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# THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

**Third Sunday of Easter  
9 April 1978**

*Acts 2:14, 22-28*

*1 Peter 1:17-21*

*Luke 24:13-35*

The liturgical year, dear sisters and brothers, does not parallel the calendar year. We might say, rather, that it is like a golden thread that weaves together our concrete history during this year 1978. That is why I would like us to be very mindful of the meaning, the mystique, the message that the church offers Sunday after Sunday. As you listen to this divine message communicated through my poor words, just be mindful, as we say during Mass, «not to look on my sins, but on the faith of the church»<sup>1</sup>. There may be human defects, but what is important is that despite these defects our message enlightens the reality in which we live. If it does not throw light on our reality, then our message would be a parallel discourse that never intersects with life.

Therefore the homily—that is what it is called even though some people laugh at this word—is a consecrated word that signifies what the celebrant of the Mass says as he applies the Scripture readings to the concrete situation of the assembly that has gathered together. The homily tells people that this is not some historical consideration; it is our reality today. This word that has been read in our midst, even though it was written many centuries ago, is the word of an eternal God who is speaking today to his beloved Salvadorans assembled in the cathedral or gathered around their radios in order to reflect on their reality.

Today the liturgical year is like the sun at noon; it is at its zenith. The Easter season lasts seven weeks or fifty days from the resurrection of Christ until Pentecost, a word that means fullness. It is the light of redemption in its culminating moment; it is the paschal mystery; it is the light of the risen One who has not died but lives now in his church and is speaking to those who follow him today in 1978. Today we conclude the first three Sundays of the Easter season during which time the church, like a bride made beautiful by the memory of her risen Spouse, reflects on the historical passages about this revelation, about this resurrection.

Today we listened to the charming passage about the disciples on the road to Emmaus, which you sing about in a communion hymn: «A pilgrim journeyed with me on the road to Emmaus. As we walked I did not recognize him, but when he broke the bread, I realized that it was the Lord who was walking with me»<sup>2</sup>. Beginning next Sunday and for the remaining Sundays of the Easter Season, we will focus synthetically on the different ways in which Christ

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<sup>1</sup> *Roman Missal, Rite of Peace.*

<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Romero is paraphrasing words from the hymn, *El peregrino de Emaús* (Los Perales and Rafael Jiménez), which has the verse: «On the road to Emmaus a pilgrim walked with me. I did not recognize him on the way, but then I did in the breaking of the bread».

lives among us. Next Sunday we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and reflect on how this living Christ loves us and calls us by our name.

We will see this next Sunday, but I refer to it in advance because the pope wants Good Shepherd Sunday to be also Vocation Sunday. I make you aware of this so that during this week we intensify our prayers for vocations. The pope has expressly said that it is not a question of asking for alms; it is a matter of awakening consciousness in the people. The priests, the men and women religious, the seminarians, and all those persons who have been inspired by the ideal of consecrating themselves to God and who seek to live their lives in intimate union with God—all these people have received this inspiration, this vocation from God. All of us have a responsibility to pray for these people so that they do not falter in their ministry of service, whether they be priests, religious, or in the seminary, which thank God is today full of young men seeking to be priests. Sisters and brothers, we need much prayer. We might say that prayer is what we pay God to buy these tremendous graces called vocation. If young men and women feel the calling to follow a vocation to the consecrated life, then this is a very propitious week for thinking about that.

During the Easter season the first readings at Mass are taken from the Acts of the Apostles. That precious historical period after the crucifixion of Christ on Calvary has changed into a mystical life, the time of the church, the life of the newborn church. During this time of Easter I encourage you to spend time reading this book of the Acts of the Apostles; read it as a community. Dear base communities of faith, see in the book of Acts an inspiration of what church life should be for our time. The second readings are always taken from one of the letters of the apostles. Today's is taken from the first letter of Saint Peter, the trustworthy witness who appears this morning in the first two readings announcing the great *kerygma*. That is what it is called: the *kerygma*. It means the announcement, the news, the great revelation that Christ died because of human evil, but God transformed this crime into redemption for all because he raised him up, and the risen One lives for the salvation of all who believe in him. This is the great *kerygma* of the church, the great announcement that we, like Peter, continue to preach. Catechists, preachers, and celebrators of the word should never stop announcing this Good News: that Christ died for us and Christ rose to restore to us our life. This is the message.

