thieves will break in. He keeps watch because if he goes to sleep they may surprise him» (Mark 13:34-37). So we mustn't fall asleep, thinking God will do everything. He is coming now! Hope is what keeps alive our desire to collaborate with God. Hope is what gives us the assurance that if we do our part, God will do his part. And together we will save the country! (Applause)

In today's readings Christ and the prophet Daniel describe to us apocalyptic scenarios of destruction, suffering, and sorrow, but they are not saying that God will abandon his people. Someone might feel tempted to say, «God has abandoned us! God has left us alone!» but that is not true. I recently read a commentary that really impressed me; it explained these readings as describing «the pain of childbirth, not abandonment by God». The prophet Daniel speaks words that may well be applied to El Salvador today: «These are times of distress unlike any before, from the time nations began until now» (Dan 12:1). These times of distress are like the difficult time of a woman giving birth. Something new is born, and something passes away. That's the way of history. Those who want to make history something static, measurable by unfeeling instruments, have no idea what history is. Some people want to make everything happening in the country conform to their own criteria and molds; they are incapable of adjusting and evaluating their strategies, their systems, or their procedures to the country's new way of doing things. They don't understand that history is a mother giving birth. Something old is dying, and something new is always being born in history. Hopeful persons know that all the pains of the country, like all the pains and sufferings of a family, are the pains of a new creature being born. In the midst of these pains let us lift our hearts to God, who wants to use our pain and our suffering so that he with his omnipotence can work together with us in the salvation of our people. The times are difficult, but our church remains calm.

Life of the church

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, with the joy of belonging to a people nourished by hope, allow me now to make an evaluation of our week so that we can offer the country an authentic contribution from the church, as I do in my pastoral letter. It is all of us, you and I, who must nourish our Christian hope—solidly based on God's promise and Christ's payment—that our country is not lost, that God is with us, that Christ is the warrant for our faith and our hope, that God will save us. This is the hope that we must nourish in this people of God.

This coming Wednesday, November 21, a celebration of Our Lady of Peace will take place in San Miguel. In 1966 Pope Paul VI proclaimed her the principal patroness of the Republic of El Salvador. I urge you as Salvadorans, therefore, to pray insistently to her. Please attend the pontifical celebration at nine-thirty if you can. It would be good for many of us to be present there. As metropolitan, I've been invited to attend by the bishop of San Miguel, and I will go to render honors to the Blessed Virgin in the name of the archdiocese. No one should interpret my presence there in any other way. I go simply as a pastor who knows that Mary intercedes before God for the peace of this land, something we all must pray for.

This week the clergy of the vicariate of San José in Quezaltepeque made their retreat. I was with them, and I congratulated them for their efforts to renew themselves and enrich their priestly spirituality.

The vicariate of La Inmaculada in La Libertad organized a study session on the fourth pastoral letter. We were there yesterday with the priests, religious, and laity. Doctor Lara³ accompanied me and shared with us the ecclesiastical spirit that is being felt ever more profoundly in our communities.

Last Sunday we celebrated the feast of San Martín. I want to make known to you the excellent catechetical work and the youthful enthusiasm of that parish that is pastored by Father Rutílio Sánchez. Working there also are the Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, whom I had the pleasure of greeting.

The youth movements are quite outstanding in the Colonia Santa Lucia, and the adults there are also intensely involved in the life of the parish. I congratulate them.

In Candelaria, Cuscatlán, the people of Dulce Nombre de María celebrated their patronal feast, in which I accompanied their pastor, Father Interiano. I congratulated him for the flourishing parish school, which has been functioning for ten years now.

On Friday we had a wonderful liturgy for peace in this basilica. The participation of Doña Lidia Pineda and her message about peace made me very aware of how much you lay people can do when you are true agents of Christian peace in the midst of our people.

Yesterday in areas two and three of Reubicación, Chalatenango, we celebrated the feast of Saint Teresa. I was made aware that in that place there are around a thousand families living in provisional circumstances. We thank God, however, that religion is spreading much joy and much fervor among them, despite the poverty. I want to congratulate Father Efraín López and the Assumptionist Sisters who work there.

This afternoon we will bless a rural chapel in the parish of Santo Tomás.

