

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHURCH

Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 6, 1977

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
2 Thessalonians 2:15-3:5
Luke 20:27-38

My dear sisters and brothers, it seems that our gathering here in the cathedral, the community Church, is a family gathering, a gathering of the Archdiocesan family. The transmission of this celebration on radio also allows me, as pastor, to become present to many parish communities, base communities of faith, and homes in so many towns and villages. In this way, we are able to share the joys, hopes, anxieties and ideals that we hold in common. Thus these announcements and the news that I share with you at the beginning of my homily is done not only to inform you, but also to share with you in a way that will enable you and all those persons who identify with the Church to feel that they are united by these ideals and hopes and sorrows. I also begin in this manner so that those who are not in accord with us will at least know the paths along which the People of God walk. I am very pleased to know that, each day, more and more people identify themselves with the life of the Church, not with me --- for as a person, I am secondary and an unworthy servant of this Church. I know that those who hold me in esteem ultimately esteem Jesus Christ whom I represent. Those who slander and persecute me and do not hold me in esteem, do not simply reject me, but reject the One who sent me. So I rejoice with those individuals who each day repent and are converted to the Lord. Hopefully the fruit of my word results in more people drawing closer to the Lord. My ideal is the same as John the Baptist, *he must increase; I must decrease* (a).

My diary this week

Last Sunday, despite the obstacles that were placed in the path of many pilgrims, I was greatly pleased to share with the people of Cojutepeque on the occasion of their traditional feast in honor of Christ the King. I witnessed these obstacles, for as I was arriving in Cojutepeque, I saw pilgrims being detained at gun point. They finally arrived, but there is no reason to view as suspect people who want to participate in these parish gatherings. I would hope that we can avoid these provocations and that as Church, we would be free to gather together, since we do so with pious and gospel objectives. There is no reason to detain and threaten people. Nonetheless, the celebration was most splendid. I want to congratulate the Knights of Christ the King in Cojutepeque, the many pilgrims, and the pastor, for their enthusiasm and love of Christ, the King of our Church.

On Monday, I made an important visit to Amatepec and the surrounding area and was filled with great joy. Even though this visit was not planned, I felt the warmth of the people who received me, a people who have developed their faith as a result of the pastoral zeal of

Father Luis Bouguet, a Dominican priest. It is clear that they are forming a community there in this very poor area where the people, in their hearts, are very rich.

I was also very pleased to celebrate a Mass that had been organized by the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart. This Mass was celebrated on All Saints Day in El Paisnal at the grave of Father Grande. As we celebrated this Mass, our eyes were focused on the celebration of the next day, the feast of All Souls Day. In front of Father Grande's grave and the two *campesinos* who were assassinated with him in March, I prayed for all the deceased of the Archdiocese. We raised up our eyes from that place and reflected on the many saints who form part of that international court that is revealed to us in the book of Revelation, a royal court, *from every nation, race, people and tongue* (b). Together with Father Grande and those who have died offering their lives for their faith and the gospel, I saw a great number of people from every class of our society who surrounded the throne of the Redeeming Lamb of humankind.

In the afternoon of the feast of All Saints, I participated in a beautiful celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd prepared these young men and women. I was affirmed in my belief that in order to receive this sacrament that strengthens young people through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we need a better preparation, like that which these Sisters provided. I was impressed to see that group of young people process behind the paschal candle that represents the Risen Christ and then, gathered around the same paschal candle, renew their baptismal commitment and receive this new gift of the Holy Spirit --- this gift of Confirmation. This morning we are going to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in the parish at Colón. I call upon all parents to provide a better preparation to your children. Finally, I tell you that I do not like to administer Confirmation to the multitudes that gather in the crypt of the Cathedral. I do not like this because many of them do not know what they are receiving and, as little children, they do not need this strength of the Holy Spirit at this time, but will certainly need it later in their life. Therefore, it is best that they be better prepared. The pastors are collaborating in this ministry and providing a better preparation so that this sacrament, as the word implies, might truly be a confirmation of their baptismal faith, a strengthening in the Holy Spirit, a sacrament for young women and men.

On Wednesday, in the parish of Lourdes, in the school of the Sisters of the Assumption, we had a very interesting meeting that dealt with the pastoral planning of this parish. This work and planning gives us great hope because the Sisters have been ministering there for a long time.

