

**THE CHURCH IN THE SERVICE OF PERSONAL, COMMUNITY AND  
TRANSCENDENT LIBERATION**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent  
March 23, 1980**

**Readings:**

*Isaiah 43:16-21*

*Philippians 3:8-14*

*John 8:1-11*

My dear brothers and sisters:

**Introduction**

**a) Greetings to the ecumenical mission**

Our brothers and sisters, members of an Ecumenical Mission, are visiting our country during these days, and are present with us this morning, sharing in this celebration of God's Word and the Eucharist. They are here to gather information about our situation, especially the abuse of human rights. The members of this commission are: Reverend Alan McCoy, a Franciscan who together with Father Juan Macho Merino are presiding at this Eucharist with me. Reverend McCoy is President of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors in the United States. Also present are: Reverend Thomas Quigley, a member of the United States Episcopal Conference's Department of Peace and Development (Latin American Division), Reverend William Wipfler, member of the Program of Human Rights of the National Council of Churches in the United States, Mrs. Betty de Nute Richardos, member of the Service Committee of the American Friends of the United States, Mr. Ronald Joung, member of the Educational Program for Peace of the American Friends of the United States. In their person and Christian way of thinking, we feel the solidarity of North America. We understand how the Gospel can illuminate the different forms of society. From the perspective of respect for the human person as revealed to us by Jesus Christ, this solidarity is expressed to us as a Church that tries to defend these rights of the human person, rights that have been subject to great abuse in our own country. We are most grateful to you.

Yes, we express our thanks to them and pray that the days that they will spend with us might strengthen them in their Christian commitment. We also see that our own efforts to understand other nations are supported and affirmed by all those who are truly enlightened with the light of the Gospel.

**---YSAX, an instrument of truth and justice**

I repeat, we want to greet our radio audience listening to us through YSAX. For a long time we have awaited this moment, and thanks to God the time has come. We also know that our radio station is at risk precisely because it is an instrument of truth and justice. We know,

however, that we must take this risk because so many people support this word of truth and justice.

### --- Radionoticias del Continente

I am most happy this morning to be able to count on the collaboration of Radionoticias del Continente. As they have done on previous occasions, so today, using our telephone and radio station, they are broadcasting our voice to Latin America. Demetrio Olaziregui, a reporter, is present with us this morning and has informed us that a bomb exploded outside the offices in Costa Rica where Radionoticias del Continente is broadcasting this program. Several sticks of dynamite exploded and partially destroyed the wall and the glass of two-story building. This forced them off the air for a brief time but they have been able to continue their broadcast and have gifted us with this wonderful service. We have been informed that the homily will continue to be transmitted and that there is great demand for this program in Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil. They have received between 300 to 400 letters, informing them that this program can be heard very clearly in Honduras, Nicaragua and here in many parts of El Salvador.

#### b) Liturgical context: Lent, a preparation for Easter

I give thanks to God, first, for this message which is simply a humble reflection on the Divine Word and secondly, for having these wonderful channels of communication that allow me reach so many people and tell them that in the context of Lent, all of this is a preparation for our Easter. Easter is itself now a cry of victory. No one can extinguish the life that Christ has resurrected. Neither death nor all the banners of death and hatred that have been raised against him and against his Church can prevail. He is the victorious one!

### --- Holy Week, a celebration of redemption

Just as he will thrive in an unending Easter, so we must accompany him in a Lent and Holy Week when the cross, sacrifice and martyrdom are so prominent. As Jesus said: *"Blessed are those who are not scandalized by the cross!"* (Matthew 10:37 [this is a reference to taking up the cross and following Jesus but is not the exact quote])

Lent, then, is a call to celebrate our redemption in that difficult combination of cross and victory. Our people are well prepared to do these days: all that surrounds us proclaims the cross. But those who have Christian faith and hope know that behind the Calvary of El Salvador lies our Easter, our resurrection. This is the Christian people's hope.

#### c) Lenten message of God's Word

### --- Revelation of God's plan to fully liberate humankind

I have been trying during these Sunday of Lent to uncover in divine revelation, in the Word read here at Mass, God's plan to save peoples and individuals. Today when history offers our people various proposals, we can say with assurance: the plan that best reflects God's plan will prevail. This is the Church's mission. So, in light of God's Word that reveals God's plan for the happiness of peoples, we have the duty of also pointing out the realities, of seeing how God's plan is reflected among us or despised among us. Let no one be offended that in light of God's Word read in our Mass we illuminate social, political and

economic realities. If we did not, this would not be our own Christianity. It is for this reason that Christ willed to become incarnate, so that the light that he brings from the Father might become life for people and for all nations.

I know that many are scandalized at what I say and charge that it forsakes the preaching of the gospel to meddle in politics. I do not accept that accusation. No, I strive that we may not just have on paper and study in theory all that Vatican Council II and the meetings at Medellín and Puebla have tried to further in us, but that we may live it and interpret it in this conflict-ridden reality, preaching the gospel as it should be preached for our people. I ask the Lord during the week, while I gather the people's cries and the sorrow stemming from so much crime, the ignominy of so much violence, to give me the right words to console, to denounce, to call to repentance. Though I continue to be a voice that cries in the desert, I know that the Church is making the effort to fulfill its mission.

During the Sunday's of Lent we have reflected on the plan of God, a plan that could be summed up in the following way:

### **--- Christ is the way**

For this reason, Jesus is presented to us as one fasting and overcoming temptation in the desert.

Christ is life and the goal of our life. He urges us forward and thus presents himself to us as one transfigured, calling us to this goal that all humankind is called to.

### **--- The collaboration of humankind: conversion**

On the third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent, God invited men and women to collaborate in their salvation: to be converted and reconciled with God. Using beautiful images such as the barren fig tree, the Prodigal Son, and the adulterous woman who repents and is forgiven, God calls us and tells us that we will encounter God as the father of the Prodigal Son and the Savior of the adulterous woman. Every sin can be forgiven and we can be reconciled with any enemy when there is a sincere conversion and turning back to the Lord. This is the message of Lent!

### **--- Revelation of the realization of God's plan in history**

The readings of Lent also tell us how God makes his plan concrete in history, that is, how he makes the history of people, the history of salvation. Indeed the salvation of people and their happiness depends upon the way in which these same people reflect, in their own life, the plan of God, the plan to be saved in Christ through conversion. Therefore in the very first reading of Lent we listened to the history of Israel, a paradigm people, and an exemplary people, exemplary even in their unfaithfulness and sinfulness. We saw how God chastised the people for their infidelity and sin. Yet this same people became a model who received the promise of salvation from God. We walked with Abraham, wandered in the desert with Moses and celebrated with Joshua the entrance of the people into the Promised Land.