I also want to express my delight with the vocational encounter for young people that is being held in the seminary during these days. They were expecting about fifty young people, and about a hundred arrived. Almost all of them are high school graduates who are discerning their vocations. No doubt many of them will enter the seminary. It's extraordinary how at this time—a time of distress as Daniel has told us and as Doctor Lara has repeated—our young people's heroism is flourishing as they seek to get involved in the adventures of God in history.

I want to rejoice also with the Divina Providencia Hospital because just this week they acquired the land where they plan to develop their home for orphans whose mothers die of illness and also for incapacitated elderly people. They still have to pay 75,000 *colones* in order to finalize the purchase of the land.

We're sorry to hear about an accident of a Caritas vehicle that was transporting assistance for our poor.

Events of the week

³ Jorge Lara Braud.

Raising our eyes now toward the universal church, I find the pope offering two ideas that throw extraordinary light on the situation of El Salvador. First there is the situation of hunger, and second the matter of kidnappings.

The pope addressed the issue of hunger before the Food and Agricultural Organization, that United Nations agency that treats matters of nutrition and agriculture. He pointed out the true causes of hunger in the world and stated that aid programs are not enough; he said structural changes are needed. Here are some of the pope's statements: «Hunger in the world is not caused only by geographical or climatic conditions detrimental to agriculture but has human causes as well. It proceeds from deficiencies of social organization which discourage personal initiative. Hunger is also caused by terror and oppression, by ideological systems and inhumane practices»⁴. Now that there is talk about change in El Salvador, what the Holy Father is telling us is this: the new government officials, if they truly want to merit the people's trust, should not rest until they offer our people the profound structural changes they desire. We must take seriously what the pope says because our problems of hunger and malnutrition are not going to be solved by paternalistic assistance. There must be a change of structures that reaches to the roots of our way of life in El Salvador.

Nutrition experts say that in Latin America fifty million people suffer severe malnutrition, and in the world there are five hundred million people who experience hunger. Instead of diminishing, the number of malnourished persons keeps increasing. Latin America is the region most affected by increased consumer prices, which make it even more difficult to solve the problem of malnutrition. Imagine, prices in Latin America have increased by 319 percent since 1975; the same products cost three times more now. In contrast, in more advanced countries with better legislation, the price increase has been only 31 percent. That means that we should be able to buy beans and corn more cheaply in El Salvador; we need a law which deals with these basic things. According to official figures, the nutritional deficiencies of the Salvadoran population since 1975 constitute one of the most dramatic aspects of our social condition. More than one-half of Salvadorans have problems of malnutrition because of lack of adequate income. In this regard, the junta's measures in freezing the prices of basic food products⁵ and increasing rural workers' wages seem to me quite correct⁶.

You already know that coffee harvesters will be paid fourteen twenty-five, cotton harvesters eight, and cane cutters nine⁷. It is not enough to point out deficiencies and make corrections. Our workers all have the same needs, even if they're harvesting cane or cotton. It would therefore be good for the government to look for a way to resolve these anomalies. It would also be good to make sure that these measures don't lay too heavy a burden on small and medium producers.

A commission of women from the market came to report that the lowering of prices is affecting small businesses, which sometimes pay more for the products than they're allowed to sell them for. For our part, we told them that these are times of sacrifice and that all

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the General Assembly of the Food and Agriculture Organization», 12 November 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (25 November 1979).

⁵ *La Prensa Gráfica* (13 November 1979).

⁶ *El Diario de Hoy* (14 and 17 November 1979).

⁷ Figures are for *colones*.

of us have to do what we can to help with the sacrifice. All the same, it would be good if the legislation on these matters took into account that the situation of small producers and small businesses is not the same as that of large producers and large businesses. Let the laws be just, according to people's capacities. (Applause)

On page five of the paper *Orientación*⁸ you can read the discourse the pope gave in Philadelphia, where he spoke directly about this problem of nutrition and farm products. I would just like to cite this passage from the Council: «God destined the earth and everything it contains for all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity» (GS 69).

The pope focused on another problem that is quite important for us, the problem of kidnapped persons. The pope referred to cases in Spain and in Italy, but his words seem to me very pertinent for El Salvador: «I speak directly to those who have kidnapped Don Javier Rupérez, a distinguished member of the Spanish House of Deputies. I know that that action has been roundly deplored and condemned by public opinion. I earnestly implore the Lord», said the pope, «that he enlighten the minds and move the hearts of you who are responsible for the kidnapping so that, guided by the principles of our common humanity, you will voluntarily release Mr. Rupérez and put an end to the anguish that both he and his family are suffering. I urge you to realize that no humane and just solution can be achieved by following the paths of violence. No one, least of all those who call themselves Christian, can have recourse to such tactics»⁹. Here in El Salvador we could say the same to those who have kidnapped Jamie Batlle and Jaime Hill, asking them to free them in the name of love and civilization.

