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The Homily Actualizes God's Living Word Among Us

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

27 January 1980

Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10

I Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Dear sisters and brothers—and I thank God that I can also say, «esteemed radio audience». For we hope that the bomb that was intended to silence our radio station has not achieved its aim and that we are still broadcasting the voice of the church through our station, which exists precisely to serve the word of God¹. (Applause) I thank you for your show of solidarity, to which I want to add several messages that have arrived. To be brief, there is the message of the sisters of the pastoral team in Tepecoyo: «Regretting the loss of the station, the guiding voice of the church. As Christian people, we are in solidarity with the archdiocese, offering our parish Sunday collection and united in prayer». I am also thankful for the various expressions of solidarity from other radio stations that have protested this brutal attempt to silence by force the truth of God. In response to this assault on the instrument by which the church announces her word, today's readings show the best way to pay honor to the word of God which is the very heart of our message.

Today's readings present us with two different homilies. The first is the one given by Ezra and the Levites to the people of Israel on their return from exile; they read the word of God to the people and explained it to them. Then in the gospel we find the most sublime homily ever pronounced: after Christ closed the book, he said, «These things have been fulfilled today» (Luke 4:21). That is what a homily does: it explains that the word of God is not about times past but is a living word and spirit that is being fulfilled here and now. That is why we must try to apply God's eternal message to the concrete circumstances of the people. Today therefore provides us a good opportunity to talk about what a homily is. We thank God that through his word we are able to give this catechesis; we will show how a homily tries to explain the eternal word clearly and to apply it concretely. For God's word is light and strength; it consoles us, enlightens us, guides us.

The Second Vatican Council, which has inspired the present renewal of the church, describes for us the role of the homily: «The homily is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself». Notice that it is part of the liturgy itself, part of the Mass! «By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year; in fact, at those Masses which are

¹ On 23 January a bomb exploded at the transmitter of YSAX, the archdiocesan radio station, putting it off the air for four days. The Organization for Liberation from Communism, an extreme right-wing group, claimed responsibility. «Bulletin of the Office of Information of the Archdiocese of San Salvador» in *Orientación* (27 January 1980).

celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and feasts of obligation, the homily should not be omitted except for a serious reason» (SC 52).

Here we are told that the homily must be a reflection on the word of God. The topic of the homily is not to be invented by the preacher but is to be determined by the word of God: «Speak about this!» «Say this to my people!» The preacher's task is to apply God's word to the assembled people who have come together to shed light on the reality they are living. And most importantly, the people should celebrate God's word in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The whole of the Bible and all our preaching treat of the great saving mystery of Christ, which culminated in his death and his resurrection.

Since Christ left us the memorial of his death and his resurrection in the Mass, the readings from any part of the Bible should be centered on this mystery. That means that the preacher, while illuminating the realities of the people and guiding them on their path, must also end up saying, as Ezra does in his homily, «Amen, amen, let us praise the Lord and give him glory» (Neh 8:6). That is why we unite together in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

The homily, then, is sacred liturgical discourse which leads the hearts of those who hear it to believe in God, to praise him, and to celebrate the redemption that is made present in the eucharistic sacrifice. We preach what we celebrate. That is why the Mass remains incomplete if we come only to listen to the homily and don't remain for the eucharistic part. The main thing is not the preaching; that is only the path to what is most important: the moment when we adore Christ and, illumined by the word, commit ourselves to him by our faith. So the word is heard and takes account of the reality; it is celebrated and nourished in the life of Christ; and it moves people to commit themselves to their duties and their homes, and to serving the world and truly living their lives as God wishes.

The homily makes Christ vividly present through the whole liturgical year, and that is why the church organizes the celebration of this mystery in such a marvelous way. We are now in Ordinary Time, which is called «ordinary» because it is a season when there are no special celebrations. The liturgical year has three special moments: the Christmas season, which we just finished; the season of Lent, which will begin within a few days; and the Easter season, when the Lord's resurrection is celebrated for fifty days. Except for those three singular seasons, all the rest of the year is called Ordinary Time. At the end of the Christmas season begin the weeks and the Sundays of Ordinary Time, which last until Lent. After the Easter season ends on the feast of Pentecost, there is Ordinary Time again, which continues until the beginning of Advent, the season when we prepare for Christmas. During Ordinary Time there is no special mystery; rather it is the whole of the mystery of Christ that we celebrate. That's why every year we take different gospels for the readings.

Nowadays the church offers us a wider selection of readings from the Bible. This year the readings are from the Gospel of Saint Luke, the third gospel. Accordingly, today's reading is from the prologue at the beginning of Saint Luke and from Luke's first description of Christ's ministry. The theme I am going to treat in this homily will help us understand better the spirit of this gospel. I hope, dear sisters and brothers, that this will be the gospel of the year for all of us, and not just when we come to Mass. Let us read this third gospel in our homes as well, and study it seriously for this is the gospel for this year. To synthesize my reflections, then, my title today will be «The Homily Actualizes God's Living Word among Us». The homily actualizes, that is, it makes God's work actual and present here among us with all its vital power, as if it were

happening now. It makes present the reality of Christ, who lives through his word. I will explain this idea with three points.