## **Events of the week**

These Sundays are so enlightening and consoling; they are so filled with hope and life in the living Christ who is here in his church, here in El Salvador. He is moving through the reality of our Salvadoran life. It is also here, sisters and brothers, where my words encounter so many obstacles. It is not that I possess the only truth. Indeed, it would be foolish if I thought that I alone possessed the truth or if I wanted everyone to think like me. Thanks be to God I have a greater openness, and I look for truth among all people. I reproach those who want to monopolize the facts and manipulate them to their liking.

At this time I want to make a solemn profession of faith regarding my adherence to the Holy Father. The pope has always been a source of light for me, and I hope to die having been faithful to him. I also want to profess my communion with the body of bishops throughout the world. I want to thank certain distinguished bishops, such as the one who this week sent me an envoy with a special message. I refer to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume, who expresses his admiration and love for this archdiocese. He has invited me to pay a

visit to his diocese in England when it's possible. I am grateful for this immense honor that gives evidence of my communion with the world's bishops. I am also thankful for the many expressions of solidarity from our beloved bishops of Central America, South America, and even Europe. All of this indicates that the bishop of San Salvador, even though he is not infallible because he is not the pope and does not possess the only truth, still walks in solidarity with his clergy and his people, ever in search of the truth. The presence of the people who fill this cathedral and the solidarity of so many people who are gathered around their radios, listening to this reflection in so many towns and villages and plazas, people who will stay behind after this broadcast has concluded and continue to reflect on this word—all of this tells me, sisters and brothers, that these words will never remain alone but will spur a sincere search for the truth in communion with my people. It is with this truth that I attempt to preach and to shed light on our realities so that they are not manipulated by just one side. My aim, as far as lies within our church's power, is to bring about justice and truth and to give voice to those who are not heard.

During this past week the vicar of the department of Cuscatlán spoke on our radio about the desolation that is evident in some of the villages of San Pedro Perulapán: «Fields are abandoned at a time when they should be planted. Who is going to plant these fields?» he asked. «Animals are running wild as if they had no owners—pigs and chickens whose owners have disappeared or are fleeing under what has been commonly called in these areas “psychological warfare”». Fear is seen in many faces, and people speak with pain: «They have robbed us! They have killed us! They have wounded us!» Some people, humiliated by their experience in prison, have spoken about the cruelties that occur there. Your pastor above all, sisters and brothers, is greatly pained by all of this. We have already met with the priests from that department. We are pained especially by the seeds of disunity and the spirit of vengeance that can ferment in these circumstances. The vicar, speaking about a mother who had been handcuffed, asked, «What son or daughter can remain indifferent before such a sight?»

What we have proposed to the priests of this area is a ministry of reconciliation. This is our great duty. That is why I feel hurt by the crude calumny uttered against my words by those who say I am sowing hatred. I would not be listened to by such noble people as those who are now listening if my words were sowing seeds of rancor. It would also be foolish to think that the people who now fill this cathedral would leave here in order to stage a demonstration of hatred and violence. I believe to the contrary that today's preaching is attractive to people because we proclaim words of true love, forgiveness, justice, and peace. But not the peace that is won by repression, not the peace of the cemeteries. What we preach is the peace that is built solidly upon a foundation of justice and love. That is why we say that the peace we preach is the peace of Christ, but he also said that he sows division (Luke 12:51). True peace also sows division because not everyone understands the depths of justice where true peace is found. Some people want to hear soft, comforting words that offend no one and propose instead a false peace.

In light of this situation, I am happy to tell you that our church has been hard at work. The commission of solidarity has taken two aspects of their work very seriously and has created two subcommissions in the chancery. One subcommission is gathering testimony and trying to contribute something to the truth that we all have to seek. The other subcommission is looking for donations of food, medicines, clothing, and money, and it is making sure these

donations reach those most in need. The first commission has published a bulletin<sup>3</sup>—I am not going to take your time by reading it to you, but if you want a copy, it is available in the chancery, where we are gathering all this information. This information is not based on rumors or third-person accounts; these are first-person accounts from eyewitnesses who saw and experienced the events. We have there, sisters and brothers, a tremendous report of sixty-eight disappeared persons, six dead (four of them decapitated), and fourteen wounded. The bulletin also draws certain conclusions, and again I am not going to read them here because they coincide with the thoughts I have frequently expressed in this cathedral, namely, that as long as there does not exist a more just social order, seeds of conflict will be sown, justice will have no roots, and there will be fruits of violence.