This problem of kidnapping relates also to another very critical problem here in El Salvador. Citing those same words of the pope, I appeal to the members of the security forces who are holding the disappeared persons or who know what happened to them: release them, or provide information to the investigatory commission about what has been done with them and about who bears responsibility. (Applause)

This week the FAPU presented photographs that show the existence of a clandestine cemetery on a cliff near the sea, but they seem to be identical to some photographs taken by a priest. What is the FAPU doing with them? They also read the testimony of a member of the PDC who was captured by the security forces in San Vicente and then thrown into that same place along with four other *campesinos*¹⁰. This testimony certainly provides clues for those in charge of this investigation. All those who have information about this matter should collaborate with the commission, which I am certain is sincerely working on this problem¹¹. I hope that this commission will not rest content with simply publishing a summary of the results of their investigation. I believe that they must in justice also request immediate compensation for the families of the disappeared persons in cases where it can be shown, or at least reasonably assumed, that they were killed. I believe that there are many forlorn families who, simply by human and Christian norms of morality, are owed restitution by the persons responsible for doing them harm.

⁸ *Orientación* (18 November 1979).

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, «General Audience on Wednesday, 14 November 1979», in *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 November 1979).

¹⁰ *La Prensa Gráfica* (16 November 1979).

¹¹ The reference is to the Special Investigatory Commission for Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons established by the government in its decree of 30 October 1979. *El Diario de Hoy* (14 November 1979).

In this same line of thought, the Human Rights Commission has asked the governing junta to provide it with information about the political prisoners who are being held in public prisons and who haven't been released due to doubts that have arisen about the interpretation of the decree¹². The archdiocesan Legal Aid, for its part, has already presented to the governing junta and the investigatory commission a list with the names of these political prisoners, and this coming week they will also present a list of the two hundred arrested and disappeared persons, along with appropriate documentation.

The Supreme Court of Justice is faced with a great challenge. In a statement it has affirmed its determination to guarantee the universally recognized human rights. The following words in the statement give us hope: «We exhort all judicial officials to carry out with due responsibility the duties required by their position, especially the duties of imparting prompt and complete justice, preserving relations of mutual respect, and fulfilling the norms that regulate the conduct to be observed in the courts of justice»¹³. The Supreme Court has also recommended that «lawyers, in the exercise of their profession, collaborate in the sound, prompt, and efficient administration of justice, thus contributing to the prestige of the judicial power»¹⁴. Unfortunately, as we've said here many times, the administration of justice has been abominable.

I received a letter signed by four mothers of disappeared persons in which they say that it is untrue that they are being manipulated by the people's organizations. This makes me very happy even though there are testimonies that give rise to doubts. Let us hope that what they say is true and that they are being truly respected. I have great respect for your suffering and your pain, dear mothers, and that's why I absolutely refuse to let demagogues make ill use of your suffering, which is something sacred. (Applause) The mothers also denounce that during their hunger strike at the National Guard they were subjected to assaults on Tuesday the thirteenth at one-forty in the morning. As a result they decided to leave that locale.

Regarding this same topic of the disappeared and kidnapped persons, I want to appeal once again for our beloved collaborator in the parish of Soyapango, the sacristan Tomás López. Nothing is known of him even though he was carried away wounded during the time of this new government. I know that they are investigating this matter seriously, and I hope to be able to report some clear results of the investigation. If there is no clarity, strong suspicions will weigh heavily on our present government. It is necessary, therefore, that proper administration of justice be put into practice very quickly, and there must be a wise and prudent purging of the security forces.

I must refer also to something that has been happening despite our insistent requests to the contrary. Vengeance is neither Christian nor human. After the decree dissolving ORDEN was published, that same organization supposedly made it known that they would continue working with or without legal recognition¹⁵. Some of their members will be operating clandestinely in those places where the government and the armed forces are legally

¹² «Open Letter of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador», 12 November 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (14 November 1979).