First, Christ is the living homily that reveals the Father. The very person of Christ is like a timeless homily of revelation of the Father. The eternal will of God becomes human; it is clothed in the human flesh of Christ and lives here among us. Christ, even when he is silent, speaks; he is the timeless homily of God

My second reflection will be that the church is the ever timely and active prolongation of the homily of Jesus. Jesus continues preaching through his church. The church is the prolongation of the homily that Christ initiated there in Nazareth: «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me» (Luke 4:18). The church can continue to assert this at every moment, just as I can declare now, on this Sunday, January 27, 1980, here in the basilica at eight o'clock in the morning: «This prophecy is fulfilled here today» (Luke 4:21). Here the word of God is present. The church is you; the church is me; we are the continuation of the living homily that is Christ our Lord!

And the third point will be the effect that the homily that is Christ has on people. Some will accept it and be blessed; others will reject it and persist in their evil ways.

Jesus is the living homily that reveals the Father

Let us say first of all that Jesus is the living homily of God's revelation. Today's gospel has recounted a very exciting event. Let us study it carefully. When Christ arrived at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, he took a seat on the dais where the teachers of Israel sat. As was their custom, they invited Jesus to come forward to read God's scripture and to explain its meaning. (This is a custom that we practice even now when we call someone from the people to read and comment.) So Jesus took the scroll—which was a roll of parchment, not like a modern book—and either he or the sacristan chose a passage from Isaiah for him to comment on. What an honor it was for Isaiah to be read by Jesus Christ, but a still greater honor was to come after he rolled up the parchment. Today's gospel indicates this with a very significant expression: «Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and all the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him» (Luke 4:20). This expression indicates what a historic moment this was. As you know, the gospels contain theological depths that need to be searched out, and the author of this gospel was inspired to express himself in this way about this historic moment. «All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him» means to say, «Everyone was waiting for Christ to utter the word that could save. He would speak the truth that the world needed». We all feel anxious when we behold him. We wait for him to speak the word that the Lord commands him to speak! The commentary of Christ is very simple but very profound for he tells us, «Today this Scripture you just heard is being fulfilled» (Luke 4:21). What is it you just heard? You just heard that «the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has sent me with the power of the Spirit», as the gospel goes on to say, «In the power of the Spirit he returned to his home town» (Luke 4:14).

Christ makes himself present here as the revelation of the Father and as the fullness of all revelation. Christ is described in the Council's document on revelation as the culmination of revelation. I will read to you what it says because we should savor these matchless words and should feel honored and happy to have knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Council says, «The Father sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all peoples, so that he might dwell among

men and women and tell them of the innermost being of God. Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as “as a human being to human beings”. He “speaks the words of God” and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do. To see Jesus is to see his Father. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and the final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death and to raise us up to life eternal» (DV 4). To know Christ is to know God. Christ is the homily that continually explains to us that God is love, that God is power, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him, and that he is the divine Word and the presence of God among us.

Consequently, Jesus Christ and the Gospel are not two different things. The Gospel is not a biography of Christ. For Saint Paul, «the Gospel is the living power of God» (Rom 1:16). Reading the Gospel is not like reading an ordinary book. Rather it fills us with faith and makes Jesus Christ come alive as the revelation of the Father. Even when we are in silence and no one is speaking, we should have a profound, heartfelt faith that Christ is preaching to us as the homily of God and that we are being filled with the divine power that has come in Christ Jesus through the Spirit.

Let us keep in mind the marvelous theology of the Gospel of Saint Luke. His is called the gospel of prayer and the Holy Spirit because it is the gospel that most shows Christ in prayer and in communion with the Father. It is Luke who most consistently states that Christ was «driven by the Spirit». Of course Luke, who is the author of this third gospel, also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, which shows how the Spirit who stirred Christ to work our redemption is the same Spirit that Christ poured out on this church. It is the same Spirit who impelled Paul on his journeys, encouraged Peter in his imprisonment, and inspired Christian communities in their prayer. Christ continues to live thanks to the Spirit: «The Spirit is upon me. Today this prophecy is fulfilled. Today the era of Christianity commences. Now begins a phase of history that is the fullness of time». The Spirit of God has also become the Spirit of those who want to receive him.

The church is the ever timely and active prolongation of the homily of Jesus

My second reflection, then, is that the church is the ever timely prolongation of the homily of Jesus. First, the truth of the church depends on the truth of Christ. Saint Paul states, «We would be greatly deluded and great liars if we preached Christ and Christ were not who we say he is». That is the idea that comes out clearly in Saint Luke’s prologue, which we read today. What was Luke’s purpose in writing the gospel? It was «to relate the events according to the traditions transmitted by those who were eyewitnesses». Luke explains, «I want therefore to investigate everything anew, and I have decided to write it down for you in orderly sequence so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received» (Luke 1:2-4). At this time when everything appears relative, when all is confusion, when nothing seems true, how solid these words of the Gospel sound! The Gospel gives eternal consistency to the church. That is why we have repeatedly stated that the church’s life is not guided by immediate circumstances; the church’s life is guided by the eternal reality that happened in history and was witnessed by human beings and was transmitted through living traditions illuminated by the presence of the Spirit.

What actually happened? That is what the gospels begin to tell us. From the moment he entered that synagogue, Christ was preaching his message, bringing about redemption, rising from the dead—all that constitutes the *kerygma*. The proclamation of God's kingdom and of Christ's coming to save humankind is precisely the reality that we call church. The church is born from the truth of the events. Even historically speaking, apart from divine inspiration, there is no book whose authenticity and veracity have been so scientifically proved as the gospels. For twenty centuries they have been criticized both by friends and by enemies who have tried to deny what they say, but the critics have succeeded only in giving more splendor to the words of Saint Luke about «the realities that the eyewitnesses observed and transmitted to us, the events that prove the truth and the solidity of the things you believe».