Today we are invited to participate in a second Exodus: the return from Babylon. This is a history that every people must imitate, not because all people are like Israel, but because there is something like Israel in all people --- in the group that follows Christ, in the group known as the People of God (a group that is not composed of all people but rather a faithful

group of people). This morning we have a beautiful example of this in our midst. The followers of Christ in the United States have come to share with the followers of Christ in El Salvador. This people from the great nation in the North are a gospel voice that cries out against the injustices in their own country and they come here and express their solidarity with us, the People of God in El Salvador. May we know how to denounce courageously the injustices of our own society!

In light of today's Divine Word I am going to present this reflection entitled: The Church in the Service of Personal, Community and Transcendent Liberation. These three qualifications highlight the three thoughts of my homily today: 1) The dignity of the human person is primary and demands liberation, 2) God wants to save all people, 3) Transcendence gives liberation its true and definitive dimension.

## **1. The dignity of the human person is primary and demands liberation**

### **a) The image of the adulterous woman in the presence of Christ**

Let us look at today's Gospel. I can find no more beautiful figure of Jesus restoring a person's human dignity than that of the sinless Jesus who comes face to face with the woman surprised in the act of adultery. Her judges want her stoned to death. Without saying a word Jesus reproaches her accusers for their own sinfulness and then asks the woman: *Has no one condemned you?* The woman replies: *No one, sir.* Then Jesus said: *Nor do I condemn you. You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin* (John 8:10-11).

Strength but tenderness. Human dignity is made a priority. In Jesus' time there was a legal problem. The book of Deuteronomy stated that any woman caught in the act of adultery ought to be put to death. Since the method of inflicting death on the person could be discussed, the Scribes and the Pharisees debated: stoning? strangulation? Therefore when the Scribes and the Pharisees say to Jesus: *Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses ordered such women to be stoned. What do you have to say about the case* (John 8:4-5), they are actually asking him: how should we put her to death? Jesus is not interested in these legal details. Recognizing their evil intention and their desire to set a trap for him, *he simply bent down and started tracing on the ground with his finger* (John 8:6). They persisted and with great wisdom Jesus said: *Let the one among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her* (John 8:7).

He touched their consciences. Since they were eyewitnesses, the law stated they should be the first ones to throw stones. But these witnesses, after examining their consciences realized that they were witnesses of their own sinfulness. Thus the dignity of the woman is saved. God does not save the sin but rather the dignity of a woman submerged in sin. Jesus loves the sinner and has come among us precisely to save sinners. We see this in the example of today's gospel. Converting the woman is better than stoning her. Forgiving and saving her is better than condemning her. The law has to be at the service of human dignity and not focused on legal details that so often can trample people's honor.

The Gospel, with spontaneous realism, says: *the audience drifted away one by one, beginning with the elders* (John 8:9). We ought to be concerned about offending God and therefore, our days here on earth, days that ought to provide us with time to deepen our commitment with humanity, with the dignity of other people and with God, can easily

become days when hypocrisy takes hold of our lives and hides our sinfulness as we advance in age.

### --- Personal sin is the root of social sin

My dear brothers and sisters, we must keep this fact in mind especially today when, like the example of the adulterous woman in the gospel, it is so easy point out the sinfulness and injustices of others and so much more difficult to look into ourselves and admit our own sinfulness. It is very easy to denounce structural injustice, institutionalized violence and social sin. Yes, all of this is a reality, but what is the root of this social sin? The root of social sin lies within the heart of the human person. Our actual society is like a type of anonymous society in which no one wants to lay blame on anyone and everyone is responsible. We are all responsible for this but want to remain anonymous. We are all sinners and we have all played a part in the crimes and violence that occurs in our country.

Therefore, salvation begins with the human person, from the dignity of the human person, and consists of eradicating sin from each person. During Lent this is precisely the call that God makes: Be converted individually! There are no two sinners among us who are exactly alike. We each have our own faults and we want to blame others and hide our own faults. It is necessary to remove our masks. I am also one of those and I have to ask pardon of God and of society for my faults. This is God's call: the human person is a priority.

What a beautiful gesture of the adulterous woman who feels herself pardoned and understood: *No one, sir. No one has condemned me. Nor do I condemn you. I who could speak a truly condemnatory word, I do not condemn you. But from now on, avoid this sin* (a paraphrase of John 8:10-11). Avoid this sin! Let us be careful, my sisters and brothers, for if God has forgiven us so many times let us take advantage of this restoration of friendship with the Lord and live with gratitude in the love of God.

### --- The promotion of women

How wonderful it would be to insert a chapter here on Christianity's promotion of women. If women have attained a status similar to that of men, it is due in great part to this gospel which was read today. In Jesus' time it was indeed seen as strange that he should talk with a Samaritan woman because women were seen as "unworthy" to enter into conversation with a man. Jesus, however, knew that everyone was equal: there is neither Greek nor Jew; man nor woman. All are children of God. Women ought to be doubly thankful to Christianity because Jesus' message has lifted up and exalted women. Yet we must admit that at the same time a belief in male supremacy has often led to a lack of appreciation and a devaluation of the gifts of women.

#### b) The accusers

The eyewitnesses who surprised the woman in adultery also understood that redemption begins with respect for the human dignity of the person. True, they are judges who must administer justice but first and foremost they must be honorable people who are able to judge and hand down a sentence with a clear conscience. They must realize that they would be the first ones to have this sentence imposed on themselves if they committed the same crime.

Look at Jesus' attitude. We ought to focus on this Gospel passage in order to understand its teaching. Jesus demonstrates a tenderness in dealing with people. No matter how sinful they might be, he distinguishes the sin from the person and sees the individual as a child of God and an image of the Lord. He forgives and does not condemn. Thus we must know how to reject and condemn the sin yet save the sinner.

The human person is not subordinate to the law. This is very important in our time. It is said: *Man is not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man* (Mark 2:27). Let us not invoke the law in order to save the Constitution of our land, especially when this law is trampled upon from every side. This same law is often used to defend our personal selfish interests. The law is made for the human person and not vice versa. Therefore Jesus is the source of peace when he bestows upon human dignity its true primacy. As a consequence people can feel that they need not remain in sin but can rely on Jesus when they repent of their sins and sincerely return to him. This is the greatest joy that a human being can experience.

### **c) Saint Paul...another convert, freed from sin and ignorance**

In today's second reading, we have the example of another sinner who walked for a long time as a deceived individual. But he came to know Christ, Christ who saved him. Now he has one goal in life: to know Christ. *I have accounted all else rubbish...* (Philippians 3:8) we are told in the second reading. When I cease to create idols out of earthly things, when I come to know the true God, the true Savior, then all the ideologies and strategies of this world, the idols of power and money and material possessions appear as rubbish. Yes, Saint Paul uses this harsh word. He says: *I have accounted all else rubbish to that Christ may be my wealth* (Philippians 3:8).