¹³ «Statement of the Supreme Court of Justice» in *La Prensa Gráfica*, (16 November 1979).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ «Declarations of General José Alberto Medrano» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (15 November 1979).

prevented from acting. In other words, it appears that members of ORDEN and other persons want to continue that organization's repressive activity, which has been discredited by the new government and condemned by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the OAS.

As pastor, I want to address those Christians who have knowledge of the ORDEN members in their communities who are open to conversion or who joined that organization only for reasons of neediness or deception. You should urge them not to take part in the organization and certainly not in actions directed against the people. Help them so that they don't need to continue in the organization but can instead find strong support and a warm welcome in our communities. Let us be truly Christian, welcoming all those who want to return to the Christian way of life. There is no justification for ORDEN to continue its repression, as their statement seems to be threatening.

The judicial power and the security forces are also being restructured in the interests of greater justice. When people take justice into their own hands, there follows abuse, injustice, and intensified violence, especially among the rural population. For that very reason I condemn the murder of eleven *campesinos* carried out by the FPL on the pretext that they were members of ORDEN¹⁶. Just as we are demanding judgment of the security force members who are responsible for unjustly repressing the people, justice also requires that the members of ORDEN who took part in atrocities be fairly judged as well. But judging them, not to speak of killing them, is not within the competency of the FPL or any other group or private initiative. For that purpose, I repeat, there is the Supreme Court of Justice. (Applause)

I was very impressed by the testimony of a relative of one of the men killed. He stated, «In the village of Llanitos, jurisdiction of Jutiapa, there are now only three alternatives: join FECCAS or UTC, leave the village, or be murdered. This village has always been distinguished for its profound religiosity and because its people don't use weapons. Many families have had to leave the village because of threats from certain organizations. In the town of Jutiapa there are houses where three families live together, such is the poverty. Some of those recently killed were very devout Christians who never harbored feelings of vengeance. Some were members of the village patrols. In a number of places these acts are being carried out by people who are organized». We should take account of this testimony because it tells us that the roles are being reversed. The people who before were complaining about repression by the security forces are now the ones who are repressing our people. (Applause)

The attacks on McDonald's and Avis has also been attributed to the FPL¹⁷. Some employees of McDonald's came to our archdiocesan offices. I'm sorry I wasn't present when they arrived, but a priest attended to them and gave me a faithful account of what they wanted. I am certainly in solidarity with these McDonald's employees and want to make their views known: «We McDonald's employees vigorously condemn the attack perpetrated against our stores and the cowardly murder of a watchman. Such actions do nothing but harm many poor, humble families who have nothing whatsoever to do with the current political situation or with ideologies of either left or right. Such action brings grief to one more home and does damage to a business that identifies with the needs of its employees, for McDonald's is one of the few businesses that seeks to provide greater benefits for its employees. We want to take this opportunity to appeal to the consciences of these persons: if your objective is the defense of the

¹⁶ *La Prensa Gráfica* (13 November 1979).

¹⁷ *La Prensa Gráfica* (12 November 1979).

rights of the people, then don't keep hurting the poor by destroying their places of work. The ones who suffer most are those of us who have families to support».

Another statement was signed by the employees of Servi-Pronto of El Salvador: «Distressed by the vile attack against our place of work, we loudly protest this crime, and we appeal to those groups that are in one way or another responsible for the disorder in which we live to desist from those actions which cause only mourning and insecurity in our homes. We are simple folk who must rely on our labor for our sustenance, and we don't understand how certain sectors, supposedly under the banner of the people's cause, are actually working against that cause with their actions since they plunge the working class into poverty and unemployment», and so on. (Applause)

A fire was set that affected the ANDA pumping station in Joya Grande. This has caused problems in the flow of water to Miramonte Poniente, Centroamérica, San José, Layco, Santa Teresa, Las Rosas, Ciudad Satélite, and other nearby sectors¹⁸. Using the same logic found in the statements I just read, I make an appeal that no damage be done to our people's essential services.

On the other hand, I want to applaud the beautiful gesture of troop number thirty of the Boy Scouts in Mejicanos; they have dedicated their time and their energy to fixing the streets and doing other good works. That's what all of us Salvadorans should be doing, fixing our things and not destroying them. (Applause)

There was an attack against the Altamirano family. We repudiate every attack against the tranquility of our people.