Sisters and brothers, let us never have doubts about the truth of the Gospel. It is dangerous to confuse it with all the false promises of humans and to think that the Gospel will also leave us frustrated and disillusioned. The Gospel is something very different. That's why I told you that, on this day when YSAX has returned to the airwaves, it can honestly be said that its antennas, which human beings have tried to destroy, are transmitting a word that absolutely no one can hold back. It is a word that lives in the church and has solid reality in the faith of all the people so that no one can do away with this word. (Applause)

But another precious aspect of the church appears in the prologue of Saint Luke: since the church is born of the Gospel, the church becomes the messenger of the Gospel. The church is evangelized in order to evangelize. That's why Saint Luke tells us that he has gathered together the testimony of others. Saint Luke was not an apostle, and he didn't know Christ personally, but he was a disciple of Paul; he lived in Rome and heard the words of the apostles and the communities. And the very fact that the gospels were made by the communities is something wonderful. The gospels we read today—Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, Saint John—are the homilies of the communities. The witnesses of the events told the people about them and testified to the truth of what they were saying, even to the point of shedding their blood. After listening to the witnesses, the people believed because the Spirit of God was also inspiring them, and in this way they were evangelized. The result was a community that had received the faith and felt impelled to carry the faith to others, thanks to the same Spirit who inspired them.

Luke is no more than one link in this chain of tradition. Luke himself did not know Christ, nor did he personally witness the events that he recounts. But as he says, he was convinced of the reality and the certainty of these things: «I know that the community in which I live is nourished by this faith, and there can be no doubt about its truth». So the evangelists, as the fruit of their discussions with the communities, wrote the exquisite gospels that have come down to us. That's why the gospels have very different characteristics even though they all tell the same story of Christ's life. They are homilies; they are reflections coming from very different but very real historical contexts. Luke wrote for pagans, Matthew wrote for Jews, and Mark wrote for Romans. Luke, who wrote for pagans, was concerned less about Jewish formulas than about themes that would motivate any human being.

Therefore, the characteristic teachings of the Gospel of Saint Luke draw a parallel between the activity of Jesus and the ministry of the church. They present Jesus not as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies but as a new prophet who wants to see his teachings fulfilled in the church that is being born. Luke presents Jesus as the prophet who introduced into the world «a kingdom that will never end» (Luke 1:33), and the passing years confirmed that this

prophet was the founder of the church. Saint Luke also highlights Christ's activity among the Gentiles, among the poor, and among the outcasts. This portrayal of Christ appeals to those for whom religion is not a matter of privilege; it brings people to a new awareness of Christ and a new understanding of that utterly despised world of slaves and pariahs.

The Gospel of Saint Luke has been given some wonderful names. It's called, for example, «the gospel of mercy and great forgiveness». No other gospel tells the parable of the prodigal son who becomes a repentant sinner (Luke 15:11-32). The Gospel of Saint Luke is the one that best reflects the tenderness of Christ's heart when sinners approach him and he forgives them.

It is also called «the gospel of the poor». The story of Bethlehem is attractive because the newborn Christ is surrounded by shepherds; they are poor folk who have no future in the eyes of the world, but they are the courtiers of the King who has been born. That's the origin of the preferential option for the poor.

It is also called «the gospel of absolute renunciation». When Luke addresses those who idolize the honor and riches of earth, he tells them to forsake everything for the kingdom of God. No other gospel is so absolute in calling for renouncing possessions and becoming truly poor as does this gospel of the poor.

Luke's gospel is also called, as I explained before, «the gospel of prayer and the Holy Spirit» because it is the one that best presents the transcendence of the Gospel message and elevates us toward God. It shows us how the most solemn moments of Christ's life had their origin in prayer to God, such as when Christ chose the apostles, when he was transfigured, and when he launched the church into the world. All are the fruit of prayer and the Spirit.

The Gospel of Saint Luke is also called the «gospel of messianic joy». If you want to hear a message of joy and optimism, read Saint Luke. Read about the joy with which the disciples announced the good news, telling people that God has come and that sinners and outcasts and everyone who needs good news could find it there in the Gospel, a word that means «good news».

In this same way our own church becomes a community that transmits Christ, a community that continues the homily that is Christ in a particular style. This is also marvelous: each community, each preacher, each catechist, each religious congregation, each element of the church has its own charism, its own way of being, so that we can recount, among all of us, the marvelous truth that Christ lives through his Spirit in us.

Here I would like us to read once again, or simply recall, today's second reading, in which Saint Paul, Luke's teacher, refers to the church precisely as a body in which we are all members of one another. Christ is the head, and the Holy Spirit which gives life to the head also gives life to all the members who form the church, so that it is the same life in the head and in the body.

