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THE POPE: THE DEPUTY OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time

27 August 1978

Isaiah 22:19-23

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

...¹ to echo the great news that the world heard yesterday from the balcony of the Vatican basilica: «I proclaim joyful news to you: we have a pope!»² And just as that great multitude responded to the news with applause, I would like to ask for resounding applause in the Cathedral of San Salvador as a gesture of our allegiance to the Holy See. [Applause] Because in my homily today I want to tell the new pope how much we love him and why we have applauded him. But at the same time I want to tell him about the people whose hands are applauding him. This has been my constant aspiration as pastor: taking the light of the universal church and the Gospel that illuminates all the world, and making it concrete in our beloved people, incarnating myself in them with the divine message. How could that be displeasing to John Paul I, the son of working people, a humble man? He was not mentioned among the possible candidates; none of us knew who he was. Yet in a college of electors that was mostly foreigners, not Italians, the finger of God has singled out an Italian, but one who responds to the longings of most of the world. Blessed be God!

As I said to a sister yesterday, I believe that we're going to get along well. I think that our people already feel the sympathetic heartbeat of a man who is retiring, simple, close to the people. He knows what it means to suffer from poverty, and he's also able to understand the tremendous dimensions of this Gospel that doesn't seek out quarrels but rather asks for great love as a way to solve conflicts.

Why do we applaud the new pope, sisters and brothers? Receiving this news of the election of a new pontiff gives us a magnificent opportunity. During all of this year the principal focus of the Liturgy of the Word is the Gospel of Saint Matthew. (That's why I offered you an outline of the gospel; many people from all over have been asking me for it, and we're already sending it out.) According to this outline the Gospel of Matthew can be read as a poem of the church in seven stanzas. It starts of course with the Child Jesus, and at the present time we're in the fifth stanza, corresponding to chapters 13 to 18. Chapters 13 to 18 of the Gospel of Saint Matthew offer us the reflections of the early Christian community about how the kingdom begins with the coming together of a few disciples. In that group one person stands out as the head, Peter. In those initial stages of the church the community obeyed and followed Peter, believing him to be the nucleus of unity for that nascent community.

¹ The first words of the homily were not captured on the tape recording.

² Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, was elected pope on 26 August 1978 and took the name John Paul.

Those chapters 13 through 18 lay out the rules for living in community; in them Christ discourses beautifully on community. It is precisely there in chapter 16 that the gospel speaks to us about the church community that will keep extending itself around one person chosen by Christ. Today we were told about what happened in Caesarea Philippi, a city founded by Philip in pagan territory; it's situated about thirty kilometers north of Lake Gennesaret, near the source of the Jordan River. Christ retreated there with his disciples because the people of his own village had rejected him. But there he set about laying down the groundwork for what would be the solid foundation of the community being born. It's there that this episode takes place, this dialogue that describes marvelously the role of the pope.

That's why I would title this homily, «The Pope, the Deputy of Christ in His Church», as a summary of today's readings. The readings explain to us, just one day after the election of the new pontiff, exactly who that man is. He was unknown until yesterday, and now he is loved and applauded by everyone, just as you have applauded him now. Blessed be God for the great news that this unassuming man has been chosen as the one who will assume the rich inheritance that Christ handed over to *Kephas*, Simon, son of Jonah, the first pope some twenty centuries ago. After him there have been 263 successors. The present one, Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, has taken an original name: John Paul. But what's of interest is that under whatever name—Paul, John, Leo, Pius, etc.—he is receiving the legacy of Peter announced in today's gospel and summed up in the title of my homily, for the pope is the deputy, the vicar, the one who represents and embodies the head. What is more, as Saint Catherine of Siena used to say, he is *il dolce Cristo in terra*, the sweet Christ on earth³.

In order to develop this thought I will present you, as usual, with three ideas: first, he is Christ's deputy because he reflects the presence of God in the church; second, the pope is Christ's deputy because he guarantees the long-term consistency of the church; and third, the pope is Christ's deputy because he is the principal and the foundation of the universal unity of the church.