I am happy that three demonstrations were held without incident. As we were saying, political groups like ANDES, FAPU, and UDN are now able to demonstrate in public, and their pressure is necessary at this time in order to make the country more democratic. But as we've repeated a thousand times, it must be the language of political pressure and not the language of violence.

There were difficulties at Social Security, as you already know, but I'm happy that this matter was resolved with patience, wisdom, and dialogue¹⁹. Doctor Saca stated that he is not a politician but simply a professional in the area of health. He acknowledged that the employees' action was not an attack against his person but against the procedure used for his appointment. He promised to show them by his actions that he is no way opposed to them. *La Crónica* explained that the issues could be resolved without the need for prolonged violence. Since it is true that people want to reach an understanding by dialogue, the best solution to our problems will always come by being reasonable and intelligent.

I've also been asked to make known the statement of the Association of Salvadoran Bus Owners, who presented the Minister of the Economy with a series of petitions²⁰. Since there is a desire to do justice, I believe they will be heeded. For example, they

¹⁸ *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 November 1979).

¹⁹ Trade unionists of the Salvadoran Institute of Social Security suspended labors and occupied the administrative buildings to protest the appointment of Doctor Alejandro Saca Menéndez as director of the institution. *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 November 1979).

²⁰ *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 November 1979).

are asking for a moratorium of six months, fair financing with low interest rates, suppression of the onerous and illegal compound interest rates, repeal of the no-fault clause in the transit law, government subsidies, free fuel for public transportation in exchange for courtesy passes, and so on. There are fifteen points in their petition, and I personally recommend that they be treated in a spirit of justice and with common sense.

With regard to other labor matters, I want to mention that several meetings were held in the Ministry of Labor. It seems that the problems at Lido, Apex, Arco, Duramás, and Dimex are being resolved through wise dialogue. It is regrettable that some representatives of these businesses were not present. At this time, any absence of these persons can be considered a sin of omission since they are not helping to resolve the situation. And it *is* something we can resolve if we plan together and engage in intelligent dialogue.

I want to make reference also to the problem at the university, which for several months now has been at an impasse due to various factors. One of them is the conflict that exists among the student movements. One movement has taken over the administration building to demand that the university general assembly meet and elect officials²¹. Let us hope that pressure is applied to resolve this anomalous situation and that the other student groups make an effort to work together so that the university once again becomes an authentic center of higher education, one that educates intellectuals who are committed to their people and who use the knowledge they acquire not to enrich themselves personally but to serve our people in the way the present situation demands.

I want to conclude, then, by referring to the statement of the Federation of Academic and Professional Associations of El Salvador, which includes dentists, doctors, architects, economists, engineers, public accountants, chemists, humanists, etc. The federation is calling for their associates to collaborate, from their various professional disciplines, in seeking out the different political, social, economic, and cultural alternatives that can help to strengthen the democratic foundations of the country. The professionals reaffirm their commitment to the people, and they declare that they have the right and the duty to speak out publicly and take part in public life in order to contribute to the solution of national problems. The federation «encourages all professional associations to speak publicly about the situation of our nation and also to make known to the people the results of their research and their recommendations concerning the development of our people»²². I truly believe, sisters and brothers, that if we all had the same spirit of collaboration about which we're hearing now from the professionals, thank God, the solution to our country's problem would be more possible than ever.

I forgot to invite you to take part in the theology course being offered in the UCA starting tomorrow the nineteenth and continuing until the December 15; it will be from six in the evening till nine at night. There is a registration fee, but they say that if anyone is experiencing economic difficulties, a solution will be found.

I want to finish. In referring to all these matters, we have not departed from our theological and biblical reflection. Hope is the liberating power of our people because it relies on the promise of God, who is the ground of our hope. Our hope relies above all on the

²¹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (16 November 1979).

²² *La Prensa Gráfica* 17 November 1979.

redeeming power of Christ, who offered a sacrifice that continues to be the source of salvation for all people. Supported by Christ, we can say with Daniel that the people are in safe hands. But as I said in the third point of the meditation, we all have to collaborate. We must act as Christians who have hope. As people energized by hope, we must be actively involved in the collaboration the professionals are calling for. May all of us get involved, whether we're professionals and non-professionals, with Christian faith or without it, with hope in Christ or without it. Let us realize that there is a God who cares for our people and who accompanies us in our struggle. If we collaborate with him, then the reality of liberation in El Salvador will come very soon, God willing. (Applause)