### **d) Puebla's doctrine on the human person**

I do not want to tire you and so I will not read to you the very rich content of the Puebla Document where the dignity of the human person is discussed. There are three main theological lines in this document: the truth about Christ, the truth about the Church and the truth about the human person. When they speak about the human person, the bishops of this continent gathered in Puebla made a commitment. They examined various theories and ideologies that have introduced new outlooks with regard to the human person: some wish to make the person an instrument of exploitation, others, like Marxist ideologies, view the person as simply a cog in the wheel, and the National Security vision places the person in a position of servitude to the State, as if the State were the master and the human person, a slave, while in reality the opposite is true, that is, the state exists for the human person not the human person for the state. In order to promote the human dignity of the person, the human person must be in the forefront of every human organization.

Thus the bishops of Latin America have committed us in the following way: *We profess that every man and every woman (Gal. 5:13-24) however insignificant they may seem, possesses an inviolable nobility that they themselves and others must respect and ensure respect for, without any conditions attached; that every human life deserves to be dignified in itself, in whatever circumstances; that all human life together must be grounded on the common good which lies in the ever more fraternal realization of the common dignity of all.*

*All this requires that none be used as instruments for the benefit of others, and that all be willing even to sacrifice private benefits (Puebla, #317).*

This is the foundation of our Sociology and of Jesus' teaching in the gospel: above all else, the human person must be saved and individual sin is the first reality that has to be confronted. Our accountability to God and our individual relationships with him provide a basis for everything else. The false liberators are those who make the soul a slave of sin and yet cry out for liberation. In this way they are most cruel because they do not know how to love or respect the human person.

## **2. God wants to save people as a whole**

### **a) Collective personality**

My second thought moves from the individual to the community. In today's readings it is beautiful to see how God saves men and women as a people. God wants to save people as a whole.

#### **--- God with his people**

Today's first reading, the famous hymn of Isaiah, presents God speaking with the people. This dialogue of God is with a collective personality, as if God were speaking with single person. God speaks with a people and makes that people his people. He entrusts to this people his promises and revelations which will later be extended to all people.

#### **--- Difference between the People of God and people**

My dear sisters and brothers, notice that in the history of the Bible, in the Old Testament, there are references to this group called the People of God and there are other references to the people in general. How many times did the prophets of Israel reproach the people for boasting about their status as children of Abraham rather than obeying and believing in God? This group of believers, this remnant, was the true People of God. All others were seen as corrupt and this included that group of people who were called Gentiles. Through Christ, this remnant, this People of God, this collective personality with whom God speaks, becomes all Christians. The People of God is no longer a group of people in Israel, but groups of people in every land and nation.

This morning we have a visible example of this reality. In the United States there is a group of Christians (not everyone there is Christian) just as here in El Salvador there is a group of people who are Church (not everyone here is Church). When I as pastor speak to the People of God, I do not pretend to be a teacher for everyone in El Salvador but rather I am the servant of that remnant that calls itself Church, the Archdiocese, those who want to serve Christ and who recognize in their bishop the teacher who speaks to them in Christ's name. From them I hope to receive respect and obedience. I feel that I am united with them and I am not surprised that some are not members of the Church (even though they are inside the Church). These are often the individuals who criticize me and speak behind my back and want to destroy my ministry.

These individuals are not the People of God. Even though they have been baptized and come to Mass, if they are not united in solidarity with the powerful teaching of the Gospel, and with the concrete application of the Gospel as outlined in our pastoral lines of action, then my sisters and brothers, we know how to distinguish these people and thus avoid playing games with this sacred and holy name: the people. We call the People of God this remnant of Salvadorians who believe in Christ and who want to follow him faithfully. They are nourished by his life, his sacraments and by his pastors.

## **b) The historical dimension of salvation**

### **--- God saves in history**

This People of God becomes a reality in history

### **--- Do you not remember the days of yesterday?**

This People of God becomes a reality in history.

Notice how beautifully the first reading expresses this idea: *“You take glory in the First Exodus when I led you of Egypt and helped you cross the desert. How many wonderful deeds were accomplished during the journey with Moses! But do not take glory in the past. The past is history. See, I am doing something new!”* (a paraphrase of Isaiah 43:16-21). What beautiful words. God does something new and becomes involved again in history.

### **--- The New Exodus**

Now the exodus takes on another route: from exile in Babylon. The desert through which they must travel will blossom like a garden and water will flow through the land symbolizing the movement of God and his forgiveness of the people. Thus a people reconciled with God will move toward Jerusalem. Here we are not talking about slavery in Egypt but rather exile in Babylon and throughout history there are new exoduses.

### **--- Every country lives its own exodus**

Today El Salvador is living its own exodus. Today we are passing toward our liberation through a desert strewn with bodies and where anguish and pain are devastating us. Many suffer the temptation of those who walked with Moses, wanting to turn back and did not work together. It is the same old story. God, however, wants to save the people by making a new history. History does not repeat itself even though it is said: “History repeats itself.” Indeed, there are certain things that are not repeated, for example, the circumstances and the political and economic situation that we experience here in El Salvador. How varied is our history from one day to another. One is able to leave El Salvador and return the following week and it appears that our history has totally changed. We can no longer judge things the way we used to. But one thing is certain: we are firmly anchored in the heart and the faith of Jesus Christ, the God of history. This does not change. God is delighted to change history and “makes all things new.”

Christian grace, then, should not tie one to traditions that can no longer be sustained but rather open one to apply this eternal tradition of Christ to present realities. My dear friends,

when dealing with the changes in the Church, changes that occurred in other eras and in other systems, we need to ask God for the grace that will enable us to embrace these changes in a way that will allow us to understand the present reality without betraying our faith. God makes things new. For this reason God chastised the Israelites because they glorified the First Exodus and were blind to God's marvelous deeds at the time of this Second Exodus. During the present Christian era in which we are now living, God will bring about even greater marvels.

History will not fail; God sustains it. That is why I say that insofar as historical projects attempt to reflect the eternal plan of God, to that extent they reflect the kingdom of God. This attempt is the work of the Church. Because of this, the Church, the people of God in history, is not attached to any one social system, to any political organization, to any party. The Church does not identify herself with any of those forces because she is the eternal pilgrim of history and is indicating at every historical moment what reflects the kingdom of God and what does not reflect the kingdom of God. She is the servant of the Kingdom of God.

The great task of Christians must be to absorb the spirit of God's kingdom and, with souls filled with the kingdom of God, to work on the projects of history. It's fine to be organized in popular groups; it's all right to form political parties; it's all right to take part in the government. It's fine as long as you are a Christian who carries the reflection of the kingdom of God and tries to establish it where you are working, and as long as you are not being used to further worldly ambitions. This is the great duty of the people of today. My dear Christians, I have always told you, and I will repeat, that the true liberators of our people must come from us Christians, from the people of God.