The pope is the deputy of Christ because he reflects the presence of God in the church

To help us understand how the pope is a reflection of God, the second reading gives us a magnificent idea of God. Saint Paul is coming to the end of the profound reflections we've been hearing these past few Sundays. He explained how God's project of salvation was given first to the Jews, but when they proved unworthy, it passed on to the Gentile world. Paul hoped that when the Jews became envious of the Gentile world that was taking over their heritage, they would also turn to Christ. In this way both Jews and Gentiles, once converted in the fullness of Christ, would manifest God's glory. After concluding these profound reflections, Saint Paul cites the hymn to God's greatness that you heard today: «What depths of generosity, wisdom, and knowledge! How inscrutable are his decisions! Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor?» (Rom 11:33-34).

Paul then uses a phrase that sums up everything I want to say: «He is the origin, the way, and the goal of the universe» (Rom 11:36). Everything is included in these words. Outside God there is nothing. As vast as the world of the stars, the seas, and the volcanoes may seem, that whole immense universe has one *origin*: God. It may be that we don't understand that

³ *Obras de Santa Catalina de Siena: El Diálogo* (Works of Saint Catherine of Siena: the Dialogue), BAC, Madrid 1955, 401.

incredible drama of creation with its human beings, with its history of nations, with its conflicts, with its injustices, but God remains for us the incomprehensible way. Why does God allow so many things to happen? Because after the course of this life there is also a *goal* that is God. God encompasses history from beginning to end, and he will know how to explain in due course why things happened the way they did.

And so it is of this splendid, incomprehensible, infinite God, who encompasses in his greatness the limits of creation, no matter how massive they may appear, that the pope is a reflection! We might say that the pope is like those little curved mirrors that provide a panoramic view; the mirror reflects the vast span that we cannot capture just by looking directly. The pope is like those lenses in photographic cameras that take in a wide landscape and reduce it in size. That's what the pope is like: a photograph or a small, unremarkable mirror. Two days ago who could have told this humble cardinal, Albino Luciani, that the Lord was going to draft him as a little mirror to reflect his divine greatness throughout the world?

Why am I saying that the pope reflects this infinite grandeur of God? The very gospel we read today authorizes me to do so. We hear the meaning of being pope in Peter's reply to Jesus. Christ asks, «Who do people say that I am?» The disciples reply, «People have many opinions. Some confuse you with prophets, with wise men, with other great figures». «But I who have been with you for three years ask you: who am I?» And that's when the voice of the first pope responds, «You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In you all the greatness of God has become incarnate. You are the hope of redemption for humanity. You are everything». And Christ responds to Peter, «Blessed are you, Simon. What you just said was not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by my Father who is in heaven. That is faith. You have faith, and»— as the reader here at Mass just said—«faith is the initiative of God. You have discovered me among human beings. I am the Son of God. I encompass creation. All things were made by me. I am the hope of the world. Blessed are you because you recognize me! And that is why I say to you, "You are Peter. You are rock. The faith you just confessed is the foundation of this church". For that purpose I am organizing my church: to keep alive among men and women faith in the true God and to proclaim throughout the centuries that I am Christ, the Son of the living God» (Matt 16:13-17).

Notice how the first pope, Peter, reflects for us his *raison d'être*. The pope is the one who guarantees our faith. Christ himself approved Peter's confession of faith. That's what this episode in the gospel is called: «Saint Peter's confession». This is the faith of our church, the faith they ask us about when we're being baptized:

«Do you believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth?» «Yes, I believe».

«Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who was born of the Virgin, died, rose, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?» «Yes, I believe».

«Do you believe in the Holy Spirit whom Christ the Redeemer sent and who is the life of the church to which you want to belong?» «Yes, I believe».

«Do you believe in eternal life? Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins? Do you believe in the all-powerful redemption of Christ?» «Yes, I believe».

Then the priest, becoming the voice of the church, says, «This is the faith of our church. Do you want to be baptized in this faith?» «Yes, I do». What an honor it is to utter this confession whose solid rock is there, in the foundation, in the pope!

The pope cannot fail in his faith. That's why the pope enjoys a great prerogative called infallibility in matters of faith and morals. He can be mistaken in matters of mathematics, astronomy, and human sciences, but when it comes to faith in God and the morality that God demands of human beings, the pope has the supreme teaching power. He can define a truth that is to be believed or a duty that is to be fulfilled even if people don't understand it. The pope cannot be mistaken; he is infallible not in his humanity but by the special assistance Christ promised to the one who would be the foundation of a people who also cannot be mistaken because God cannot deceive them. On this day of the pope's election, let us reaffirm our faith. He is the reflection of God. He is the guarantee of what we believe. He is the faith and the hope of our church.