On November 3rd, I was happy to celebrate the feast of Saint Martin de Porres in Quezaltepeque. Many boys and girls dressed like Saint Martin and carried brooms that represented the call and the message of this saint. Privileged people and people in lofty positions do not attract God's blessing in the same way as humble people who, like Saint Martin, know how to make their broom and their daily chores (whether small or great) instruments of their sanctification. The destiny of humankind is not to obtain large amount of money or power but to fulfill the will of God. This is the message that we communicated to the people of Quezaltepeque on this feast of Saint Martin.

I want to speak a little more and communicate to you the profound reflections that we shared with the seminary leadership team, mostly young priests, who have been prepared to form our future clergy. I became aware of the seriousness and the depth of their commitment

to this ministry. I invite everyone to place their trust in our seminary and therefore, let us pray that the seminary might continue to form these apostles that today our archdiocese and our Church so desperately need.

Certainly a highlight of the past week occurred yesterday morning in the Diocese of Santiago de María. There, in communion with the hierarchy and in the presence of many religious communities and faithful from countless parishes, Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas, our beloved brother, took possession of the diocese of Santiago de María. Using the words that the Bishop spoke during his homily to the multitudes that surrounded the small pavilion in the central park, I can tell you that on very few occasions have I seen in Santiago de María such an eloquent presence of the Church as yesterday. The presence of the hierarchy, so many priests from all the dioceses, men and women religious, and laity, gave the appearance that the Church is very much alive and present in our country and, concretely, alive and present yesterday in Santiago de María. I want to reiterate what was said yesterday and last Sunday here in this Cathedral, namely, that we assure Bishop Rivera that we will remain united with him in our prayer and ministry.

Among the many letters that arrived at my office during this past week, I want to highlight two of them. One was from Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, the International President of Pax Christi. From Holland he wrote that he had been informed about the situation of our Church and said: *I ask you to communicate to your collaborators and the people our expression of solidarity. We are united in prayer for justice and in our struggle to establish respect for human rights.*

Another important letter arrived from Brother Roger. You have heard me speak of Brother and his famous monastery in Taizé. It is neither a Catholic nor a Protestant monastery, but rather a Christian monastery. In France, the doors of this monastery are open to all those who love Christ, be they Protestant or Catholic. Brother promised to visit El Salvador. You were able to read in *Orientación*¹ an open letter that Brother Roger wrote to the President asking for his effective collaboration in the matter of respect for human rights. He went on to speak about his visit to our country so that *we might pray together and listen and obtain from the President guarantees that the acts of persecution will cease.*

My sisters and brothers, it is sad, but the persecution continues. During this week we have received sad news from the Department of Chalatenango. Even sadder is the news that was communicated to us this weekend concerning the abuse and insults leveled against the pastor of Osicala, Father Miguel Ventura. While it is certain that Father is not a member of our Diocese (he is a priest in the Diocese of San Miguel), but our sense of solidarity compels us to protest this abuse of a brother priest.

I received some details about this case. Father Miguel was tied up and bound like a vile assassin, abused, and detained at the police station in Gotera. Together with Father Miguel, some catechists were captured and have disappeared. There is not enough time to enter into all the details here but it is clear that these actions do not allow us to conclude that the relations between the government and the Church are getting better. I want to remind you about an aspect of our ecclesiastical law that states: *All the faithful owe reverence to clerics according to their various grades and offices, and they commit a sacrilege if they do real injury to a cleric*². Anyone who touches a priest, especially in the way that Father Miguel was treated, is guilty of the sin of sacrilege and sanctioned in the following way: *Whoever lays violent hands to the person of other clerics or to religious of either sex is upon that fact*

*subject to excommunication reserved to his own Ordinary, who shall punish such a one with other penalties, if the matter requires it, according to his prudent judgment*³. In other words, all those persons who tied up and bound Father Miguel, and all those who have abused any priest, are excommunicated for having realized such an act and only their own Bishop can lift this sanction. In this case, only Bishop Alvarez can lift the penalty of excommunication from those who committed these actions against one of his priests. He can also punish these persons guilty of the sin of sacrilege with other more serious penalties.