I have brought some hopeful thing to read to you. The president of the Central Council on Elections, in presenting his credentials to the new legislators, told them that they should consider passing more modern legislation, especially regarding the situation of the *campesinos*<sup>4</sup>. Hopefully these beautiful exhortations are not simply empty promises. Let us hope that among the new legislators of our nation there are more sensible people who understand that the true progress of our nation will not be achieved by repressive laws that attempt to justify tremendous cruelty. As the president of the Central Council on Elections stated, what we need are laws that correspond to and inspire institutions and good relations between those who have capital and those who provide labor. This would be wonderful! This is what we have always asked for: a form of justice and laws that allow people's political concerns to be expressed freely and not viewed as clandestine and in need of being brutally repressed. If people are repressed, then at least provide them channels to express themselves legitimately so that young people and people of experience can contribute what every Salvadoran should for the common good of our country.

I also want to thank and congratulate the commission made up of ten lawyers and seven law students who have taken seriously the petition for amnesty<sup>5</sup>. As you saw in the newspaper, they already presented their petition to the assembly. This group of lawyers and students, let me tell you, is a great hope for our people. May they be noble and true in their defense of what is just and right. I expect much of them, and I encourage them, in the name of the Lord and of the people, to consider seriously how best to do justice. May their legal knowledge not be used to establish the legality of abuse but rather to legalize positions that lead toward justice. May they learn to be what the Bible says: defenders of the poor, the dispossessed, those who have no voice (Isa 11:3-4).

## **Life in the church**

From our church we must lament the assault on the church of Monte San Juan and its beloved pastor, Father Toñito Alfaro<sup>6</sup>. May the people there know that we are completely with them in this time of trial. I want to thank the faithful for the reception given me this week in the

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<sup>3</sup> «Report of the Commission of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, Press Bulletin No. 2» in *Orientación* (16 April 1978).

<sup>4</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (8 April 1978).

<sup>5</sup> «Petition for Amnesty» in *Orientación* (9 April 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Father Antonio Alfaro, parish priest of Monte San Juan, Cuscatlán, was threatened by the military and forced to leave the town after being obliged to hand over the keys of the rectory and church. See «The Church and El Salvador» in *Orientación* (16 April 1978).

community of San Juan Opica, where I went to install their new pastor, Father Jorge Salinas. I also thank the community of San Rafael Cedros, whose pastor, Father Leopoldo Deras, was kind enough to invite me to confirm a group he had prepared. I was given an unexpected welcome by all the school children and the people in that beautiful church. And Dulce Nombre de María, a picturesque little town there in Chalatenango, also welcomed me with great fervor. There the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart are working, and the Carmelite Missionary Sisters of La Laguna also arrived for the event. Both communities are engaged in dialogue with their pastor, studying the pastoral problems of that region.

I am also happy to announce that this week a new parish was erected in the Colonia Miralvalle. It will be dedicated to Our Lady of the Presentation. The beautiful image we have here is the first image of Mary that was venerated in El Salvador. It was formerly in the church of San José until it burned down, and then it was brought here to the cathedral. Now we will take it in procession when the church in the Colonia Miralvalle is ready. She will always be the patroness and the symbol of the love of a people that was born to be Mary's and, through Mary, Christ's. The Augustinian Fathers will be responsible for this new parish, as they already are for the Colonia Miramonte. We thank them and congratulate them for their pastoral work.

I also want to recognize, as a gesture of communion, the visit I received from the Vincentian Fathers of Central America, who are gathered here from the five republics and Panama. They came to express their solidarity and tell me that they were in full accord with the pastoral ministry of our archdiocese.