And so I repeat, sisters and brothers, what I told you once before, precisely when we were afraid that one day we would be without the radio: the best microphone of God is Christ, and the best microphone of Christ is the church, and the church is all of you! (Applause) Each one of you, from your own position and your own vocation, should live the faith intensely whether you are married, a religious, a bishop, a priest, a student, an undergrad, a laborer, a

worker, a market vendor. In your own particular situation you should feel that you are a true microphone of God our Lord. That way the church will always be preaching, will always be a homily, even when we don't have the wonderful opportunity, which I appreciate every Sunday, of entering into communion with so many communities. This week those communities made clear to me their desire to hear once again this radio station that has become almost the daily bread of our people. But if the day comes when the forces of evil leave us without this marvelous medium, which they themselves possess in abundance while leaving the church to fight for the scraps, let us be assured that they will have not hurt us. To the contrary, we will then be even mightier microphones of the Lord, and we will proclaim his word far and wide. (Applause)

The messianic and salvific effects of the homily that is Christ

My final reflection in this homily concerns the messianic and salvific effects of the homily that is Christ. The word «messianic» refers to all the benefits Christ brought us, and «salvific» refers to the incomparable liberating force of the Gospel.

The Gospel is the preaching of Jesus, presented in the Gospel of Saint Luke as a mission of grace and an offer of salvation. Out of the abundant material of the Old Testament, what was the text that Christ chose to introduce the messianic times? Luke's intention is not just to tell us about one Sabbath in the synagogue of Nazareth. By joining this episode with the prologue of his gospel, Luke wants to announce to the whole world who Christ is, what his work is about, and what he came to say.

That is why he chose and recounted with delight the passage read by Christ, which tells of all the marvels of liberation: «The Spirit is upon me because God has anointed me» (Luke 4:18a). «He has anointed me!» Christ is the anointed One—that's what «Christ» or «Messiah» means. «Messiah» is a Hebrew word that means the same as «Christ» in Greek or «anointed» in English. He is the anointed One, the one who has been assumed by and steeped in the Holy Spirit. As the anointed One, he is the fullness of the Spirit of God.

«He has anointed me and has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor» (Luke 4:18b). This is the mission of Christ: to bring good news to the poor, to those who receive only bad news, to those who receive only abuse from the powerful, to those who can only watch the riches that delight others pass them by. It is for these that the Lord comes, to make them happy and to tell them, «Do not be greedy. Consider yourselves happy and wealthy because of the great gift brought to you by the One who "being rich became poor" in order to be with you (2 Cor 8:9). Realize that the greatest happiness is taking part in the joy that God shares with his poor».

«He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's grace» (Luke 4:18c-19). That refers to the jubilee year that everyone was longing for, because in that year all the things that had been taken away from the poor had to be returned to them. During that year all debts were canceled, and it was like the beginning of a new society. The time we are waiting for here in El Salvador is not a year of grace but the power of reconstruction that the people want and that will be achieved with Christ, for he has come precisely to proclaim the good news of new societies and new times. (Applause)

That is why I never tire of telling everyone, especially the youth who long for their people's liberation, that I admire your social and political sensitivity, but I feel sad when you squander it by following paths that are not the true ones. The church is telling you to follow this path, the path of Christ. Make good use of all your determination, all your commitment, all your self-sacrifice, even to the point of dying, but be sure to die for the cause of true liberation. True liberation is guaranteed by the One who is steeped in the Spirit of God and cannot lead us astray. He takes onto himself all the people's desires and struggles for liberation, for the people's cries reach God's ears, and God must hear them. Let us hope that all of us will understand that the great leader of our liberation is the Lord's Anointed, who comes to announce good news to the poor, to give freedom to the captives, to give us news about the disappeared, to bring joy to all the homes that are mourning, so that our society will be made new, as during those years of grace in Israel.

Another effect of the homily is to encourage worship of God. That's why I like the first reading with its moving historical context. Nehemiah and Ezra were two Jews who had returned from the exile in Babylon. When they returned, the diverse caravans found before them a Jerusalem destroyed. Despite their disillusion, they worked hard to rebuild the city. They determined not to be overcome by pessimism: their job was to rebuild, not to tear down. Once they had finished their work of rebuilding, these two men called together the whole people and held a solemn assembly. That is when the people began to recover their patriotic spirit.

All the people were listening to Ezra, who stood on a platform and read from the Pentateuch, the books in which Moses had written down what God commanded him to tell the people. Ezra explained to the people by means of simple catechesis what God wanted and what God meant to say in those books. The homily was addressed to the people, using simple words without any rhetorical or oratorical pretensions. It was delivered out of love for the people so that they would understand God and enter into contact with God. This is our intention as well. I shouldn't be an obstacle in your dialogue with God. My only aim is to awaken in every heart gratitude, love, wonder, repentance, and a desire to return to God. Would that, once the homily is over, we might see our own people standing up like that Jewish nation, raising their hands, and responding, «Amen! Amen!». «Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the Lord, their faces to the ground» (Neh 8:6).

We also do this after the homily; we dedicate ourselves to prayer and celebrate the Eucharist. These days, each time a sacrament is celebrated, there is a reading from the Bible and a homily. The sacramental life of the church is very solemn now! In order to have a baptism there has to be prior preparation. When the people arrive for the ceremony, a passage from the gospels is read, and the priest explains it. It is only after faith has been awakened and the adults understand what is going to take place that the child is taken to the baptismal font. It is the same with matrimony, which is also a sacramental rite. The word of God is read so that those who are going to love one another forever are moved to ask God to keep them faithful to their love. These are all ways of drawing close to God, and I don't seek anything more than that, dear sisters and brothers. I am very happy when humble folk find in my words something that helps them draw close to God, or when a sinner is converted to God. This is the effect of true ecclesiastical preaching: it is the church as the homily of Christ, continuing to announce the message of Christ.