Any historical plan that is not based on what we spoke of in the first point --- the dignity of the human being, the love of God, the kingdom of Christ among people --- will be a fleeting project. Your project, however, will grow in stability the more it reflects the eternal design of God. Therefore, my dear political brothers, one must thank the Church, not manipulate the Church to make it say what we want it to say, rather we should say what the Church is teaching; it has no interests. I have no ambition for power and so with complete freedom I tell the powerful what is good and what is bad and I tell any political group what is good and what is bad. That is my duty.

From this perspective of freedom of the Kingdom of God, the Church ought to be unified in its criteria. When I speak of Church, I am not just speaking about the bishops and the priests, but all of you, faithful men and women, religious, administrators and teachers and students in our catholic schools, all who are part of this People of God, this remnant of believers in Christ. We should not be divided or separated from one another. We have no reason to feel inferior when dealing with the popular organizations. So often we want to please them and their plans more than the eternal plan of the Kingdom of God. We have no reason to beg from anyone for we have much to offer everyone. This is not arrogance, but the humility and gratitude of one who has received from God a revelation to be communicated to others.

### 3. The transcendence of liberation: its true and definitive dimension

Finally, using today's readings, my third thought is that the plan of God to free people is transcendent.

#### a) What is transcendence?

I believe I repeat this idea too often but I do not tire of doing so because we run the great risk of wanting to get out of pressing situations with quick solutions and we forget that quick solutions can patch things up without being real solutions. A genuine solution must fit into God's definitive plan. Whatever solution we decide on for better land distribution, for better management of money in El Salvador, for a political arrangement suited to the common good of Salvadorans, will have to be sought always in the context of definitive liberation.

A short time ago I was presented with a very meaningful outline. Persons involved in politics look at the temporal problems: money, land and material possessions and can become content when problems in these areas are resolved. Politicians who are also persons of faith, who lift themselves up toward God, and who from a faith perspective examine the many problems that politicians are trying to resolve, such persons are unable to separate themselves from God's perspective. From the beginning to the end of history, God has a plan and a solution, a solution that must accommodate to God's perspective if it is to be effective. And God's perspective, as it appears in the words that we had read in the Bible today, consists of: first, recognizing God as the center of history; second, beginning from the reality of redemption from sin; and third, continually reminding ourselves that Christ is the way and the goal of true liberation. That is very clear in today's readings, and all during Lent we have been studying this plan of God.

#### --- First, recognize God's initiative in bestowing liberation

It is very clear that God takes the initiative. The first reading says: *The people whom I have formed for myself* (Isaiah 43:21). God is speaking with Israel: "I have chosen you and I am creating your history." It is a great moment when people realize that they are God's instruments --- We live as long as God wants us to live; we are able as long as God enables us. As intelligent as one might be, yet even that is a God-given gift. We place all our limitations in God's hands and recognize the fact that we are able to do nothing without God. From this perspective, my dear sisters and brothers, we can see that the transcendental meaning of this time in El Salvador demands that we pray often and are united with God. There are people, united with God, who are working for liberation.

The other day we spoke about the problem of a refuge --- do not confuse a refuge with a barracks --- a refuge is for people who come with fear, who are fleeing and hiding. "Ah! But many people are organized and we cannot be idle. We have to work!" Well, then go and work; find a barracks and work. But the refuge is a place where the sick also work (maybe their own special kind of work, anything they can do is considered their contribution, e.g., suffering). That husband and wife and their children who could not work, they wanted to send their children to occupy a church --- but how can they go if they are sick? Let them offer up their pain and sickness. This has value. But when we lose sight of the transcendence of the struggle, everything becomes made up of things that are sometimes even erroneous. Hopefully all who work today for the liberation of the people know that nothing can be

accomplished without God and that with God, even the most useless work is still work when it is done with a good intention.

In today's first reading, God invites the people of Israel to discover his hand at work, not only when they leave Egypt for the Promised Land, but now when they are traveling from Babylon to Jerusalem. Transcendence means discovering the hand of God in the complex historical situation of the people. Therefore, I repeat, may those who work for the liberation of the people never lose sight of this reality, of this transcendental dimension.

### **--- Second, liberation has to free us from sin**

We must keep in mind that all evil has a common root, namely, sin. In our hearts we find selfishness, jealousies and idolatry. From our hearts arise divisions and greed. As Jesus said: *Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile* (Mark 7:15). It is necessary to purify the source of every form of slavery. Why is there slavery? Why are there people living on the margins of society? Why are there people who can neither read nor write? Why is there illness? Why is there a people who cries out in pain? All of this must be denounced as a consequence of sin. Medellín states: *Poverty is a denunciation of the injustices of that people* (Medellin Documents, *On the poverty of the Church*, #4).

Therefore, the transcendence of liberation roots out sin and the Church continually preaches: repent of your personal sins. I speak to you with Jesus' words: *Nor do I condemn you. You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin* (John 8:11). Sin is always evil. I want to tell all of you who give little importance to establishing an intimate relationship with God, take the time to give this the importance it merits. It is not enough to say: I am an atheist; I do not believe in God; I do not offend God. It is not a question of whether you believe or not, but a question of whether you have broken your relationship with the source of all life. If you do not discover this God, and follow God and love God then you are disconnected from your origin. As a result, then, you carry within you disunity, ungratefulness, disorder, and are lacking in faith and love. Without God there can be no concept of liberation. There can be quick liberations, but only people of faith are going to bring about definitive, solid liberations.

### **---Third, transcendence asks us to have great faith in Jesus Christ**

Saint Paul's words are truly incredible. Paul, the sinner, had forgotten Jesus, or perhaps better said, he had no knowledge of Jesus but believed that Jesus and the Christians were traitors to the true religion: Judaism. He felt authorized to seek out and eliminate this new sect. Yet when Jesus became present in his life and revealed himself to Paul, he writes: *I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:8). This is an expression of gratitude on the part of a sinner: I did not know you, Lord. Now I know you and everything else seems inconsequential in comparison to this wonderful knowledge of knowing you, my Lord. Paul was willing to lose everything in order to come to this new knowledge and when he reflects on all that he has gained, when he reflects on the fact that Jesus dwells within him, then he comes to the conclusion that everything else is rubbish. He arrives at this conclusion not because of justice: *...not having any justice of my own based on observation of the law* (Philippians 3:9), but because of his faith in Christ: *the justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:9). This, my sisters and brothers, is transcendence.

