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THE MOTIVATION OF LOVE

Funeral Mass of Father Rutilio Grande¹ 14 March 1977

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

It seems to me that on some occasions, like this morning, the cathedral becomes the sign of the universal church. It is here that 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 the whole world. We feel that the presence not only of the living but of these three deceased persons gives this image of the church a dimension of openness to the Absolute, to the Infinite, to the One Beyond: the universal church, the church beyond history, the church beyond 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 consider a brother. At very critical 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 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 here in his representative, the nuncio, whom I thank because he gives our church a sense of unity. During these tragic hours I am feeling this sense of unity in the archdiocese as a hurried blossoming of these sacrifices that the church is offering. The message of Paul VI, when he speaks to us about evangelization,² provides us with guidelines for understanding Rutilio Grande. What does the church contribute to 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, especially bishops from the Third World, lamented the anguish of those who «remain on the margin of life, suffering from famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty» (EN 30). The church cannot be absent from this struggle for liberation; its presence in this struggle to lift up and dignify human beings must be a very original message—a very unique way of being present that the world may not understand but that provides the seed and the promise of victory and success. The pope declares: «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» (EN 38). This is the liberation that the church proclaims. For this reason the pope states that the

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 PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, on evangelization in the modern world (8 December 1975).

church's liberation «cannot be confused with other liberation movements that lack supernatural and spiritual horizons» (EN 33) and especially the inspiration of faith.

The inspiration of faith

Here before us today 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. I believe in a 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».³ This is an illumination of faith that distinguishes Christians from any liberation of a purely political, economic, or worldly sort, and from any liberation that does not move beyond this world's ideologies, interests, and realities. My sisters and brothers, no one here present should ever think that this gathering around Father Grande's body is some political act with sociological or economic implications. By no means; rather, it 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. It is liberation which culminates in happiness with God, liberation which begins from repentance for sin, liberation based on Christ, the only saving power. This is the liberation that Father Rutilio Grande preached, and he has therefore 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. Second, the church is providing us with men and women who base their lives on a doctrine, the social doctrine of the church (EN38), which tells people that the Christian religion is not one-dimensional, spiritualistic, unmindful of the misery that surrounds them. Rather, our religion beholds God and from the perspective of God sees the neighbor as brother or sister and becomes aware that «what you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me» (Matt 25:40). I hope that all the movements active in social matters are aware of this doctrine. If they are, they will avoid failure and the short-sightedness that is unable to see beyond worldly realities and temporal 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 to help us to harmonize our hearts with the heart of God, then everything will be feeble, revolutionary, passing, and violent. None of these things is Christian. What gives true life is the social doctrine that the church proposes to people. How enlightened the world would be if all of us took the social doctrine of the church as the basis of our social action, our existence, and our concrete commitments in political and economic affairs! This is what Father Rutilio Grande preached. And because this doctrine is often misunderstood, even murderously, that is why Father Rutilio Grande died. He died because the social doctrine of the church is confused with the political doctrines that disturb the world. The church's social doctrine is often slandered as subversive, like other things far removed from the prudence which the church's doctrine posits at the basis of existence.

³ An adaptation of the profession of faith from the Rite for Baptism.

My brother priests, this message of Father Rutilio Grande is extremely important for us. Let us embrace it, and in the light of this doctrine and this faith let us work together. Let us not be separated by wildly dangerous ideologies, by ideologies that are not inspired in the faith of the Gospel. Let us illuminate our doctrine, our actions as Good Samaritans, and our preaching of Christ's commandment with the light which the church, as depository of the faith, is trying to make present in these mysterious, convulsive times of our country. This is the message that the bishops of El Salvador proclaimed yesterday.⁴

I am happy, dear priests, for the fruits of this death we lament and of the other difficult circumstances at this moment: the clergy are united with their bishop, and the faithful understand that the light of faith leads us along paths that are quite distinct from other ideologies that are not of the church, for the church offers a third way—a motivation of love.

The motivation of love

We speak of the motivation of love, sisters and brothers. There should be no feeling of vengeance among us (EN 38). 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 others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Yes, it is true that we have asked the authorities to investigate 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 beforehand. We hope to hear the voice of an impartial justice because, even with the motivation of love, justice cannot be absent. There can be no true peace and no true love that is based on injustice or violence or intrigue.

True love is what moved Father Rutilio Grande as he died with the two *campesinos* at his side. That is how the church loves. She dies with them, and with them she presents herself to heaven's transcendence, for she loves them. And it is significant that Father Grande was gunned down precisely when he was traveling to impart to his people the message of the Mass and salvation. A priest was with his *campesinos*, on his way to meet his people, to identify himself with them, to live with them—this was an inspiration of love and not revolution.

It is precisely because it is love that inspires us, sisters and brothers, that we want to tell those responsible that we love them. Who knows if those who are responsible for this criminal act (and therefore excommunicated) are hearing these words on a radio there in their hideout and in their conscience? We want to tell them, «Brother criminals, we love you, and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts because the church is incapable of hatred; the church has no enemies». Her only enemies are those who declare themselves as such. But even these she loves, and like

⁴ «Message of the Conference of Bishops of El Salvador on the Reality Facing the Country» in *Orientación* (20 March 1977).

the dying Jesus she says, «Father, forgive them for they know not what they do» (Luke 23:34).

The love of God inspired the actions of Father Rutilio. Dear priests, let us embrace this precious heritage. Those of us who heard Father Rutilio and shared his ideals know that he was incapable of preaching hatred; he was incapable of stirring up violence. Perhaps that is why God chose him for this martyrdom: because all those who knew him are well aware that he never uttered any call to violence, vengeance, or hatred. He died loving, and without a doubt, when he felt those first impacts that brought him death, he was able to say as Christ did, «Father, forgive them for they know not what they do».

My dear sisters and brothers, in the name of the archdiocese I want to thank these collaborators of Christian liberation, Father Grande and his two companions, now on the journey to eternity. They are helping us understand the true dimensions of our mission as church. As we gather now with all our beloved priests of other dioceses, in union with the Holy Father who is present through the nuncio, let us never forget this. 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 there may seem to be no peaceful solution, and some feel they must resort to violent means. But 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 experiencing the church, not as an enemy, but as the circle in which God wants 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 will be a solution to all of our great social problems.

As archbishop, I also want to thank all you who work in harmony with the church's lines of action, all you who enlighten others by your faith and inspire them with your love, all you who prudently teach the church's social doctrine. Thank you, dear sisters and brothers, all you who accompany us in this hour of sorrow.