And there's another reason as well, sisters and brothers: the pope testifies that this church is not built by human beings. You heard the words of the gospel: «You are *Kephas*. You are rock. You are Peter». Which is to say, «On this *Kephas*, on this *piedra*⁴ I am going to build my church» (Matt 16:18). How magnificent! It's not the pope or the bishops or the priests. All of us, from the pope down to the last rural catechist, are nothing more than peons, workers who collaborate under the one and only builder. «On this rock which is you I am going to build my church. It is not your church. It is not a church built to the taste of human beings. It is *my church*».

Coming to Mass on Sunday and baptizing children so that they become part of the church is the way we become part of this construction Christ is realizing. It is the pope who gives us assurance of this. He is the humblest of those who are building the church; he is the servant of the servants of God, because he knows that it is Christ who is building his church. It is Christ who inspires good will in the people, in the diocese, in the communities, in all the men and women who want to work for the kingdom of God. It is not the bishop or the priest or the catechist whom we disrespect when we refuse to reflect with them on the authentic word of the church. Rather, we are spurning Christ himself who preaches through the bishop and the priest and the catechist. The pope is the first to realize that he is only the vicar of Christ, the manager of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a third reason why the pope is a reflection of God in his church: he is the depository of certain powers that only God possesses. There are two beautiful images in today's gospel: the keys and the power to loose and bind. «To you I will give the keys to the kingdom of heaven» (Matt 16:19). What does this image mean? Today's first reading sheds some light on this. You heard the prophet Isaiah pronouncing a prophecy against a certain administrator of the king's palace named Shebna. This administrator, like many others who rise to power, became arrogant and wanted to benefit only his friends. He made himself unworthy to hold power and, even worse, gave bad counsel to the king. This was during the time when the Assyrian army was about to invade the Holy Land. The king, poorly advised by Shebna and other counselors, wanted to make an alliance with Egypt. At that point Isaiah, inspired by God, went to the king and told him not to fear Assyria and not to make an alliance with Egypt. If Jerusalem remained neutral, he said, nothing would happen to it. But the king let himself be seduced by Shebna; he made an alliance with Egypt, and then came the catastrophe. And that's when Isaiah uttered today's prophecy against that evil counselor, that evil administrator: «So says the Lord: I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station, and I will summon Eliakim». The prophet went on to speak about Eliakim words

⁴ *Piedra* means «stone» in Spanish.

that foreshadow what Christ is saying today to the pope. He told Shebna, «I will clothe Eliakim with your robe and gird him with your sash. I will give over to him your authority. He will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will place the key to the house of David on his shoulder» (Isa 22:19-22). The key was the symbol of the power over a house. Even in our own time, when an illustrious person visits a city, they symbolically give that person the keys to the city. But the symbolism was even greater in those days in Jerusalem and the Holy Land: the key was the sign that a person was the administrator of a house for it was the key that opened doors and closed doors.

Isaiah also spoke some words that didn't refer only to Eliakim; they were a prophecy concerning the future: «I will place the key of the house of David on his shoulder; what he opens, no one shall shut, and what he shuts, no one shall open» (Isa 22:22). Not even the pope is quite able to realize this prophecy because the Apocalypse—in chapter three, verse seven—shows us the same Christ speaking to the church of Philadelphia; he tells them: “Thus says the Holy One, the True One, who holds the key of David, who opens doors no one can shut and shuts doors no one can open» (Rev 3:7).

This image of the keys announced by Isaiah and realized in the pope will find its consummation in Christ. The keys the pope receives today are in reality nothing more than the keys of Christ. That's why a great writer has said, «The keys of Peter are the keys to history». People won't understand the history of the universe unless they believe in the keys that open and close. The pope is the reflection of God with his keys in his hand. He was given the keys by Christ, the Lord of history: «To you I will give the keys» (Matt 16:19a). Christ is the key to the treasures of the universe, not by his humanity but because he receives them from God. Christ is the one who holds the keys, the True One, the Immortal One, the one who opens, the one who closes. That's why Christ rounds out the image with another comparison: «Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven» (Matt 16:19b).