The homily produces yet another effect. The book of Nehemiah recounts that the priests told the people, «Behold, today is consecrated to our God. Do not be sad and do not weep» (Neh 8:10b), for the entire people were shedding tears as they heard the words of the law. Then the priests said to the people, «Go, eat rich foods, drink sweet wine, and allot portions for those who have nothing prepared, for today is consecrated to our God» (Neh 8:10a). We could say that this is the spirit of Sunday, the day of the Lord, a day of joy. It is not a self-centered joy but a joy shared with those who have nothing. Let us share what we have so that we'll feel even happier. How marvelous will be the day when a new society, instead of storing things up selfishly, divides and shares everything out so that everyone can rejoice and feel that we are all sons and daughters of the same God! The word of God seeks nothing else in our Salvadoran land but that all of us be truly converted so as to feel like genuine sisters and brothers!

Today's gospel also reveals to us two other effects of the homily, one happy and one bitter. The happy effect is seen in the passage that relates that the people were amazed at Jesus and were happy to have him with them because they had received from him a wonderful revelation (Luke 4:22). But then in his homily Christ began to denounce his hometown, Nazareth, even though he loved the people. He could not perform any miracles there because the people were incredulous and saw him simply as the son of Mary, the son of a human being. Christ told them, «In former times as well, there were prophets in Israel, but they were not sent to the Israelites but rather to foreigners who came to them and accepted their message». The people knew he was referring to them and condemning their incredulity and their false piety. The formalistic religion of the synagogue would not tolerate anyone saying that its worship was wrong, so the people pushed poor Christ out of the building and drove him to the brow of the hill where Nazareth was perched. They wanted to throw him off the cliff, but he, using his divine power, passed through the midst of them and escaped—his hour had not yet arrived! (Luke 4:23-30). The lot of the prophets! They always have to announce good news to encourage the people, but they also have to point out the people's sins so that they will be converted. Those who are humble will heed them and be saved, but those who are proud will remain obstinate and be lost.

Life of the church

We have offered reflections on the very sources of the homily: Jesus as the homily of God and the church as the homily of Christ. And we have seen how people respond to the homily either with love or with rejection. Now it is time to see whether our archdiocesan church and our communities and our ecclesial labors are truly a microphone of God. Are we trying to steep ourselves in the thought of Christ?

The events of church life this week are perhaps as rich as the events of civil life are tragic. You can see that the church is gaining strength in her life because circumstances require her to be strong. I want to beseech all of you, dear sisters and brothers present here, as well as you who are listening to the homily by radio: let us all, if we are truly Christians, commit ourselves to making our church strong. The church is strong when she joins her life with the life of God and from there speaks out and sheds light on all sides. Then we are the true people of salvation.

What a magnificent celebration we had last Sunday there in San Francisco in Mejicanos! We celebrated the first anniversary of the death of Father Octavio Ortiz and the four youths who died tragically with him in El Despertar in San Antonio Abad. There was very lively

participation of communities from all over. The event seemed to me comparable to the Sermon on the Mount since the church couldn't hold all the people. We had to hold the celebration in a grove, and that was very significant.

In Apulo there are two marvelous ecclesial experiences. The first is the academy for adult vocations, that is, for men who thought they couldn't become priests because they were too old to study. Now they are being given the opportunity to catch up on their studies and then proceed to priestly formation. One day, God willing, those men will become priests of great conviction because they loved their vocation despite the difficulties. Something else I experienced that same afternoon that I spent among the communities of the parish of Ilopango was a community of young women with religious vows and living in the world. They give evidence of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is true what Saint Luke says, «The Spirit that animated Christ continues to animate his church». The communities of Ilopango are just as much church as any community. Blessed are all the communities if they let themselves be engulfed by the Spirit of the Lord!

The priests' senate, a group of priests elected by their fellows to counsel the bishop, has been very active this week. I want to thank them publicly for the many insightful suggestions and opinions they have offered me to enhance my pastoral judgment.

As regards our religious, we had a chance to greet the superior general of the Passionist Sisters and the mother provincial of the Carmelite Missionaries from Spain. This congregation of Carmelite Missionaries will this very day be celebrating the profession of sisters born here in our land, the first Carmelite Missionaries from El Salvador. The Carmelite Sisters of Saint Teresa have also elected their new superior general, and we wish them future success in their ecclesial and religious ministry.

This week we celebrated the Octave of Christian Unity with many difficulties but with constancy on the part of a very conspicuous group. Catholics and Protestants gathered together in churches of various denominations and prayed that Christ's ideal would become a reality: that all of us Christians would become a single body (John 17:21).

The feast of the Virgin of Candelaria² is getting close. Even now I want to anticipate my greetings to the parish of Candelaria in San Salvador and to the parish of Candelaria in Cuscatlán, as well as to the many towns that celebrate the Virgin of Candelaria as their patroness.