Many people want justice, my justice, the justice of men and women. They do not move beyond this. Paul says that it is not this kind of justice that saves him, but rather the justice that he possesses and which comes through faith in Christ, my Lord. How then does Jesus become humankind's justice? Paul states: *I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead* (Philippians 3:10-11). See how life recovers its meaning, how suffering is a communion with Christ who suffered, and death is a communion with the death that redeemed the world? Who could feel insignificant before this treasure that has been found in Christ who gives meaning to sickness, suffering, oppression, torture and marginalization? No one is conquered, even though under the heel of oppression and repression. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are the conquerors and truth and justice, the definitive victors.

In the same text Saint Paul says: *I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind me but push on to what is ahead. My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me --- life on high in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:13-14). This is transcendence: a goal that we want to move toward as we seek our total liberation, a goal that gives definitive joy to humankind.

### **Event that occurred during the week**

My sisters and brothers, this is the liberation that our Church has to live and preach. This is what we have learned from the Word of God and therefore as we approach Holy Week, let us build a better Church, a better People of God. At this moment I speak to my dear priests, to the Christian communities, to all those who call themselves Church, to the People of God, to the remnant of believers, and I pray that as this core group of believers we might have the same strength that God gave to Israel --- strength to enlighten and reject all that is evil and strength to encourage all that is good. Now at this moment in my homily, I refer to the some ecclesial events and invite all the leaders of the church to become true promoters of liberation, a liberation that flows from God's plan for us.

### **Ecclesial Events**

First of all I want to announce today that next Sunday we begin the celebration of Holy Seek. Due to special circumstances we will hold our celebrations here in the Basilica. Next Sunday, the blessing of palms will take place at 8:00am. We will join with the people of the parish of El Calvario, therefore, I ask you to gather in front of El Calvario at 7:30am for the blessing of palms and the procession which commemorates the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. We will celebrate the Eucharist here in the Basilica. The other Holy Week celebrations appear in the bulletin. They are primarily the blessing of oils on Holy Thursday at 10:00a.m, but all of this will be announced next week. I do, however, want to say a word about the celebration of the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. We want to give this devotion a sense of healing, and solidarity, and denunciation, especially since we, as a Christian people, must carry the cross. Next Sunday I will give more information about this celebration that will truly be an expression of Jesus' solidarity with His people.

Some information about the communities. Last Sunday I spoke about the celebration of Saint Joseph's day. There was a very devout celebration at the seminary of San José de la

Montaña as well as in San José Cortes, San José Villanueva, the school of Cristóbal Colón directed by the Josephite Community and the day school San José.

In Aguilares we celebrated the third anniversary of the assassination of Father Grande. It was obvious that the repression was achieving its affects in this area --- because of fear only a few people participated in this celebration. In my message I spoke of Jesus' words and the fact that we, like Father Grande, must find meaning in Jesus' words if we are to be faithful as Christians.

We celebrated the patron feast of the village of Martínez in Tejutla. During the celebration I was given the following denunciation: On March 7<sup>th</sup>, at 12:00am a pick-up truck filled with soldiers (some dressed in civilian clothing), entered one of the houses and forced all the occupants outside. This was done with great violence --- kicking the family members and beating them with the butts of their guns. Four young women were raped and their parents severely beaten and threatened if they spoke about this incident. We have received information about this tragic event.

We had a beautiful celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation in the parish of La Reina located in Agua Caliente, Department of Chalatenango. These are very good people.

In Cojutepeque, the pastor, Father Richard Ayala, has been the victim of false accusations. A copy of a communication from the Director of the Guardia Nacional to the Chief of Staff arrived in the chancery. It stated: I, Commander and Director of the National Police wish to inform you that we have information that this past weekend Father Ricardo Ayala, pastor of San Sebastian in Cojutepeque, met with a group of men and women in San Andrés, Monte San Juan. He told them that on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month he would go to Nicaragua or Cuba to obtain re-enforcements to continue the struggle in El Salvador. Signed: the Commander. Truly ridiculous!

When we called Father Ayala, whom many of you know, he wrote a letter to Mr. Duarte (it was Mr. Duarte who sent the communication to the chancery). Father stated: With regard to this matter: 1) It is true that on the days that have been pointed out I was visiting the villages of El Carmen and Soledad in Monte San Juan. I was accompanied by Father Benjamín Rodríguez, the pastor of this area; 2) the purpose of our visit was to console and reconcile people of opposing groups in that area; 3) it is completely false that I spoke about leaving the country on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month to bring re-enforcements from other places to continue an armed struggle here. This is not how I speak nor is it the pastoral mission that has been entrusted to me. Signed: Father Ayala.

In Candelaria, another community in the Department of Cuscatlán the people denounced the Guardia Nacional from the villages of San Miguel, Nance Verde and San Juan Miraflores Arriba. In the afternoon a young reservist named Emilio Mejía was captured. He was brought to his village San José de la Ceiba and on the same afternoon killed in front of the house of Salvador Mejía. The following day his mother, Carmen Martínez de Mejía claimed his body and buried him that afternoon. It has been said that his death was a mistake and the army was looking for someone else with the same name. What a fatal mistake!

Second, on the following day Mr. Emilio Mejía was captured in his house in the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba. In the presence of his wife he was beaten and dragged from the house. The following day his wife found his decapitated body two blocks away.

Third, in the village of San Miguel, Nance Verde, José Cupertino Alvarado and his daughters Carmen Alvarado and María Josefa Alvarado were captured and found dead behind a coffee field that is part of the Hermitage of the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba. Their family buried them in a common grave the following day.

Fourth, it is stated that all the deceased (except the first case) were captured in their homes and they offered no resistance. The undersigned saw on that afternoon, a military truck occupied by members of the Guardia Nacional in front of the offices of ANTEL.

This denunciation makes a beautiful legal analysis and makes it very clear that not only the law but also the human person has been violated in these instances. The person who made this denunciation went on to state: As I make this denunciation, I am not defending anarchist or subversive ideologies, if by chance this is what the deceased had been accused of. Rather these kinds of actions have taken place outside the boundaries of the law and therefore are violations of human dignity.

The chancery has received the following response to our protest in the matter of the threats made against the house of the Belgian Fathers in the area of Zacamil. The Defense Minister stated: Regarding the threats on the house in question, I ask you to consider the following details: 1) there was no sign that identified this house as a residence for religious or a place for religious cult; 2) not only was this house searched but also another house in the same neighborhood merited investigation; 3) when it was proven that this house belonged to priests and nothing suspicious was found, the search was halted; 4) it is not outside the realm of possibility that after the search was suspended, someone else entered the house and caused damage or left the house in such a condition to give the appearance that the search involved violence. When I spoke to the Guardia Nacional about this incident, they did not deny the fact that the house had been searched, but searched in the way that this Ministry had ordered -- orderly and with respect for these special cases, consulting before taking action. If only this were true. The facts say something else.

