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The Final Homily of Archbishop Romero

**Anniversary Mass for Sara Meardi de Pinto,
Chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital
24 March 1980**

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Psalm 23:1-4

John 12:23-26

Because of what Jorgito has written in today's editorial in *El Independiente*, I have been able to enter into his filial sentiments on this anniversary of his mother's death, and I have especially been able to appreciate the noble spirit of Doña Sarita, who dedicated all her cultural formation and graciousness to the service of a cause that is so necessary today: the true liberation of our people.

This afternoon, dear sisters and brothers, I believe we should not only pray for the eternal rest of our dear Sarita but should above all embrace this message that every Christian today must heartily proclaim. Many people don't understand the message. They think that Christianity should not get involved in these things, but quite the opposite is true. You just heard the Gospel of Christ: we must not love our lives so much that we avoid taking the risks in life that history calls for. Those who seek to shun danger will lose their lives, whereas those who for love of Christ dedicate themselves to the service of others will live. They are like that grain of wheat that dies, at least in appearance. If the grain does not die, it remains alone (John 12:24-25). If it yields a crop, it is because it dies, allowing itself to be immolated in the earth; it is by being dismantled that it produces the crop.

From her place in eternity Doña Sarita can give us marvelous confirmation of this text I have chosen for her from the Second Vatican Council:

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons and daughters of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on humanity's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.

Therefore, while we are warned that it profits us nothing if we gain the whole world and lose ourselves, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God. For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in his Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, fraternity, and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured, when Christ hands over to the Father «a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace». On this earth that kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower (GS 39).

This is the hope that inspires us as Christians. We know that every effort to improve society, especially when injustice and sin are so widespread, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God requires of us. We give thanks when we encounter people as generous as Doña Sarita and when we see her ideals reflected in Jorgito and all those who work for the same ideals. Of course, we must purify them in Christianity and invest them with hope for what lies beyond because in that way they become stronger. For we have the assurance that we will never fail in all the work we do on earth if we infuse it with Christian hope. We will find it purified in that kingdom where our merit will be according to what we have done on this earth.

I believe that on this anniversary we must aspire to live by her spirit of hope and of struggle. We remember with gratitude this woman who could understand the concerns of her husband, her son, and all those who are working for a better world. She also did her part, sowing her grain of wheat in suffering. There can be no doubt that her place in heaven will be in proportion to her spirit of sacrifice and comprehension, a spirit that is lacking in many people at this time in El Salvador.

I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to view these things that are happening in our historical moment with a spirit of hope, generosity, and sacrifice. And let us do what we can. We can all do something and be more understanding. This holy woman that we are remembering today perhaps could not do anything directly, but she encouraged those who were doing something, she understood their struggle, and she above all prayed. Even after death she speaks to us a message from eternity, telling us that our work is worthwhile. If we illuminate with Christian hope our intense longings for justice and peace and all that is good, then we can be sure that no one dies forever. If we have imbued our work with a sense of great faith, love of God, and hope for humanity, then all our endeavors will lead to the splendid crown that is the sure reward for the work of sowing truth, justice, love, and goodness on earth. Our work does not remain here; it is gathered and purified by the Spirit of God and returned to us as a reward.

This holy Mass of thanksgiving, then, is just such an act of faith. By Christian faith we know that at this moment the host of wheat becomes the body of the Lord who offered himself for the redemption of the world, and that the wine in this chalice is transformed into the blood that was the price of salvation. May this body that was immolated and this flesh that was sacrificed for humankind also nourish us so that we can give our bodies and our blood to suffering and pain, as Christ did, not for our own sake but to bring justice and peace to our people. Let us therefore join closely together in faith and hope at this moment of prayer for Doña Sarita and ourselves.

(At that moment, a shot rang out.)