On the church's behalf I want to recall here the many demonstrations of solidarity that we have received. But I want to pay honor especially to the community of Plan del Pino, where today a beautiful ceremony is being conducted by the congregation that oversees the pastoral ministry there, the Spanish Carmelites. I want to read to you the letter that the provincial superior brought me from Sister Rosa Vaquerano, who is greatly loved in that community. She writes:

I am aware of the continuing problems and of your unending worries, and with my sisters here I send you affectionate prayer and sacrifice for this country which I so love and to which I owe so much. God loves us, there can be no doubt, and he expects

² The popular name for the feast of the Presentation, February 2.

something from all this difficulty, something great. I cannot help but believe that all this pain and bloodshed will one day yield a rich harvest. The times are hard. May God help us to understand so that, instead of seeing things cursorily, we may interpret the signs of the times. I continue to believe as always in the church of the archdiocese, and my life will always be inspired by your example and your practice. May the forces of evil reconsider their actions and finally make clear their pretensions; may they return to the path of concord and disinterested love. Here in my new assignment I will speak of what I learned there, and along with those with whom I have worked, I will ask the Lord for the peace we so desire.

This is my greeting, then, for the communities of Plan del Pino.

If we look now to the universal teaching of the pope for our church, there are many thoughts that console us and enlighten us—they are a true homily of God for the church. When the pope said that we must pray for the unity of Christians, he also said that the church and the pope must be the principal mediators for calming world tensions wherever necessary³. Sowing peace throughout the world is our mission.

The Holy Father also pleaded for the freedom of people: «In many countries there is growing terrorism and an increase in fear and anxiety. We who believe in Jesus Christ are called to be architects of reconciliation, pacification, and fraternity among all people»⁴. These are magnificent words for this day when we are speaking of the church as the microphone of God. Let everyone be an expression of the love that God has for us as Father for he wants us all to be like sisters and brothers.

Speaking to the diplomatic corps, the pope referred to the problem of hunger in the world: «Last year I was able to visit the headquarters of the FAO to share with the officials of that international organization my concerns about the urgent need to increase the supply of food products and to distribute them more equitably. However, the generous plans which should have reduced present and future penury have been compromised by many obstacles that depend less on the capacity of nature than on the deficiencies of human beings». What a sad statement! Hunger exists not because the earth is stingy but because some human beings hoard what the earth produces and let other starve. We must all understand that God has created the earth for everyone and that solidarity is all the more necessary when selfishness is most pronounced.

Speaking of human deficiencies, the pope criticizes «people's indifference to this problem, their lack of solidarity, their poor use of resources. This», he says, «is what should mobilize people and bring together the efforts of everybody. But instead of this, we see huge amounts of money consecrated to deadly weapons and machines! We see tremendous incoherencies in commercial exchange!» Take note of how these words of the pope apply to El Salvador. «We see vast energies squandered on ideological struggles and on the politics of power and prestige! But power for whom? Power for what? For the common good? Future generations will call us to account for this»⁵. There is an obvious struggle for power in El

³ JOHN PAUL II, «Toward the Full Unity of Christians: Catechesis at the General Audience», 23 January 1980, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (27 January 1980).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See», 14 January 1980, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (20 January 1980).

Salvador, a struggle for ideological dominance, but has anybody realized that power is service and should not be the pinnacle of ambition? Let us hope that the politicians and the leaders of the people's organizations will consider very seriously these questions of the pope, who says that we are obliged to seek the good of all and not the prestige of just a few. (Applause)

With sympathy I want to convey some sad news that has deeply affected our beloved brother, Father Porfirio Martínez, and his family. In San Francisco Chinamequita they murdered his father Don Catarino Martínez, his mother Doña Matea González de Martínez, a brother, two nephews, and a guest of the family. This massacre was not carried out by the army itself, but it is nevertheless criminal and cannot be tolerated. I send sincere condolences also to Father Julio Menjívar who is related to these tragic victims.

I want to express my condolences as well to Sister Teresa Alas of Divina Providencia Hospital because they have murdered members of her family there in the region of Arcatao. They killed Doña Concepción Alas de Mejía and her son, Gregorio Mejía, as well as Salvador Mejía, Damián Mejía, and another brother. This happened in the village of Yurique, near the Río Sumpul.

I also want to express my solidarity with the grief of the family of Doctor René Quintanilla of San Miguel, who also died as a victim of violence.

We stand in solidarity also with the community of Arcatao, where terror, threats, and cruelty continue unabated. You saw in the paper the news about the finding of the body of the soldier whose disappearance gave rise to the violence there, and you also saw how he was barbarically murdered⁶. It is unjust to exact that kind of reprisal, as guilty as the man might have been, just as it is unjust to wreak disproportionate vengeance such as that unleashed by the National Guard on Arcatao.

The community of Aguilares is also grieving, and I am in solidarity also with them. In a raid on the night of January 24, Jose María Murillo, Anibal Corado Tejada, Emilio Estrada Alegría, and another unidentified young man were taken from their homes without warrant. In another village they seized Santos Rivas Lemus, Antonio Alas Pocasangre, Fidel Américo González, and Efraín Ernesto González; and in still another place, Juan Umaña. The next day, sadly, these nine men captured by the National Guard appeared dead and with signs of horrible torture. When their poor families wanted to bury them, they were harassed by the security agents, who gave them barely enough time to perform this tragic duty. The origin of all this was supposedly the death of two soldiers of the National Guard. I want to include in this message for Aguilares my expression of solidarity with the sisters and the priest. They made the church valiantly present by staying close to those families of the parish community in their grief and their suffering.

From Las Vueltas has arrived a letter from *campesinos* who couldn't sign their names but left on it their fingerprints. (There were a few barely legible signatures). They complain that the people in some villages have had to flee because FECCAS and UTC are threatening to kill them if they don't join their organizations. It seems to me a type of tyranny to impose force on people who have the right to make their own personal options.

⁶ *El Diario de Hoy* (23 January 1980).