We aren't so foolish as to think that because a human being says something, God must say the same thing. Christ didn't mean anything as absurd as that. What Christ is saying is this: «I make you my deputy. You represent what I am. I am the invisible head of God's kingdom and of the church, but you are the visible head. You are the mouth of the Mystical Body. You are my will. Whatever you sanction—naturally with the wise counsel and discernment that my Spirit inspires in you—will also be sanctioned in heaven».

Dear sisters and brothers, when we hear so many calumnies against the pope, we regret to think that certain people are playing with high-tension electric lines. What the pope sanctions on earth, God considers sanctioned in heaven. If the pope excommunicates someone who lays violent hands on a priest, it is God himself who is excommunicating. No one should laugh at excommunication because what it means is that God himself disavows a person, and if that person does not repent and return to the fold, he will remain separated from God forever. When the pope says, «This is licit» or «This is not licit», we should not play around with his words and interpret them some other way. When the pope decrees «excommunication for those who commit the horrible crime of abortion», we should not play around with false interpretations. Those who recommend an abortion or carry one out are also excommunicated before God. When the pope says in *Humanae Vitae* that the use of artificial contraceptives is not licit (HV 14), let us not search out permissive interpretations. «What you sanction on earth shall be sanctioned in heaven» (Matt 16:19b).

Perhaps because we play so many games with people and see so many injustices in the judicial power on our land, we think we can play with the judicial power of God. It's a different thing altogether. The judges of our land, the Supreme Court of Justice itself, will get what they deserve from the One who sanctions people with true justice and condemns the violence and injustice we commit against each other. That's why we should follow the teaching of the popes: it's not merely human teaching; it has the backing of Christ. When God's deputy on earth speaks, it is Christ who speaks.

The pope guarantees the long-term consistency of the church

In our second point, sisters and brothers, we were saying that the pope reflects God because he is Christ's deputy on earth. He is the guarantee of the church's long-term consistency. They say that the new pope, Cardinal Albino Luciani, now called John Paul I, is a very serene man. In one of his recent talks in Venice he commented on how people nowadays tend to talk about the «immensity» of problems, but he said, «We should not create that mentality of immense problems. We should look out on the horizon with serenity; we should trust that God is a Father who loves us». For me these words are an assurance that there on the church's highest tower stands a watchman who will never let himself be surprised or frightened by anything. That's the reason he took the name John, to summon up the serenity of John XXIII, and the name Paul he took so as to inherit as well the exquisite prudence of Paul VI.

The church has a guarantee of consistency in what Christ declares to the first pope, «The gates of hell shall not prevail against it» (Matt 16:18). This can be accurately translated to mean that the church will not succumb to the powers of death that have already consigned so many empires to non-existence. That power of death that does away with everything has no dominion over this vessel of eternity that will continue sailing in time, for its horizon is defined by the One who is the origin, the way, and the goal of history. The church will reach the goal, and the pope is the guarantee of that. As long as there is a pontiff holding firm the rudder of the church, all of us pilgrims who are passengers and crew will travel with tranquility. Let us have great faith because the pope is the guarantee of the church's consistency.

When Jesus Christ made Peter the first pope, he changed his name, which before was Simon, son of Jonah. «From now on you will be called Peter» (John 1:42). The Aramaic word that Jesus used was *Kephas*, which means «rock». Translated into Spanish, it loses much: *piedra, Pedro*. But if there were a translation that made the name Peter mean rock or solid foundation, then that would define the pope. The pope is the rock on which is built a church of eternal guarantees.

The pope is the principal and the foundation of the church's universal unity

The third reason why we say that the pope is Christ's deputy in his church is that the pope guarantees the church's universal unity. It may seem impossible to join these two words together, «unity» and «universality», especially when one looks at the differences between one people and another, between the great variety of differing opinions, between such different races. Why did Christ dream of making one single church that includes blacks and whites, that includes Chinese and Europeans and Americans—all the while respecting their distinctiveness? The church does not approach any people and try to rob them of their values. To the contrary, no one guarantees the true indigenous values of a people as much as the

church does. Look here at El Salvador. Who shows greater respect for the customs of Salvadorans? Who has identified more profoundly with the people? Only the church! But even with her respect for what is universal, indigenous, and particular in each people, the church herself is united and unique. How did Christ achieve this miracle? Vatican II explains this by saying that each bishop is the basis of the unity of his diocese, and all the bishops united with the pope represent the universal church united in love and peace (LG 23).