I say all this, sisters and brothers, in a setting of Easter which I would like to be the doctrinal nucleus of this homily. I'm very happy when people call this my «catechesis» because they don't like to call it a homily. I am delighted to feel that I am a catechist of the diocese. Here then is the catechetical lesson of this morning: we'll call it «The Paschal Mystery» because all the readings today are carefully focused on the paschal mystery. The Second Vatican Council cannot be understood if we do not have an idea of what the paschal mystery is, for it is this mystery that has given the church her origins and her mission for all times. The church is nothing more than a messenger of the paschal mystery.

### **What is the paschal mystery?**

What is the paschal mystery? The Council defines it in this way: «The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved his task principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion and resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby “dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life”. For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth “the wondrous sacrament of the whole church”» (SC 5). What a beautiful text! This seems to me to sum up today's three readings.

If we understand a little of the paschal mystery, sisters and brothers, we will also have a great desire to attend Mass every Sunday and to celebrate Holy Week as a paschal feast. These are the two central paschal moments of the church: Sunday Mass and the feast of Easter, which we are now celebrating for fifty days from the resurrection of Christ on Holy Saturday night until the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. These fifty days the church considers a single

Sunday, one uniquely great feast: the feast of the mystery of the blessed passion and death and of the glorious resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven. It is these two aspects of Christ—suffering and dying to destroy our death and our sins, and rising and ascending to heaven to restore life to us and open to us the gates of hope—that constitute what we call the paschal mystery.

Why do we call it the paschal mystery? Because Christ accomplished this work during the Jewish Passover. Note well that it was a Passover that Christ called «his hour»: «My hour is at hand, the hour when the Son of Man will be glorified» (John 12:23)—that is the Passover. When the hour arrived, he sent his disciples to prepare for the Passover in Jerusalem (Matt 26:17-19).

Second, we call this the paschal mystery of Christ because John the Baptist had introduced him to the world as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), but now at the Last Supper Christ became the paschal Lamb. This was the lamb that was sacrificed at Passover time and that the Israelites ate to signify their sacrifice and God's protection. On that first Holy Thursday, when all the Hebrew families were eating their paschal lamb, Christ also was eating a lamb with his disciples, but he was thinking that that lamb was also going to be the end of his mission: «Tomorrow, Good Friday», he thought, «it will be me, hanging on a cross, the bloody Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, the paschal Lamb».

Third, this paschal mystery is also called the mystery of redemption because that supper of Holy Thursday enabled Jesus to unite the Passover of the Old Testament with the Christian Passover. Today, for example, we are celebrating the Mass. That altar is the Passover altar where the Body and the Blood of the Lord are offered. He is the Lamb, and when I show you the host, I will say, «This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world»<sup>7</sup>. Christ says, «Take and eat» (Matt 26:27). This is the Passover during which the Lamb is offered with his divine Blood that takes away the sins of the world. And so the Eucharist remains, sisters and brothers, as celebration of the Mass, as present in the tabernacle, as procession of Corpus Christi, as our visit to the Blessed Sacrament. This whole wonderful devotion that our church renders to the sacred host is the love of a spouse who has received it as an inheritance from her husband who has disappeared but will reappear. The great gift of Passover is the Eucharist. Therefore, to come to Mass is to be grateful; to come to Mass is to feel that we are the spiritual Israel; to come to Mass is to sit beside Christ at the Last Supper and to prolong it to this Sunday of 1978. The Mass of every Sunday, the Mass for our deceased, the Mass for First Communion, the Mass for matrimony, the Mass to ask the Lord for light and comfort—every Mass is the sacrifice of Christ, the Lord's Supper that becomes Passover in all the circumstances of life. That is why the Council advises us not to celebrate Mass for the deceased in a gloomy, somber mood, as if everything was finished. Rather, it should have a paschal meaning. The Mass for the deceased is now celebrated with white vestments, and even alleluias are sung because, even though the family may be grieving, their tears are illuminated with the Passover of Christ (SC 81).

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<sup>7</sup> *Roman Missal*, The Communion.

Read or listen to the homilies of St Oscar Romero at [romerotrust.org.uk](http://romerotrust.org.uk)

## **What is the Passover?**

What is the Passover? To understand the Passover that Christ wanted to give as an inheritance to the Christian people through his redemption, we must go back in time, sisters and brothers. This is my second thought: the Passover of the Old Testament and the Passover that Christ embraced.