I believe we have said enough and that we can all understand where we, as Church, are heading at this time in history. From the perspective of this historical moment, we lift up our eyes in contemplation. In light of the beautiful words that the Church has just proclaimed to us,

The eschatological Church

We title this homily: the eschatological Church. The word *eschatology* --- the study of the final things --- enables us to see that the Church points out to women and men, to all people, the final realities, the destiny toward which all people, all communities and our own nation travel. Today, in theology, eschatology is a very important theme. My sisters and brothers, I would say that eschatology, this knowledge and science and experience and hope that Christians bear within themselves about the final things, gives our Church a most original dynamic. I am speaking about a dynamic of hope that can only be achieved as the result of great faith. Today, Saint Paul has sadly told us that *not everyone has faith* (c).

Faith is not for everyone. I am saddened to think that perhaps some of my listeners belong to this group of people who do not have faith. This is not because of some fault on God's part, but rather because of the ill-will of these individuals whose hearts reject either our preaching or the preacher. Do not focus on my person, which is surely repugnant for many, but rather focus on what I say in the name of the One who speaks with a profound knowledge of eschatology. My dear sisters and brothers, priests, religious, catechists and collaborators in establishing the Kingdom of God, the day when we, as Catholics, understand the meaning of this eschatology, then on that day all those things that separate us will disappear.

As I said two weeks ago when speaking about the missions --- the day when we understand the meaning of this universal ministry of the Church, this mission that God has entrusted to our people, this mission to proclaim the saving message to the whole world, on that day, because of the universal consequences of salvation, all divisions will disappear. I called upon my sisters and brothers of the Protestant religions to cease creating more sects among our people that ultimately only create more divisions among us. I invited them to join in this common struggle for unity. We, as Protestants and Catholics, because we are divided and you, my Protestant brothers and sisters, because you are divided into so many sects, and even though we call ourselves Christian and believe in the same Bible, yet we give a scandalous witness for we act as Saint Paul says, as if Christ were partial (d). There is only one Christ and we have the obligation to unite around his message, to root out all selfishness and personal ways of thinking from our hearts. In this way we can present to humankind the unique faith in the one Christ and thus form the one flock that will save the whole world.

If this universal perspective is not enough to unite us, then I believe another dynamic and force can bring us together, namely this eschatological perspective that enables us to

recognize that we journey toward the same destiny, that we are crew members on the same ship, that we are illuminated by the same light that emanates from the lighthouse that guides the ship in the midst of the storms of our history and life.

What do the readings today teach us about eschatology? I would like us to focus on this fact: this is the next to last Sunday in the Liturgical Year. Next Sunday is the last Sunday and the Church wishes to crown the Liturgical Year with the feast of Christ the King, the King of all seasons, the eternal King, the beginning and the end of life. Thus, today, the thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, we are near to the conclusion of the Liturgical Year and this is our final reflection on the Church. How appropriate that just as we do at the conclusion of the calendar year, so as we draw near to the conclusion of the Liturgical Year, we take time to analyze what we have done during the year and how we will focus our thinking during the new year. Thus eschatology is like a compass on our ship that enables us to see if we are on the right course. In this case, the readings speak to us about the realities of life here after: the resurrection.

The first reading is an epic and one of the most heroic passages in the Bible. The era of Alexander the Great and his conquests of the East marked the beginning of a very dangerous period in the Holy Land, a situation that would continue up to the time of King Seleucus. The events recounted in today's reading took place during the reign of King Antiochus. It deals with the process of Hellenization, that is, the process that sought to introduce Greek customs into the culture of Palestine. Hellenic is the same as Greek, thus we are speaking about Greek or pagan customs, such as the gymnasium and stadium. All of these customs were opposed to the sacred Law of Moses and thus there was conflict. Conflict will always replace well-being when a group of people attempt to impose criteria that are opposed to the authentic sentiments of the people. The Hellenic imposition of King Antiochus resulted in a revolt by the people. The seven sons of the priest, Matthias, (the most famous being Judas Maccabee) were able to organize the army against this pagan invasion of the Holy Land. In light of this heroism, many wonderful acts occurred in Palestine.

In this first reading we are presented with the case of a mother and her seven sons. They wanted to be faithful to God's law and refused to offer sacrifices of pork to the false Greek gods. Because of their disobedience, they were martyred, one by one. On these pages of the second book of Maccabees (read the entire seventh chapter of this book) we are presented with a theology of martyrdom, a theology that is very necessary for our people today. We see that people preferred to be faithful witnesses to the Law of God rather than obey those who profaned these laws and rights of God. Examining the responses of the seven sons, it was concluded that the Law of God had to be obeyed even when this meant the possibility of death. (e) What a courageous principle!