I think that yesterday the world was given a testimony that no one can give except the church. Men came from different continents, most of them not Italian, and the same day they came to an agreement, electing an Italian who responds to the longings of the peoples. What is this? Surely it is a miracle of God who is working in this exceedingly convulsive, separatist, selfish world to make the common good prevail over private interests. It is the unity of Peter, the foundation for all us bishops throughout the world. Through the pope we feel that we all contribute something of our own. What an honor it has been for me, dear sisters and brothers, to know that I was not all alone on those occasions when I was very close to the pope. I took comfort in knowing that I was only the humble representative of the whole way of being of these four departments of El Salvador which make up the Diocese of San Salvador! What an honor it was also to know that I was the humble serving dish for such great wealth, representing to the pope the extraordinary human and Christian values of Salvadorans. I was bringing him universal riches! It's something like when the veins carry blood to the heart, and then the oxygenated blood leaves the heart and courses again through all the body. The circulatory system helps explain a little the relation between unity (the heart) and universality (the veins that run through the whole body).

Therefore, sisters and brothers, Christ tells Peter that he is the foundation for the construction (Matt 16:18). No matter how complicated the work of construction is, it would have no unity or consistency if there did not exist solid bases on which the whole weight of the construction could rest. And that is the pope. His principal function is to be the solid base on which the world's diversity can build. We should all feel that he is our father; we should feel him as much our own as if he were the bishop of our diocese, the pastor of our parish, the catechist of our village. Through these many ministers rushes the blood that flows from the heart of the pope and reaches the remotest corners of the world where people believe in this Catholic faith. That's what I was telling you, sisters and brothers, when we applauded at the beginning of the homily. And now I want to ask: what hands, what people are giving this applause? When I insist on these very particular characteristics of Salvadoran history, I am not meddling in politics, and I am not looking for a fight. I am simply saying that this is the history to which I must direct the blood that the church orders me to infuse into this diocese.

It is to this church of the archdiocese, together with the Diocese of Santiago de María, that I have the joy of presenting today a pastoral letter. I offer this letter as a humble service of enlightenment because its theme is of great importance for our time. Its title is «The Church and the People's Political Organizations». In this letter we try to respond to the concerns of many people, especially the *campesinos*. What is the meaning of the people's organizations? We know about FECCAS, UTC, FAPU, etc., etc.⁵ There's a proliferation of political groups! We say in the letter that this phenomenon is an example of what the Council calls the signs of the times, and it is on these that the church must shine the light of the Gospel (GS 11). I don't want you

⁵ The acronyms stand for people's organizations: FECCAS is the Christian Federation of Salvadoran *Campesinos*; UTC is the Union of Rural Workers; and FAPU is the United Popular Action Front.

just to read the letter; I urge you to reflect on it together with your communities. It's a matter for profound reflection so that we don't all come up with different ideas about the church's relations with these organizations, ideas that diverge from the ones we propose there by the light of the Gospel. I hope that you dedicate yourselves to this work, this pastoral effort, with the same affection with which we your pastors are offering it to you.

The letter has three parts. The first part explains the situation of the people's organizations in El Salvador. We defend the right of organization, and we support the just objectives of organizations. We describe and denounce the violations here in El Salvador of this right to organize because it is a right that all persons have. We explain why the right to organize is legitimate and also when it may become illicit. We are not defending every organization. Some organizations are formed for criminal activity, for abductions, for guerrilla warfare, or for other unjust endeavors, and we put forth the moral reasons why such organizations cannot be allowed.

The second part contains the central theme: the relationship of the church to the people's organizations. We propose three basic principles that define the mission of the church, the kind of service the church should provide for the people, and most importantly, the church's struggle on behalf of just objectives. In this second part we recall with affection the words of Paul VI that serve almost as a testament for us: «Accompany your people with the kindness of pastors, illuminating them always with the light of the Gospel». In the third principle we show how the church tries to insert all the people's struggles for liberation into Christ's universal salvation. We state that no economic, social, or political effort will be complete unless it is incorporated into the great liberation about which we sang when we entered the church today: «The people who move forward, hoping for the great liberation». The great liberation is liberation from sin; it is the liberation that will give us eternal glory and freedom. But even as we hope for that, we must also work for earthly forms of liberation. The church is not indifferent to them, but neither does she want to get lost in purely temporal pursuits.