Historians have discovered that the origin of the Jewish Passover predates the people of Israel. It was possibly a celebration that occurred on the night of the full moon of the spring equinox. This full moon of Holy Week allowed the shepherds to sing with joy because it signaled the passing of the cold of winter and the arrival of spring. Passover means passing. The passing from winter to spring was celebrated on the night of the full moon because in the spring the shepherds moved from the desert to the lands where there was pasture. Later in their history, when agriculture was prevalent in Israel, another feast was celebrated together with the Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread. Christ also celebrated this feast, which was held when the farmers gathered in the harvest of wheat; it signified the passage from the old harvest to the new. The people ate unleavened bread which was not made from the old wheat but from the new harvest. Everything was new, and so this was a time to thank God for the new wheat. This is the origin of the unleavened bread, the passing from the old to the new, the passing from the old harvest to the new harvest.

This concept of Passover was adopted by the people of Israel when they resided in Egypt. When they were persecuted and oppressed there, God revealed to them that on that night of the full moon of spring the angel of God would pass over the land, and the doors that were marked with the blood of the lamb that had been eaten by the Israelites would be spared (Exod 12:21-27). But the doors of the Egyptians, without that mark of blood as protection, would experience anguish since their firstborn children would die. On that night of extermination God passed over the land; it was the Passover of God, the passing of God. How terrible was the passing of God's justice that put in their place the oppressive people who were ungrateful toward the pilgrims of Israel! All the firstborn children of Egypt died. At the same time, the families marked with the blood of the lamb ate their Passover meal; they did so dressed already as pilgrims because that night would begin their exodus. The Passover meant exodus, leaving the people who held them captive in slavery and going «to a land I will show you» (Gen 12:1). So they left, and that night was celebrated, as Moses commanded, every year in their history (Exod 12:24).

Passover, then, meant a night of liberation: the passage from slavery to freedom, the passage from oppression to a land of promise, the passage through the Red Sea. In this stupendous miracle the people of Israel passed through the waters, and the Egyptian army was drowned (Exod 14:26-31). The Passover was celebrated when the pilgrim people arrived at Gilgal and offered their first sacrifice in the Promised Land. What joy! What gratitude!

From then on the Passover was celebrated each year as a feast of independence, a feast to commemorate their passage from slavery to salvation, a feast of life, a feast in which the Savior God was recognized as acting through Moses. This was a celebration of thanksgiving to which other biblical elements were later joined, such as the creation of man and woman, the covenant, and the sacrifice of Isaac. In this way the feast was enriched like a river that begins

very small and grows into a torrent in the fullness of time. When Christ celebrated his Passover with his disciples, this whole history was present.

Now we understand the meaning of today's readings. The Christian Passover, the Passover Christ celebrated, took on all these ancient symbols of the Old Testament to fill them with the redemptive reality that he would accomplish by his death, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. Passover is this mystery of Christ because it is in this Christ who died for us, rose for us, and lives for us eternally that we see how our church must live. Catholics who have no idea of the paschal mystery will not understand their church. That is why in this Easter season of 1978, which we in El Salvador experience as very similar to the situation of the Israelites in Egypt, we should remember that God walks with us.

### **What does the Passover that Christ left us mean for Christians?**

What is the significance for Christians of the Passover that Christ left us? This is my third and final thought. The Christian Passover has four characteristics: first, Christ's Passover is the cause of our salvation, a liberating Passover; second, Christ's Passover is sacramental, consisting of signs that contain in hidden form divine realities that we do not see; third, Christ's Passover is ecclesial and communitarian, not meant to be lived individually but in community, as a people; and fourth, Christ's Passover is eschatological, a Passover of hope.

A *liberating* Passover—what does this mean? This is explained in today's first reading, when Saint Peter preaches his first sermon on Christianity about «breaking the chains of death» (Acts 2:24) or when he says in his letter, «You were rescued». From what were we rescued? We were rescued from a way of acting: «You know that you were rescued»—the letter says in verse 18—«from the futile conduct handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ» (1 Pet 1:18). This is redemption, a ransom that is not bought with silver or gold!