I now want to share some information about our Diocese. This afternoon we will celebrate confirmation at 4:00pm in Calle Reale Ciudad Delgado.

The Catechumenate Communities celebrate their preparation for Easter this week.

The Dominican Community of El Rodario will open a new Christian Center in Soyapango.

The Base Communities of Faith in Santa Tecla are studying this manner of being Church, that is, forming base communities of faith, and are becoming more and more committed to this pastoral line of action.

A new parish has been created in Chalatenango, it will be called the parish of Cristo Rey and will be composed of the area of Paraíso, Aldeíta and Chalatenango. Father Gabriel Rodríguez has been named pastor and will be assisted by four deacons who will be ordained priests next year.

The educational community is now drawing up some pastoral lines of action for the Catholic Schools. This gives us great hope that the work of the schools will not be opposed

to the Archdiocese's pastoral lines of action. I had meetings with the lay staff at the Asunción School and will have a meeting with the staff at the Sagrada Corazón School.

Two organizations of the Diocese renewed their membership during the week ---the Pastoral Council now has new Vicars. They spent two days together and studied the pastoral plan of the Archdiocese which follows the lines of Vatican II, Medellín, Puebla and Pastoral Weeks that were convoked here in our Archdiocese. Please keep this fact in mind so that you are not surprised by false information.

I do not like it when it is said that the pastoral lines of action are the Archbishop's. I do not have a pastoral line of action but rather I am trying to follow the pastoral lines of the great Church events that's I just mentioned. I am happy that the Pastoral Commission is studying the diocesan plan, the one I received as a precious inheritance from Bishop Chavez. We are now studying how we can put these lines into practice in those communities where they are being taken seriously.

The Priest Senate also elected a new board. This is an organization that serves all the priests in the Diocese.

I want to thank Father Pick and his collaborators who are involved in a very intense work on our radio station YSAX. Their work now allows those of you are far from here to hear my voice.

I also want you to know that the gesture of our brothers and sisters from North America is not an isolated gesture. They have informed me that there are many Christian groups who support the letter that we sent to the President of the United States and support our request that no military assistance be sent to our country since such aid will only continue the repression. One of those who expressed his solidarity with us was Mr. Murat Williams, United States ambassador to El Salvador during the time of President Rivera. In an article that he published, he stated that such military assistance always results in greater repression of the people.

There can be some confusion about two events and therefore our Secretariat for Information has prepared two clarifications:

The first clarification concerns the police who were tortured in the cathedral. The official version makes ambiguous the role of the chancery. They state that the police came to the chancery but were turned away. This is a very dangerous statement because we always attend to those who come to us and do all that we can. Therefore the bulletin explains: *On March 21, members of FAPU requested the chancery to help in the burial of 17 persons who were being viewed in the cathedral. They made this request because they felt that violence would erupt on the way to the cemetery and this would oblige them to bury the deceased in the cathedral. The chancery promised to obtain guarantees so that the burials could take place without any further incident. These guarantees were obtained from the Defense Ministry. They were very attentive to this case and asked the International Red Cross and the Ministry of Public Health to assure that the burials take place with no further violence. The representatives of FAPU and BPR were informed of the communication that had taken place with the government, but they did not agree with these guarantees. Some said that the bodies should be brought to the cemetery and others felt they should be buried in the cathedral. The representatives of the chancery and the International Red Cross assured these groups that*

*they would participate in a normal burial but would not support a demonstration (one that some members of these groups wanted) to denounce this violence. While these arrangements were being worked out, Colonel Reynaldo López Nuila telephoned and requested the intervention of the chancery in obtaining the release of Corporal Miguel Angel Zuñiga who had been kidnapped by the occupants of the cathedral. Immediately the Archbishop sent a delegate to the cathedral but he was not received and they denied having taken Corporal Zuñiga hostage. Later a representative of Legal Aid went to the University of El Salvador with the Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas (Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses). We were informed that the Corporal has been taken hostage but that he had been released. Together with representatives from the International Red Cross we spoke about the burial of the bodies. It was decided that BRP would bury their deceased members in the cemetery and FAPR would bury their members in the cathedral.*

*A commission composed of priests and laypersons went to the Military Hospital and spoke with Corporal Miguel Angel Zuñiga, who stated that when he passed in front of the cathedral, he was accosted by four men armed with machine guns. They forced him inside the cathedral. He was brought to the basement and a metal brace was placed around his neck and his hands. He was then given electrical shock and punched in the ears and stomach. They wanted him to tell them the names of his commanders and companions as well as the number of vehicles at his disposition. All of this information would be given to the National University. One of his interrogators rubbed bleach on his eyes and this produced a burning sensation and great pain. They said he would be treated in the same way that the people of San Martín were treated and that they would kill his mother. A pistol was pointed at his head but he swore by God and by his mother that he had never tortured or caused harm to anyone. He was then put out on the street and he took a taxi to the hospital. The attending doctor stated that the Corporal could not see but would recuperate his sight. Because of the electric shock two of his fingers are immobile. This is what happened to the police officer and in no way do we approve of such a cruel action. This person thinks like us and should be respected.*

I want to clarify another situation. The Catholic Church has opened its doors in four places to protect the persons who have fled their homes because they fear the violence that has gripped so many places in our country. Our Church is conscious of the fact that protecting and providing charity to those who suffer is one of our principal obligations. We carry out this obligation without giving any consideration to the individual's beliefs, politics, or way of thinking. For the Church it is enough that a person comes seeking relief. In this concrete situation the Church has made four locations available to these persons. They are not meant to be centers for any type of political indoctrination or military training for instead of protecting them this would only put them in greater danger. Therefore I have asked the popular organizations to respect the functioning of these centers and their objectives. We have asked the military leaders to do the same. This humanitarian work of the Church is being coordinated by *Cáritas* the official organization of the Church for carrying out this kind of service. Beside *Cáritas* there is no other organization that the Church officially recognizes to carry on these charitable works. Let it be very clear that only *Cáritas* has the approval of the chancery to function in this capacity of assisting and helping and providing charity to those who are fleeing their homes. *Cáritas*, however, is a member of the Ecumenical Committee for Humanitarian Assistance, and thus from an ecumenical perspective is linked to other organizations that are very sensitive to these social situations, but they do not represent the Catholic Church. Again *Cáritas* is our only representative. The chancery wants to make it clear that its actions flow from its humanitarian and Christian

work. If our gestures do not achieve all the desired results it is not because of inertia but rather due to the fact that they have not found the necessary understanding or collaboration.