The third part of the letter deals with a very dangerous theme, and I ask you to study it with great care. It concerns the church's judgment regarding violence. Yes, it is true that the church seeks peace as an ideal, but she is also careful to distinguish different categories of violence. I recall for you how on the peak of Tabor five men appeared alongside the transfigured Christ: Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John. These were men of violent temperament, and they all committed acts of tremendous violence. Moses killed an Egyptian (Exod 2:11-12). Elijah put to the sword the prophets who did not adore the true God (1 Kgs 18:40). Peter drew his sword against Malchus to defend Christ (John 18:10). James and John begged Jesus to rain fire down on a town that did not want to welcome them (Luke 9:54). But I state there in my pastoral letter what Medellin says, «Christians are peacemakers, not because they cannot fight, but because they prefer the strength of peace» (M 2,15). And so I urge you: let us not devote all that flood of energy that God has given our Salvadoran people to the service of bloody violence. We have nothing to fear when Salvadorans put all the aggressiveness God has given them at the service of building true justice and creating a just order that is truly worth defending. I hope, then, that you'll study this letter very carefully and form your own criteria about the church's thinking

The archdiocese also has the pleasure of offering now, in a publication of the UCA, a precious volume titled, *The Latin American Bishops between Medellín and Puebla*. This is a

wonderful collection of twenty-three documents issued by the bishops of Latin America. The volume contains many documents which shed light on the economic and political situation of Latin America. The authors are bishops from Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and also El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama. The documents make it clear that the stance of the Archdiocese of San Salvador is not something that strays from the Gospel. That's why I urge you, sisters and brothers—dear priests, religious, Catholic institutions, faithful—to study the reality of Latin America in the light of the Gospel. This is not just the light of the Archbishop of San Salvador. It is a stance that is followed by the bishops of various Latin American countries. There can be no mistake about this, for it is the Gospel itself that obliges us with those words of Christ: «Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine who are treated unjustly, you do for me» (Matt 25:40). To betray this liberation would be to betray the Gospel itself. So there you have a collection of documents; you can find them in that book.

Life of the church

My visits to the communities allow me to gather together today the immense treasures of our archdiocese to offer the new pope. For example, last Sunday in San Juan Cojutepeque a marvelous group of young people received the sacrament of confirmation. Also, in the family home of Bishop Chávez in Rosario, Cuscatlán, there was a meeting of bishops that gave me great satisfaction. On Tuesday of this week I was in Aguilares to carry out an evaluation with the leaders of the pastoral effort there, along with Father Cruz and the Sacred Heart Sisters. What a wealth of pastoral activity is being cultivated by all those people who collaborate in the ministry of our diocese!

On Thursday the twenty-fourth, while celebrating the feast of St Bartholomew, patron of Arcatao, I felt the profound joy of a people who, as the sister welcoming me put it, never despair despite their poverty but instead have great faith and great hope. I brought back from there this lovely basket they presented during the offertory; it contains products of the earth marked with the names of the different districts. This is truly the richness of the earth that El Salvador produces for the happiness of all.

On Saturday the twenty-sixth, yesterday, as we were celebrating in Tejutla the first anniversary of Felipe de Jesús Chacón, I again became aware, as I have in past visits, that our land also offers the pope the gift of martyrs. What horror I felt as they told me about the murder! They disfigured the face of Felipe de Jesús, and what is worse, they slandered him in the press as a cattle thief, and really he was only a brave catechist who was willing to announce the Gospel no matter what the risk involved. After the Mass for Felipe de Jesús, the pastor of Aldeíta made a very courageous denunciation, saying that certain persons who pretend to be friends were going about collecting signatures against the bishop and against the Christian communities. This is the type of betrayal and stab in the back that the church is experiencing in many places.

Our diocese is also able to offer to the pope a vibrant religious life. Yesterday the men and women religious met together to study a document that gives us great hope⁶. It's a document that studies the relations between bishops and religious. They should not be two

⁶ The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Criteria for Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church* (14 May 1978).

separate worlds but should exist in the perspective of the single kingdom of God that we all seek. We must unite efforts and join charisms. So many wonderful things can be done when there is unity among the vital forces of the church. We also rejoice with the Augustinian fathers who celebrate tomorrow the feast of Saint Augustine, their patron and founder. We also celebrated with the Salesians on the seventy-fifth anniversary of their schools, Don Bosco and San José, in Santa Ana. We can certainly tell the pope that the spirit of Don Bosco, which is also the spirit of the church, is firmly rooted in our land. The Sisters of the Assumption offered me the opportunity to see the development work they're doing in the Lourdes neighborhood. The same can be said of the Carmelites of San José in the Utilia neighborhood of Santa Tecla—they are doing marvelous work in their development center there.