Therefore, let us look at the gospel, verse 21. As the disciples were traveling to Emmaus on that Easter afternoon, they felt disillusioned and deceived: «We were hoping that he would be the future liberator of Israel, and now, you see, it is the third day since this took place» (Luke 24:21). This is the disillusionment that occurs when people look for worldly liberation. Sisters and brothers, I want to emphasize this especially because I am being accused of preaching a revolutionary liberation of an earthly sort. No one believes such foolishness, but I want to make it clear once again that the liberation I preach is not the liberation that caused the disciples of Emmaus to be disillusioned. The apostles themselves, when they accompanied Christ at the time of his ascension, asked him, «Lord, are you going to free Israel now?» (Acts 1:6). This was a political hope, a worldly hope, a myopic hope without horizons. It is the same hope shared by many liberation movements of our day, by those who do not share our Christian hope but believe that they are going to resolve everything through violence and hatred and class struggle. This is not the liberation of Christ; this cannot be the liberation the church proclaims.

In response to these disciples who had their hopes dashed, Christ says, «Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!» (Luke 24:25). Christians cannot forget that the true Passover celebrated every Sunday at the Eucharist and the true hope they have in their hearts is liberation from sin, a liberation that enables us to break

completely the chains that bind us tight. It is this liberation that breaks for us the chains of death and hell and assures for us the holy freedom of the children of God. There are no freer persons than those who have been freed from sin and from the fear of death and hell because they know that they love God and they follow Christ who is alive and will give them true liberation.

True liberation is what Christ began to explain to the disciples of Emmaus: «“Was it not necessary”, he asked them, “that the Messiah should suffer these things and so enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures» (Luke 24:26-27). The redemption and the liberation that the church preaches and longs for is not a liberation that disappoints even when things turn out badly, even when people must die on a cross, even when people are tortured and killed because of the cruelty of those who do not want to hear cries of true liberation. These are episodes in Christ’s war to save the world.

Let us not forget, sisters and brothers, that redemption is still taking place, and that is why we die, that is why there are cemeteries. If Christ triumphed over death, why do people still die? They still die because redemption has not ended. Saint Paul tells us, «The last enemy of Christ to be destroyed is death» (1 Cor 15:26). This is what Saint Peter told us today in his letter when he spoke of the Lamb who was announced before creation and who will come at the end of time (1 Pet 1:19-20). Sisters and brothers, we are now living in that age! We are building something! When a building is being constructed, we are not surprised to see scaffolding and building materials scattered about. Something is being built! When the building is inaugurated, we remove the scaffolding, we clean up the area, and we see a handsomely constructed building. Christ’s liberation is like that. Much work is in process, and so there are remnants of death, there is unsightly scaffolding. Even in the church there is sin and defect because she is still not the church triumphant of heaven. She is the church still being built among sinful, envious, stingy people, as all of us are. Redemption is being worked out. Therefore, let us not expect a paradise or a redemption that comes just through human effort, just through mundane ideologies. The church cannot be communist. The church cannot be a liberator with only worldly liberations. But she still motivates human liberation by inspiring a hope that is powerful enough to give effectiveness to all liberation that seeks to be truly Christian.

We say that our Passover is a *sacramental* Passover. What, then, is a sacrament? A sacrament—once before I gave you this definition—it is a visible sign that conceals an invisible grace. We are going to receive Communion, a sacrament. I experience the taste of bread but my faith discovers that in this sign of bread Christ is present. I am going to raise up the host of bread already made the Body of Christ, and we will all adore the host because we know that the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ is hidden sacramentally in the signs of bread and wine. All of this tells us, sisters and brothers, that all the liberating power of Christ dying on Calvary, then rising and ascending to heaven, is present in the church. We read at the beginning the precious thought of the Council which says, «The admirable sacrament of the church was born from the side of the sleeping Christ» (SC 5). The church is a great sacrament; she is the presence of Christ in the world. You and I, sisters and brothers, are holy people; let us make this liberating presence of Christ visible in the world. This is what it means to be a sacrament.

