

DEDICATED LOVE

Homily for the Funeral Mass of Father Rutilio Grande¹ March 14, 1977

Most excellent representative of His Holiness, the Pope, dear brother bishops, priests and faithful.

It seems to me that on a few occasions, like this morning, the cathedral becomes an image of the universal Church. For here the whole rich pastoral ministry of a local Church is gathered together and joined to the pastoral ministry of all the dioceses of our country and those of the whole world. We are aware not only of the presence of the living, but also of the three deceased persons who give this image of the Church a dimension of openness to the Absolute, to the Infinite, to One who is greater than us: the universal Church, the Church that is greater than history and greater than human life.

If this were an ordinary funeral, I would speak here, my dear sisters and brothers, about the human and personal relationship that I shared with Father Rutilio Grande whom I considered a brother. At important moments in my life, he was very close to me and I will never forget his gestures of friendship. But this is not the time to speak about my personal feelings but to proclaim, in the presence of these bodies, a message for all of us who continue the pilgrimage of life.

I want to base my message on the words of the Pope, present this morning through his representative, the Nuncio, who gives to our image of Church a sense of unity which I now feel in the Archdiocese during these tragic hours, this sense of unity that is present as a result of these sacrifices that the Church is offering.

The message of Paul VI, when he speaks to us about evangelization², provides us with guidelines that help us understand Rutilio Grande. *What is the role of the Church in this universal struggle for liberation from so much misery?* The Pope reminds us that in the 1974 Synod, the voices of the world's bishops, represented especially by those bishops from the Third World, cried out on behalf of those who *remain on the margin of life famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty*. (a) The Church cannot absent itself from this struggle for liberation, but its presence in this struggle must lift up and respect human dignity. It must proclaim a very unique message and be present in a very unique way --- a presence that the world might not understand but that provides the seed and the possibility for victory and success. The Pope stated (b): *The Church is providing these Christian "liberators" with the inspiration of faith, the motivation of fraternal love, a social teaching which the true Christian cannot ignore and which he must make the foundation of his wisdom and of his experience in order to translate it concretely into forms of action, participation and commitment.*

The inspiration of faith

This is the liberation that the Church proclaims. For this reason the Pope stated: (c) *The Church's liberation] cannot be confused with other liberation movements lacking in other-worldly and spiritual horizons.* Above all else, the liberation proclaimed by the Church is based on an inspiration of faith. And here is Father Rutilio Grande, a priest, a Christian

who at the time of his baptism and priestly ordination made a profession of faith: *I believe in God the Father, revealed by Christ, his Son, who loves us and invites us to love one another. I believe in the Church that is a sign of the presence of God's love in the world where men and women extend their hands and encounter one another as sisters and brothers. I believe in the Church that enlightens faith and distinguishes her from liberation movements that are simply political, economical or worldly and that do not move beyond this world's ideologies, interests and realities* (An adaptation of the Profession of Faith from the Rite for Baptism).

My sisters and brothers, let no one here present think that this gathering in the presence of Father Grande's body is some political act with sociological or economic implications. No, it is not that, rather is a gathering in faith --- a faith that through Father Grande's body, dead in hope, is opened to eternal horizons.

The liberation that Father Grande preached is inspired by faith, a faith that speaks to us about eternal life, a faith that he, with his face raised toward heaven and accompanied by two *campesinos*, offered up in its totality and perfection: liberation which culminates with happiness with God; liberation which brings about a repentance for sin, liberation based on Christ, the only saving power. This is the liberation that Father Rutilio Grande preached and therefore, he has lived the Church's message.

The social teaching of the Church

First of all, the Church is providing us with Christian liberators inspired by faith. Secondly, the Church is providing us with men and women who base their lives on a doctrine: the social doctrine of the Church (d) that tells people that the Christian religion is not one dimensional, spiritualistic, unmindful of the misery that surrounds people. Rather our religion beholds God and from this perspective sees the neighbor as brother or sister and is aware of the fact that *what you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me* (e). It is hoped that all those movements that are sensitive to the social question would be aware of this doctrine. For in this way they will avoid failure and short-sightedness --- a short-sightedness that is unable to see beyond worldly realities and structures. As long as our hearts are not converted, as long as our lives are not based on this doctrine that is enlightened by faith and that allows us to harmonize our hearts with that of God, then everything will be feeble, revolutionary, passing and violent. None of these things is Christian. Indeed, we can call Christian only that which is inspired by the true doctrine that the Church proposes to people. How enlightened the world would be if people based their social action, their life, and their concrete commitments in political and economic affairs on the social doctrine of the Church! This is what Father Rutilio Grande preached. Because this doctrine is misunderstood, assassination is so often the result and in fact this is why Father Rutilio Grande died. He died because the social doctrine of the Church is confused with the political doctrine that obstructs the world. The Church's social doctrine is often viewed as subversive, and yet this is so far removed from the wisdom of the Church's doctrine that is proposed as a basis for our lives.