We can also offer the pope a diocese where the clergy are concerned and sensitive—and as a result badly misunderstood. I had a wonderful dialogue with a group of priests on Wednesday, and on Friday we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the priests' cooperative, which tries to help priests with their economic problems. They are problems many people are unaware of, but often priests are the poorest members of society. Also, there are a number of priests who are participating right now in a course on spirituality in Guatemala. You can see, then, we are trying hard.

This is the diocese we offer to the Holy Father, but at the same time we tell him: Holy Father, this is a diocese with pastoral riches, but it is caught in some very difficult situations.

Events of the week

This very week we have to mention two priests who were slandered. On August 25 *El Diario de Hoy* published the extrajudicial statement of José Vermoris Martínez Herrera that implicates Father Fabián Amaya, Father Rafael Barahona, and Professor Antonio Morales Carbonell in the terrorist activities of the People's Revolutionary Bloc⁷. The archbishop's office has declared this statement to be false and has reiterated its confidence in the falsely accused priests.

To the great satisfaction of my heart as pastor and to the joy of all of you, I have here the testimony of Father Fabián. In his letter he asserts his innocence and explains where he was when they claim he was carrying out guerrilla actions; he actually was doing pastoral work, as is borne out by witnesses. He writes, «*Monseñor*, I make this statement so that you will have something in writing, not because I believe that before you there is any need to testify regarding my conduct and my work. I also understand that this is a preconceived plan and perhaps is aimed at something more serious. I thank the Lord for this trial, and I want to tell you that I will not be intimidated. The Lord accompanies me, and I place my trust in him». So speaks a man who works for the truth and does not fear lies. The same goes for Father Barahona. He has already published his defense⁸, and we have excellent assurances in that regard. The greatest assurance of all is that the accuser himself has already stated before the Second Criminal Court that what he said was a lie and that he said it only because they were torturing him⁹. This is the kind of justice we have! This is the way we defame people!

Let us also talk about this diocese that deplores the crimes of kidnapping and also rejoices when such an episode ends, as has happened with Mr. Bjork. We are glad that he is

⁷ «Two Priests are Named as Leaders of the BPR» in *El Diario de Hoy* (25 August 1978).

⁸ «Father Barahona Refutes Charges of Being a Leader of the BPR» in *El Diario de Hoy* (26 August 1978).

⁹ *El Mundo* (26 August 1978).

free¹⁰, but we are still pained by the mystery surrounding Mr. Matsumoto. They have tried to cover it up, but it must be clarified. His wife is still waiting for some word that will reveal the truth.

Above all, there remains the kidnapping of Mr. Monedero of Santa Ana¹¹. Those who are holding him have stated two conditions: the distribution of 100,000 *colones* among the families of the disappeared and of those accused of breaking the Law of Public Order and the publication of four statements in the country's mass media. Because I'm part of the commission that's distributing the 100,000 *colones*, I can verify that we have received from his family that sum of money, we have deposited it in the bank, and tomorrow Monday we'll finalize the details for distributing it to all the families whose names the kidnappers themselves have sent. This will be done according to their instructions. At the same time, though, it is regrettable that the family cannot fulfill the second condition because the government has given strict orders that the statements are not to be published because they are unconstitutional and violate the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. This was communicated to us on August 24 by the information office of the presidency¹².

In this regard I am also happy that the Human Rights Commission has made the following appeal to the government: «Besides asking by this medium the prompt liberation of Mr. Monedero, we point out the grave responsibility of the government of the republic in preventing the mass media from publicizing statements deemed subversive, especially since on earlier occasions, when other citizens were involved in a similar circumstance, the government adopted an attitude of tolerance, knowing that a human life would thereby be saved». Given the extremely delicate situation regarding the physical integrity and the rights of Mr. Monedero, the commission urges all the vital forces of the country to reflect serenely on the importance of working swiftly to resolve the real motivations that allow such outbreaks of violence to continue and to spread. They conclude by saying that they hope that the prohibition of publication will not result in a fatal outcome.