This led people to have great hope in a second principle: those who are mutilated, who have their tongues torn out and the skin and the hair of their heads torn off, those who have their limbs torn from their bodies, those who suffer all of this because of their fidelity to God's law will be raised up with their limbs intact. This life that was taken away from them by the powerful of this earth will be restored to them in a glorified way by the Lord. The Bible tells us that the evil doers will also be raised up, (f) but not to receive glory but, if they do not repent of their sins, they will be given their just punishment, eternal ignominy.

This theology leads us to the following thought: those who are martyred are not saints and all the others evil. The book of Maccabees also tells us that God punishes the sins of his children through the assaults of the unjust. But while his children are punished, through the Providence of God, they will receive a reward and a recompense. At the same time, those who assaulted the children of God, if they do not repent of their crimes, will be cast into eternal ignominy (g). What a beautiful theology!

We will see that this theology is applied in the gospel that presents us with the curious case of the seven husbands. They were brothers who married, one after the other, the same woman. A question, a ridiculous question, is then asked by the Saducees who did not believe in the resurrection. They ridicule the resurrection by proposing to Jesus this passage that presents a case of conscience: if it is true that everyone rises from the dead, which of the seven will be her husband at the time of the resurrection?. The case seems to be well presented; nevertheless, Jesus uses this opportunity to preach about the relativity of temporal things. He says: you are mistaken! You do not understand anything about this life of the resurrection. It is true that in this life, because of a law handed down from Moses, the Levirate Law, (h) if a man died without having any sons, then his brother, who was still single, had the obligation of marrying the widow in order to give the name of his brother to a child of the widow. The case is legitimate when applied to the seven brothers who died childless, but the solution is the following: all the marriage laws, and marriage itself, have a relative, historical and temporal significance. It is only necessary that a man and a woman have children here on earth in order to preserve the human race, but in the resurrection, this sexual relationship will not be taken into consideration. Marriage does not exist in the resurrection. Everyone will be an angel of God. Naturally the resurrected body will exist (i) and this body will be a whole body, but the function of the different body parts will be transformed. Read those chapters of Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he says that it is one thing to die and be buried and then it is a different reality that this same body is raised to eternal life. Here Saint Paul is speaking about a spiritual body (j). In heaven there will be no need for sexual relations which here on earth are necessary for the procreation of descendants. In heaven this will not be necessary.

My sisters and brothers, here we are going to try to draw some conclusions. This homily provides us with an opportunity to see the aberrations of those individuals who abuse sexual pleasure: those who avoid having children, homosexuality, pre-marital relations, abortion, prostitution, etc. --- all of these realities place the use of these bodily functions at the service of pleasure. Yet the sexual functions of our bodies have been given to us by God for much higher objectives.

Here we confront the eschatological finality of these realities. If in our human relationships we would always take into consideration the finality of our lives, then this problem of demographic explosion would not exist. For this problem is not a matrimonial problem but arises outside of marriage, the result of machismo, that is, men having children with other women outside of the marital relationship. This is the real reason for the demographic explosion in El Salvador. If people truly lived their marriage commitments, if all the people of El Salvador were faithful to the promises made in marriage, we would not have this alarming phenomenon of so many children who do not know their fathers. This is often the fruit of instant gratification in the pleasures of sexual relations.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that all temporal realities are relative. Those who have power should not make it an absolute but rather use this power for the

common good. The powerful must be mindful of the fact that one day God will judge them and they --- those who govern and are governed --- will have to render an account of their lives and how they used their gifts and talents and faculties. Let us also speak about wealth. We must remember that the golden calf is an idol and will disappear. Indeed when people die, their hands are empty and all their material possessions are left behind. This again brings us back to the idea of eschatology. If we were mindful of this eschatological dimension in our use of money, in the relationship between management and labor, in our dealings with the people who harvest the sugarcane and coffee and cotton, if we allowed this eschatological dimension to illuminate all our relationships then all these temporal realities would be seen as relative. Priestly and religious celibacy is relative. Even the institution of marriage is relative. If we priests accept our commitment to renounce marriage, then we must be faithful to this commitment because we are called to be witnesses in the midst of the world of marriage and proclaim with our lives that sexual relations have a relative value. Celibate men and women, as well as those people who are single and embrace chastity, are giving a witness about our future life. As Jesus said in today's gospel: *they become like angels* (k). They do not die but are immortal and the things of the flesh are no longer necessary.