My brother priests, this message of Father Rutilio Grande is very important for us. Let us embrace it and in light of this doctrine and faith, let us work together. Let us not be separated by advanced, dangerous ideologies that are not based on the faith of the Gospel. Let us enlighten our doctrine, our actions as good Samaritans and our preaching of the commandment of Jesus with the light that the Church, the depository of the faith, is trying to

actualize in these mysterious, convulsive times of our country. This is the same message that the Bishops proclaimed yesterday in their message to the people³.

My dear priests, I am happy that among the fruits of this death that we mourn and of other difficult circumstances that we confront at this time, the clergy are united with their Bishop and the faithful understand that there is one faith that leads us along paths that are quite distinct from other ideologies that are not of the Church --- paths that offer an alternative to these ideologies: the cause of love.

The motive of love

The cause of love. My sisters and brothers there should be no feeling of vengeance among us (f). As the bishops stated yesterday, we do not raise our voice for revenge. We are concerned about the things of God who commands us to love him above all things and to love one another as we love ourselves (g). Yes, it is certain that we have asked the legal authorities to shed light on this criminal act for they have in their hands the instruments of this nation's justice and they must clarify this situation. We are not accusing anyone nor are we making judgments before we have all the facts. We hope to hear the voice of an impartial justice since the cause of love cannot be separated from justice. There can be no true peace or love that is based on injustice or violence or intrigue.

True love is the gift that Father Rutilio Grande gives us in his death with the two *campesinos*. The Church loves in this same way and, through the deceased, presents us with the transcendence of the Kingdom. The Church loves them and it should be pointed out that it was at the time when Father Grande walked among the people, proclaiming the message of salvation and the Mass, that he was shot down. A priest with his *campesinos*, walking to meet his people, to identify himself with them, to live with them --- this is an inspiration of love and not revolution. It is an inspiration of love because love is what inspires us, my sisters and brothers. Who knows if those responsible for this criminal act and who have been excommunicated are listening to the radio in their hideout and hearing these words? My dear criminals, we want to tell you that we love you and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts. The Church is incapable of hatred. The Church has no enemies. Its only enemies are those who declare themselves as such. But even these she loves and dies like Jesus, saying to them: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do* (h).

The love of God inspired the actions of Father Rutilio. My dear priests, let us embrace this precious inheritance. Those who listened to him and understood his ideals, know that he was incapable of preaching hatred and incapable of stirring up violence.

Perhaps this is why God chose Father Rutilio for martyrdom because those whom he knew and those who knew him are well aware of the fact that he never called people to violence, vengeance or hatred. He died loving and without a doubt, when he felt those first jolts that brought him death, he was able to speak those words of Jesus: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

My dear sisters and brothers, in the name of the Archdiocese I want to thank all those who collaborate in the process of Christian liberation. I want to thank Father Grande and his two companions, now on the journey to eternity, for they gift this gathering of Church, this gathering of priests from the archdiocese and the other dioceses in El Salvador, and this gathering in which the Holy Father is present through the Papal Nuncio, they gift us with the

true perspective of our mission. Let us not forget it. We are a pilgrim Church, exposed to misunderstanding and persecution, but we are a Church that walks calmly because we carry within us this power of love.

Dear people of El Salvador, at this crossroad in our history it can seem that there is no other solution but to seek violence. I tell you, my sisters and brothers: Blessed be God who through the death of Father Grande is telling the Church: Yes, there is a solution. The solution is love. The solution is faith. The solution is found in the fact that the Church has no enemies. The solution is based on the reality that the Church is a circle in which God hopes to encounter all people.

Let us understand this Church; let us be inspired with this love; let us live this faith and I assure you that there is a solution to all of our great social problems.

As Archbishop, I also want to thank all who work in harmony with the Church's lines of action, all who are enlightened by faith and animated by love, all who establish the foundation of their wisdom on the Church's social doctrine.

Thank you, my dear sisters and brothers, all of you who accompany us in this hour of sorrow.

¹ On Saturday 12 March 1977 Father Rutilio Grande was assassinated together with two peasants who accompanied him, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio Lemus, as they were on their way to El Paisnal. The requiem Mass with the bodies present took place on Monday 14 March in the Cathedral of San Salvador.

² See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, on evangelisation in the modern world (8 December 1975).

³ See Message of the Conference of Bishops of El Salvador on the reality facing the country. (*Orientación*, 12 March 1977).

Margin References

(a) EN 30: (b) EN 38: (c) EN 33: (d) EN 38: (e) Mt 25,40: (f) EN 38 (g) Mc 12,30-31 (h) Lc 23,34