Why, I ask, don't they prohibit the publication of calumnies and defamations? Is that constitutional? Why is there no observance of the constitutional mandates against torture, against arbitrary arrest, against exile? For our part, we raise our voice for the freedom of Mr. Monedero. I hope that his captors are listening to me and take into account the injustice of this situation so that they don't commit another similar injustice. If the family has done everything in its power, it is only right to return to the family the one they have a right to embrace.

Arbitrary transfers from one prison to another are also a form of psychological torture. The Professors Pedro Bran Arévalo and Salvador Sánchez Cerón¹³ and the Messrs. Orlando Cordero and Miguel Antonio Ramírez y Stefan have been transferred from the Santa Tecla prison to Santa Ana, and other prisoners from Santa Ana to Gotera. The poor families cannot find them, and this is also moral torture which is quite wrong.

¹⁰ Kjell Bjork, kidnapped by the Armed Forces of National Resistance, was freed on 24 August 1978. See *El Mundo* (24 August 1978).

¹¹ The Revolutionary Army of the People claimed to have carried out the kidnapping of Armando Tomás Monedero. See *El Mundo* (23 August 1978).

¹² *El Diario de Hoy* (25 August 1978).

¹³ The second surname of Salvador Sánchez is Cerén.

Immorality and torture! Eyewitnesses of the tragic night of August 19 in El Paraíso, Chalatenango, have denounced the immoral activity being carried out there by the new police station, which is at the same time a scene of torture and a source of threats. That night they witnessed peaceful citizens of that place being beaten cruelly.

Given this situation in our diocese, sisters and brothers, we also want to refer to the labor conflicts. Workers continue to be dismissed at the INCA and INSINCA factories for organizing unions. The Union of Beverage, Ice, Water, and Related Industries has reported that their collective labor contract with the Tropical S.A. company was approved, and they are happy to have gained wage increases and better severance pay.

Finally, this diocese that today greets the new pope also reports to him the tears it sheds for the people's suffering. Several hundred people had to sleep outdoors last week because of the high tides in Acajutla. Also, between July of last year and June of this year 4,196 persons have died as a result of diarrhea¹⁴. This datum is sad because diarrhea continues to cause the greatest number of deaths in our country. It is a result of our underdevelopment, the malnutrition of our people, and the unsanitary conditions in which most people live.

There is more pain still, and this should be a wake-up call for all of us: Dr. Osmín Antonio Magaña has stated that forty percent of the working population in El Salvador has fallen into the clutches of alcoholism, and the problem is on the increase¹⁵. Take great care, my dear beloved workers! Don't make your situation worse! I would like to extend here the helping hand of those groups of Alcoholics Anonymous I see everywhere; they provide salvation and hope for many people. Take hold of that plank of salvation! Be careful not to drown in that enormous sea that will bring more ruin on our land!

Dear sisters and brothers, this is our diocese and the concrete historical situation in which we, filled with hope, greet the pontiff, who no doubt is aware of all of this. His spirituality is not disincarnate. I am very happy that we have a pope who is incarnated in the reality of our working-class world and in the simple sharing of his life with the people. This is what we want, and the recent popes have been examples of this; they have been pastors who help us understand that the Gospel and the spirituality of God's people cannot prescind from the concrete situations in which we live and for which all of us, rich and poor, are called to find effective solutions. The church has no desire ...¹⁶ to make denunciations. I more than anyone else feel repugnance at having to say these things, but I feel that it is my duty. Our aim is not to cause a spectacle but simply to tell the truth. And the truth is one that we must see the world with our eyes wide open and our feet firmly planted on the ground, but also with our hearts filled with the Gospel and with God so that we can seek solutions that are not short-term, violent, stupid, cruel, and criminal but are solutions of justice. The only root of peace is justice. Let it be so. [Applause]

¹⁴ «Annual Report of the Labors of the Ministry of Health and Public Assistance» in *El Diario de Hoy* (24 August 1978).

¹⁵ «Alcoholism Causes Serious Harm to the Country's Economy» in *El Diario de Hoy* (26 August 1978).

¹⁶ There was an interruption in the tape recording of the homily.