On a more joyful note I want to inform you that a composer and poet has written a beautiful hymn in honor of Our Divine Savior. This will soon be made known to us: *the explosive songs vibrate with joy, --- I want to join with my people in the cathedral, --- thousands of voices join with us today, --- to sing on this our patron feast.* Other stanzas express the feelings of our people and the last verse is very beautiful: *The gods of power and money --- are opposed to this transfiguration; ---- therefore, you O Lord are the first one --- to raise your arm against oppression.*

I had some texts from the Pope's teaching, but I will not read these now. They simply confirm the doctrine that we spoken about today: the primacy of the human person.

### **National Events**

Now I invite you to look at things through the eyes of the Church, a Church that is trying to be the kingdom of God on earth and so often must illuminate the realities of our national situation.

#### **We have lived through a tremendously tragic week.**

I could not give you the facts before, but a week ago last Saturday, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, one of the largest and most distressing military operations was carried out in the countryside. The villages affected were La Laguna, Plan de Ocotes and El Rosario. The operation brought tragedy: a lot of ranches were burned, there was looting, and ---inevitably --- people were killed. In La Laguna, the attackers killed a married couple, Ernesto Navas and Audelia Mejia de Navas, their little children, Martin and Hilda, thirteen and seven years old, and eleven more peasants.

Other deaths have been reported, but we do not know the names of the dead. In Plan de Ocotes, two children and four peasants were killed, including two women. In El Rosario, three more peasants were killed. That was last Saturday.

Last Sunday, the following were assassinated in Arcatao by four members of ORDEN: peasants Marcelino Serrano, Vincente Ayala, twenty-four years old, and his son, Freddy. That same day, Fernando Hernandez Navarro, a peasant, was assassinated in Galera de Jutiapa, when he fled from the military.

Last Monday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, was a tremendously violent day. Bombs exploded in the capital as well as in the interior of the country. The damage was very substantial at the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The campus of the national university was under armed siege from dawn until 7pm. Throughout the day, constant bursts of machine-gun fire were heard in the university area. The archbishop's office intervened to protect people who found themselves caught inside.

On the Hacienda Colima, eighteen persons died, at least fifteen of whom were peasants. The administrator and the grocer of the ranch also died. The armed forces confirmed that there was a confrontation. A film of the events appeared on TV, and many analyzed interesting aspects of the situation.

At least fifty people died in serious incidents that day: in the capital, seven persons died in events at the Colonia Santa Lucia; on the outskirts of Tecmillantas, five people died; and in the area of the rubbish dump, after the evacuation of the site by the military, were found the bodies of four workers who had been captured in that action.

Sixteen peasants died in the village of Montepeque, thirty-eight kilometers along the road to Suchitoto. That same day, two students at the University of Central America were captured in Tecmillantas: Mario Nelson and Miguel Alberto Rodriguez Velado, who were brothers. The first one, after four days of illegal detention, was handed over to the courts. Not so his brother, who was wounded and is still held in illegal detention. Legal Aid is intervening on his behalf

**Amnesty International issued a press release in which it described the repression of the peasants, especially in the area of Chalatenango.**

The week's events confirm this report in spite of the fact that the government denies it. As I entered the church, I was given a cable that says, "Amnesty International confirmed today [that was yesterday] that in El Salvador human rights are violated to extremes that have not been seen in other countries." That is what Patricio Fuentes (spokesman for the urgent action section for Central America in Swedish Amnesty International) said at a press conference in Managua, Nicaragua.

Fuentes confirmed that, during two weeks of investigations he carried out in El Salvador, he was able to establish that there had been eighty-three political assassinations between March 10-14. He pointed out that Amnesty International recently condemned the government of El Salvador, alleging that it was responsible for six hundred political assassinations. The Salvadorean government defended itself against the charges, arguing that Amnesty International based its condemnation on unproved assumptions. Fuentes said that Amnesty had established that in El Salvador human rights are violated to a worse degree than the repression in Chile after the coupe d'etat. The Salvadorean government also said that the six hundred dead were the result of armed confrontations between army troops and guerrillas. Fuentes said that during his stay in El Salvador, he could see that the victims had been tortured before their deaths and mutilated afterward.

The spokesman of Amnesty International said that the victims' bodies characteristically appeared with the thumbs tied behind their backs. Corrosive liquids had been applied to the corpses to prevent identification of the victims by their relatives and to prevent international condemnation, the spokesman added. Nevertheless, the bodies were exhumed and the dead have been identified. Fuentes said that the repression carried out by the Salvadorean army was aimed at breaking the popular organizations through the assassination of their leaders in both town and country.

According to the spokesman of Amnesty International, at least three thousand five hundred peasants have fled from their homes to the capital to escape persecution. "We have complete lists in London and Sweden of young children and women who have been assassinated for being organized," Fuentes stated. He then stated that Amnesty International is a humanitarian organization and it not identified with any government, organization or person. We are not against any established government but yes we continue to fight on so that human rights will be respected in every part of the world, but especially in those areas

where they are threatened and trampled upon. This confirms what we have been speaking about when referring to this horrible and frightful week.

**In light of the violence that occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup>, I want to make an analysis of the probable cause of this violence: the work stoppage that was convoked by the revolutionary coordinator of the masses.**

This work stoppage was called to protest the violence in our midst. Last Sunday I stated that the objective of this strike was legitimate since it was a denunciation of violent actions that cannot be tolerated. The strike, however, also involved international politics --- it showed that the current repression rather than intimidating the popular organizations is strengthening them. This demonstration was carried out against the actual government that sees violent repression as a way to carry out their reforms. Yet these reforms are not acceptable to the popular organizations.

The state of siege and the misinformation that is being disseminated, both in official communication as well as in official reports in the media, do not allow us to measure the effectiveness of the work stoppage. The foreign press has spoken about 70% of the businesses closed. This is certainly a high number and would indicate a noteworthy triumph. Even considering the fact that some businesses closed because of fear, fear of reprisals from the left as well as the right and the government, still it cannot be denied that the revolutionary coordinator of the masses has shown great strength in dealing with the labor forces in our country. They are not only strong in the rural areas but also in the factories and in the cities.

It is very probably that errors were committed. Yet despite all those mistakes, it can be seen that the strike definitely advanced the popular struggle and was a clear demonstration that the left is able to paralyze the economic activity of the country. The government's response was harsh: patrols throughout the city, a shoot-out at the University of El Salvador, and so many deaths this week. The security forces killed at least ten workers in the factories that participated in the strike. This includes three workers in the mayor's office who were assassinated after being detained by the local police. Therefore we strongly denounce these actions of the mayor's office in San Salvador.

Besides these workers, it is estimated that at least 60 other people (some people say as many as 140 other people) have been assassinated. This occurred because the work stoppage in the rural areas involved armed combat carried out by the popular organizations. This fighting took place in Colima, San Martín and Suchitoto. One can question the effectiveness of these military operations of the popular organizations, yet at the same time the repressive action of the government is unjustifiable.