My sisters and brothers, I hope that you understand me because a deep spirituality is the best response to so many problems that arise as a result of making sex the center of our lives and the focus of our preoccupations. Sex is not the primary aspect of matrimony. Rather we must give attention to mutual formation between spouses, preparing ourselves to live one day as angels in heaven, sanctifying spouses and children through living chaste lives, and living honestly, according to the Law of God, this institution that is called matrimony.

It is for this reason that Saint Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians presents Jesus Christ, the Lord, as the center of eschatology. Christ gives meaning to the life of the Christian. How I would like to engrave this great idea on each one's heart: Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed, of laws to be obeyed, of prohibitions. That makes Christianity very distasteful. Christianity is a person, one who loves us so much, one who calls for our love. Christianity is Christ. In light of Christ, let us live chaste married lives. In light of Christ, let us understand this eschatological dimension of our lives. Let us realize that our elder brother awaits us, and even more, our elder brother walks with us now, at this time. When we speak about eschatology I would like to engrave this other idea in your hearts: eschatology is not simply some future reality but a reality that we already possess when in our hearts we have faith in Christ. We do not await death so that we might be happy, for as Jesus said, we are happy when we have the Kingdom of God *within us* (l).

Eschatology began when Jesus came twenty centuries ago. Indeed, the ultimate act of God was to give history a meaning of finality. Jesus Christ is the ultimate meaning of history and everything else is relative. All reality is renewed in Christ. Only those who live in this intimacy with Jesus are also living this eschatological dimension of their life. The young person, the married couple, the elderly person, those who are ill, those who fulfill their obligations and suffer as a result of their fidelity, if they unite their suffering with the suffering of Christ, the King of history, then all these people are living the eschatological dimension of their lives. For this reason, eschatology is often expressed with these classical words: *Now, but not yet!* Like the pendulum on a watch: *Now, but not yet! Now, but not yet!* This is indeed Christianity. We ought to live now as though we were in heaven. But we are not there yet because who we are has not yet been made known. Now, yes we understand our commitment with Christ who is incarnated in the people whom we must serve and for whom we ought to be willing to lay down our lives even though we do not see the splendor of the

glory that we carry hidden within ourselves. All those persons who are in the grace of God and who are going to come forward at the time of communion are living the Kingdom of God, though not yet in its fullness, for they do not yet understand all of these realities even though they bear these realities in a hidden way within their hearts. This is called present eschatology. In other words, eschatology has two movements: a present and a future. Present eschatology is lived by people of faith and hope. On the margins of society, in poverty, and in times of humiliation and torture, people are living this heaven and this hope. If they should die, then the glass of clay is broken, but the light of splendor illuminates their lives. My brothers and sisters, let us live this eschatology. Let us live in this Kingdom of Heaven. This is the great hope of the gospel.

This is also what I preach to you with all my strength and what I want to engrave deeply in the hearts of each person. Let us not despair! Let us not seek violent solutions! Let us put aside hatred and assassinations! I say this clearly once again because yesterday, in Santiago de María, according to some friends of mine, I have changed and now I preach revolution, hatred, class struggle. They told me I am a communist. You know the language that I use in my preaching. With my words I want to sow hope and yes, I denounce the injustices of this world and the abuses of power, but I do so with love and not hatred. I call people to conversion so that we might all live this eschatological dimension of life that is the soul and the essence of this Church that is inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives and reigns forever and ever.

¹ See “Carta abierta del Prior de Taizé al Presidente de la República de El Salvador”, *Orientación*, 11 September 1977.

² *Code of Canon Law*, 119. Mons. Romero quotes the 1917 Canon, valid until the promogation of the new one in 1983.

³ *Code of Canon Law*, 2343, # 4.

Margin References (a) Jn 3,30: (b) Rv 7,9: (c) 2Th 3,2: (d) 1Cor 1,13: (e) 2M 7,30: (f) 2M 7,11: (g) 2M 7,32-38: (h) Dt 25,5-10: (i) Lk 20,36: (j) 1Cor 15,44: (k) Lk 20,36: (l) Lk 17,21.