There are many homeless people still living in the Externado San José. The school has served as a refuge for them, but now it's time for classes to start. I want to appeal to the mayor to find a quick and effective solution for this problem, one that will benefit not only the homeless families but also the student population of the school. (Applause)

The Association of Bus Operators has also asked me to voice their complaints about the injustices they have suffered and to reaffirm their desire to be of service. They are asking for the technical system to be improved so that it will truly assist this service they are providing for the people. They are in favor of alternatives such as cooperatives or nationalization, but they conclude their message with something I find worrisome: they state that they resolved at an assembly on Monday the twenty-first that they would have to go on strike if their problems were not solved.

I express my solidarity also with Juan Francisco Cerna Rodas, who is demanding a retraction of those who put his name on a list of members of the UGB. He considers it a dangerous calumny. Let us hope that my words will make his explanation crystal-clear: he has nothing to do with that criminal organization.

I want to conclude this litany of expressions of solidarity with a renewed appeal for those who have been kidnapped, especially Jaime Hill Argüello; Mr. Dunn, the former ambassador of South Africa; Jaime Battle; and Mr. McEntee. Much time has passed, and I believe that the channels of negotiation need to be opened up, always seeking human dignity as in every dialogue. The orientation of the church is in favor of human rights, which cannot be subjected to whims and impossible demands. Rather, every demand and strategy must be subordinated to the dignity of human beings, who are children of God no matter who else they may be.

Events of the week

There have been many acts of violence this week, and I want to end this pastoral commentary and summarize everything with remarks about the massacre of January 22. Once again, I deplore the fact that repression against one sector of the Salvadoran people is continuing and that attempts are being made to conceal the truth of these murderous deeds. Because of this I felt obliged to name a commission to investigate the actual events so that I can now pass a pastoral judgment on what happened.

Here are the facts. After hearing trustworthy eyewitnesses and speaking with numerous foreign correspondents who were present at the scene, the commission came to the following conclusions.

First, the demonstration, which had been convoked by the National Coordinator of Popular Organizations of the Masses⁷, was taking place in a pacific, orderly manner. (Applause) From the very start this peaceful attitude was in contrast with the provocative stance of the rightists, whom the governing junta has blamed for causing the disorder.

⁷ Formed by the BPR, the FAPU, the LP-28, and the UDN. Later on the People's Liberation Movement (MLP) also joined.

Second, before the shooting began, poison was being sprayed on the demonstrators from an airplane. The effects of this criminal action were not serious because the demonstrators were able to take preventive measures and benefited by being outside.

Third, another cause of provocation was the attitude of some soldiers of the National Guard who were stationed inside the National Palace.

Fourth, there is general agreement in singling out the National Guardsmen in the National Palace as the ones responsible for the shooting. (Applause)

Fifth, some of the demonstrators defended their companions by also firing weapons. (Applause)

Sixth, the result of the shootout was twenty-one dead and 120 wounded.

Seventh, although there followed retaliatory acts by some members of the people's organizations—burning of vehicles and looting—most of the demonstrators refused to be provoked in the way the rightists perhaps hoped they would be. Instead, they took refuge in churches or nearby buildings. Without dispersing, several thousand proceeded in orderly fashion to the safe haven of the National University. (Applause)

Eighth, this action provoked the Armed Forces to surround the university during the night. The junta claims that this was done to protect the demonstrators from attacks by the rightists and to prevent members of the people's organizations from leaving that center of studies and causing disorder in residential zones. The military cordon was maintained until noon on Wednesday the twenty-third. During that time there were frequent shots fired from outside and from within the university, making many people think that the Armed Forces was planning once again to violate the autonomy of the university.

Ninth, all the radio reports about these events were controlled by the government, which ordered all radio stations to be linked to the national network for more than forty-eight hours and so to broadcast only the official version.

Tenth, the national press published photographs only of armed demonstrators but reported nothing about the actions of the rightists or the assaults of the National Guard. (Applause)

I want to state my own pastoral views on these painful events and the other tragic happenings during this week stained with great violence, some of which I just mentioned. First of all, I want to address, without exception, all the families of the victims and of those who were wounded or beaten. I want to convey to them the Gospel's counsel of hope and our own church's prayers and pastoral solidarity. (Applause)

As pastor and Salvadoran citizen, I am deeply grieved that the organized sector of our people continues to be massacred merely for going into the streets in orderly fashion to ask for justice and freedom. I am certain that all the blood that has been shed and all the suffering experienced by the families of the many victims will not be in vain. (Applause) It is blood and suffering that will water and fertilize new and ever more numerous seeds of Salvadoran men and women who will become aware of the responsibility they have to build a more just and humane society, a society that will come to fruition in the realization of the bold, radical structural reforms that our nation so urgently needs. (Applause)

The cry of the people for liberation is a cry that ascends to God; it is a cry that cannot be stopped by anybody or anything. (Applause) We should consider those who fall in the struggle—as long as they sincerely loved the people and were seeking true liberation—as

always present among us, not only because they are held in the memory of those who continue to struggle but also because the transcendence of our faith teaches us that human life does not end with the body's destruction. (Applause) Rather, our hope is that we will reach, by divine mercy, our complete and absolute liberation after death. (Applause) Earthly liberations will inevitably be imperfect and transitory. They have validity and are worth fighting for only insofar as they reflect on earth the justice of God's kingdom. (Applause)

It also seems to me excessive and therefore unjust to have silenced the people's voice by imposing that national radio chain for such a long time. (Applause) Until now the press and the television have generally broadcast only the official version and other biased versions that cover up the actions of the rightists and the security forces and try to give the impression that the armed demonstrators were the cause of so many people being killed and wounded.