Certainly the Revolutionary Coordinator has made mistakes and they need to do much more in order to become a viable alternative. Let us hope that they evaluate their actions so that they might truly express the desires of the people. Let us hope that lack of coordination does not lead to rejection by the people. They present us with hope and a real solution if they mature and come to understand the desires of the people.

These faults of the Revolutionary Coordinator are not rooted in the fact that they are subversive or social renegades, rather in the fact that they are not allowed to develop in a normal way. They are persecuted and massacred. They encounter many obstacles in trying to organize and establish relationships with other democratic groups. Faced with these

intolerable situations it is easy to understand why they engage in armed struggles. It must be admitted that our country is living in a pre-revolutionary era and not an era of transition.

**The fundamental question is how to achieve the least violent alternative in this critical stage of our history**

In this matter, great responsibility is placed upon the civil government, and especially the military. Let us hope that they are not blinded by what is taking place as a result of the Land Reform Act. This could easily deceive them and prevent them from seeing the wider problem.

Tuesday --- we continue to speak here about the many tragic events that occurred during the week. We must talk about these realities. The news reports that were given to the Pope, allowed him to speak about the number of victims who, in recent days, had suffered in Italy and Rome. I am sure that if the Pope were in my place he would point out not only the ten people who had been cruelly assassinated in Italy, but would take the time, like we are doing here, to point out the numerous assassinations that occur day after day.

On March 18, the bodies of four *campesinos* were found in different areas: two in Metapán and two in San Miguel.

On Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, at 5:30am, after military operations in San Luis La Loma, La Cayetana, León de Piedra, La India, Paz Opico, and El Mono, the bodies of three *campesinos* was discovered: Humberto Urbino, Oswaldo Hernández and Francisco García.

In the capital, at 2:00pm, the offices of the Sindicatos de Bebidas and the Ferderación Sindical Revolucionaria were occupied by the military. At that time the body of Manuel Pacín, a worker and advisor to the Municipal Workers was being viewed. Manuel's body was found in Apulo after he had been captured. The attack on these offices resulted in the death of two persons, one of whom, Marticio Barrera, was the leader of the Mechanic and Metal Workers Union.

Nineteen workers were brought before the court. Their families have asked Legal Aid to intervene in these cases. It has also been affirmed that the Union's files have been seized.

The National Press reported the death of nine *campesinos* that resulted from a confrontation, according to the Armed Forces, that occurred in the area of San Bartolo Tecoluca. At 12:00pm, the army captured the *campesinos* Miguel Angel Gómez de Paz, Concepción Coralia Menjívar and José Emilio Valencia in the town of El Almendral, the area of Majagual, La Libertad. They have not been released and we ask that they be brought before the court.

On Thursday, March 20<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm, in the village of El Jocote, Quezaltepeque, a *campesino* leader, Alfonso Muñoz Pacheco was assassinated. He was Secretary of Conflicts in the Federation of Rural Workers and was well known for his dedication to the cause of the *campesinos*.

Something horrendous and yet very important also occurred on Thursday. Agustín Sanches, a *campesino*, who had been captured on March 15<sup>th</sup> by soldiers in Zacatecoluca and

handed over to the local police, was found alive. In a statement before a notary public and witnesses, he said that he was captured on the hacienda El Cauca in the Department of La Paz where he was working as an affiliate of the Communal Salvadorian Union. During the four days of his captivity, he was tortured, beaten, asphyxiated, and deprived of food and water. On March 19<sup>th</sup> he and two other *campesinos* were shot in the head. He was fortunate that the bullet struck his cheekbone and his eye. Some other *campesinos* helped him and a close friend moved him to the capital. He was unable to sign his statement which recounts the details of this tragic event because of wounds that he received on his hands. Persons known for their honesty, however, witnessed this statement and there are photographs that show the terrible state in which this man was found.

In the village of Mogotes, in the area of Tacachico, the repression was very cruel. The soldiers with their tanks have instilled great fear among the inhabitants of this area. During the attack they robbed four radios and four hundred dollars and burned the house and all the belongings of Rosalio Cruz, who together with his family is now in a situation of extreme misery. Alejandro Mojica and Félix Santos were assassinated --- Alejandro, in his house and Félix, in a dried-up river. Both leave behind wives and children. Fear forced their families to bury the deceased on their own land. At the same time Isabel Cruz, Manuel and Santos Urquilla were taken to an unknown destination.

We have also received unconfirmed information about the death of 25 *campesinos* in San Pablo Tacachico. As we began the Mass this morning, this news was confirmed. We are told that on Friday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, at 6:00am a military operation took place on the road of Santa Ana that leads to San Pablo Tacachico. This operation was carried out by soldiers from Opico and Santa Ana in coordination with the local police in Tacachico. The soldiers had a list of names and the police pointed out these persons to the soldiers. This operation was carried out in the towns of El Resbaladero, San Felipe, Moncagua, El Portillo, San José La cova, Mogotes and their respective centers in Los Pozos and Las Delicias. At the same time everyone riding the buses or walking on foot was searched.

I mention now one final event that calls for our expression of solidarity. Yesterday afternoon, UCA, the Central American University, was attacked for the first time. There was no reason for this to happen. At 1:15pm the police entered the University and opened fire. Manuel Orantes Guillén, a student who at the time was studying mathematics, was assassinated. I have been informed that several students have "disappeared" and that their parents and the University have protested the violation of their autonomy, an autonomy that ought to be respected. This kind of attack has not occurred at the National University --- no doubt because of fear of the resulting consequences --- yet it has occurred here at the Central American University. The University has stated that they are not armed to defend themselves and this attack was unprovoked. Later, we hope to be able to give more details about this serious attack against civilization and the legal system of our country.

### **-Significance of these months**

It would be interesting at this point, but I do not want to take more of your time, to make an analysis of these months when a new government promised to get us out of these horrible conditions. If this government intends to paralyze the people's organizing efforts and impede the political development that the people want, then no program can move forward. Without roots in the people, no government can avail, much less one that wants to impose its programs through bloodshed and suffering

**I would like to appeal in a special way to the army's enlisted men, and in particular to the ranks of the Guardia Nacional and the police --- those in the barracks.**

Brothers: you are of part of our own people. You kill your own *campesino* brothers and sisters. Before an order to kill that a man may give, God's law must prevail: *Thou shalt not kill!* No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to fulfill an immoral law. It is time to take back your consciences and to obey your consciences rather than the orders of sin. The Church, defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such abominations. We want the government to understand seriously that reforms are worth nothing if they are stained with so much blood. In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!

The Church preaches its liberation just as we have studied it today in the Holy Bible -- - a liberation that includes above all, respect for the human person, the salvation of the people's common good, and transcendence, which looks before all to God, and from God alone derives its hope and its force.

Let us now proclaim our faith in this truth.....