In view of the horrible toll of bloodshed and violence that this week has left us, I want to appeal once again in the name of the Gospel to all Salvadorans to abandon the paths of violence and to make a greater effort to seek out solutions through reason and dialogue. Solutions are always possible as long as people don't renounce their own good sense and good will.

Once again it has been demonstrated that violence is not constructive, especially the violence of recalcitrant rightists who for their own benefit make use of the repressive violence of the Armed Forces to violate the sacred human rights of expression and organization which the people are determined to defend. (Applause) In view of the right's intransigent violence, I repeat once again the severe admonition of the church, that such violence is the reason for the rage and desperation of the people (M 2,17). (Applause) The rightists are the real cause of the menace of the communism that they hypocritically denounce. (Applause)

Regarding the violence of the Armed Forces, I must remind them that their duty is to serve the people, not to preserve the privileges of a few. (Applause) We would like to see them repress with equal fury the subversion of the rightists, which is more criminal than that of the left (Applause) and can be better controlled by the security forces. (Applause) Remember that bribery is degrading, even if it's dealing with millions, and that the government's forces are weakened by their complicity in human rights violations and their excessive acts of vengeance. These forces, which should embody the government's noble desires for change, are instead provoking the people's rage. In order to defend the selfish aims of others, they are sacrificing the life and honor and tranquility of many people and many homes that deserve to be equally loved because they also belong to the same people. (Applause)

I join with my people in telling the governing junta that they must immediately stop the repression in order to demonstrate that they are capable of controlling the security forces, which today seem to be acting as a parallel government that is doing great harm to the junta. (Applause) Each passing day marked by the security forces' repression is a further weakening of the government and a new frustration for the people. (Applause)

This week the people's organizations showed their maturity and their good sense in not letting themselves be provoked. By retreating with dignity they demonstrated the superior effectiveness of reason over violence. (Applause) By acting this way they showed that the church is right when she teaches that an ideology relying on violence demonstrates its own weakness. (Applause) This same church that defends the right to organize and supports all legitimate demands can never be in agreement with the extreme violence of the organized

forces or with their cruel strategies of destruction. These actions make them just as repressive as the forces they are opposing. Nor can the church be in accord with an ideology which is an affront to the faith and the sentiments of our people. (Applause) Rather, the church expects that you who are organized will practice reasonable politics for the common good of the people. Revolution is not about killing any person, for God alone is the master of life. Revolution does not mean writing slogans on walls or shouting wildly in the streets. Revolution means reflecting on how we can create political projects that will provide better structures of justice and solidarity for the people. (Applause)

Finally, in my pastoral appraisal of these events, I want to tell you how the church has intervened in this situation. Besides offering reflections and prophetic denunciations, the archdiocesan offices of San Salvador have, for humanitarian reasons and at the request of the Human Rights Commission, provided shelter for several *campesinos* who were caught up in the crossfire in the cathedral and in El Rosario and were later taken there by the Red Cross. They stayed at our archdiocesan offices until they had assurance that they could return to their homes without any further repression.

Several times I personally told the government to lift the broadcast restrictions, especially since the radio stations, when operating independently, provided a magnificent social service by giving the names of those killed and wounded and providing impartial information directly from the scene of the events. (Applause) I want to repeat here something on which I have greatly insisted: instead of depriving the people of the means of communication, we must help the people develop criteria for using the means of communication. People should know how to read and how to listen to the radio without believing everything they read and hear. That way there would be no need to link us all together in a radio chain, but each person would judge matters according to his or her own truth. (Applause)

I accepted the request of the governing junta to form a commission, together with the Red Cross and the Human Rights Commission, to facilitate the peaceful, orderly departure, once the military cordon around the university has been lifted, of the thousands of persons who were still inside and hadn't eaten for more than twenty-four hours.

Representatives of the archdiocese, along with members of the Human Rights Commission, carried out this mission, and they also communicated directly to the governing junta what they thought was the most likely account of what happened of January 22. They asked the junta to guarantee that the security forces would not interfere with the burial of those who had fallen. That petition was accepted and complied with. That same day we concelebrated with the priests a solemn funeral mass in the cathedral for those who were killed on that sad occasion.

Let it be clear, then, that the voice of the church has been raised in protest against the irrational massacre of January 22. (Applause). The church is asking the governing junta to carry out a thorough and effective investigation and to punish those responsible. The government must purge the security forces and do more to prevent them from acting repressively and unjustly. It should recompense the families of the victims as well as the families of those who were disappeared or arrested for political reasons by the security forces during the time of this government or earlier ones.

As we were saying earlier, the purpose of the homily is to apply the word of God to shed light on our reality. I think that this morning's homily has fulfilled this mission. Only one of the homily's purposes is still missing: bringing that reality and those of us reflecting on it closer to the worship of the true God by uniting together in the eucharistic sacrifice of the Lord. From the depths of our souls let us pray and let us ask the Lord to save our country. Let us ask him to give us Salvadorans the good sense and good will we need in order to find paths that are not bloody and painful but rather are the paths God has directed us toward in making us rational beings. Let us stand and proclaim our faith. (Applause)