In every sacrament that the church offers, Christ is present with his power, with his divine life. That means that heaven is now on earth, that the kingdom of heaven is already in our midst. All those who believe in the sacramental life of the church, those who bring their children to be baptized, those who confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness, those who come to Mass with faith and hope to find support in Christ for their struggles—all these people experience the risen and glorious Christ alive here in this church. Christ continues to forgive, he continues to triumph over death, and he is bringing about the great liberation of humankind.

The gospel passage is instructive, sisters and brothers. Christ is walking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He appears to be joking with them; we might even say that he seems to be pulling their leg, as if he doesn't know what happened in Jerusalem. How strange, they think, since everyone is talking about it. Playing ignorant, Christ says, «What sort of things?» They respond, «What happened to Jesus of Nazareth, who was a great prophet. He proclaimed that he was going to free Israel but three days have passed and all our hopes have been crushed. It is true that some women are going about saying that they have seen him risen to new life, but we have not seen him» (Luke 24:18-24). This is how we ourselves think when we lose sight of the presence of Christ hidden in that pilgrim. When they reach the village of Emmaus, the pilgrim tells the disciples, «Thank you for your company, but I'm going farther». They say to him, «Stay with us, sir. Don't you see that it's very late?» (Luke 24:28-29). He has won them over! As they prepare their supper and sit down to eat, Jesus must make a divine gesture because in the breaking of the bread they recognize him. But as soon as they recognize him, he disappears. They comment to one another, «Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way? Let us go and tell the Eleven» (Luke 24:30-33). So they run to Jerusalem to join the community there.

This is what sacrament is. That's why we're insisting, sisters and brothers, that the sacraments be received with greater knowledge. It doesn't help to present children for confirmation if they don't know what they're going to receive. It doesn't help to celebrate a party for baptism if people don't know the meaning of this sacrament. Christ is passing by disguised as a pilgrim, and we don't recognize him, as in that lovely hymn: «I am the Lord, and you do not know me. I am your God who is present in the Sunday Mass, and are you bored by my Mass?» This is why we are not good Catholics and do not take part in the sacraments: because like the pilgrims of Emmaus we walk with him but do not recognize him. Only when he breaks the bread, only then do I recognize him. Let us recognize him, sisters and brothers, even though we do not see him! «Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed» (John 20:29). Last Sunday Christ gave this lesson to Thomas, and now he gives the same lesson to these two disciples by disappearing just as they come to recognize him. He does not like to be visible while this life lasts, for this life should be one of faith and hope.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, the third aspect of our Passover is that it is *communitarian*. Moses commanded, «Let each family kill a lamb. If the family is small, let them invite their neighbors so that they can share the Passover meal among several families» (Exod 12:1-4). From that time the Passover became a family celebration and also a national celebration. Even now, every year at Passover Jewish people from different parts of the world try to travel to Jerusalem in Israel to celebrate Passover with patriotic sentiment. It would be the same as if people were to travel from different parts of the world to be here in order to celebrate together our independence on September 15.

This communitarian meaning of Passover is mentioned at the beginning of the first reading which speaks of «Peter with the Eleven» (Acts 2:14). Sisters and brothers, see how Peter as pope meets with the eleven apostles, the bishops at that time. As long as an apostle is united with Peter, then there is communion. Your bishop, sisters and brothers, is in communion with Peter, who today is called Paul VI. I remember well how his words gave me so much encouragement last year:<sup>8</sup> «Courage! Courage!», the pope told me, «You are the one who is in charge!» I am also mindful that my communion with the pope holds the secret of my words and my orientation to my people. The day that the pope does not recognize me or is not in accord with what I say or do, he will let me know. Then with all humility I will say, «Sisters and brothers, I am sorry. I was deceiving you. I retire, and another will follow who has the full confidence of the Holy Father». But until that time, Peter is with the Eleven, and I am among those Eleven. But now there are not just eleven; there are more than two thousand bishops who were present at the Council and who continue to govern the church throughout the world. This communion with the bishops of the world is what gives meaning to church communion.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, you also should feel Passover to be a family affair, and you should feel at home at Mass each Sunday just as you do now. Perhaps I'm abusing your goodness by speaking for so long, but I see you all so happy and content as you sit on these benches for Sunday Mass, as one family of God listening to this humble messenger of the Father's message. And yesterday when I walked through the streets of Dulce Nombre de María and the humble country folk told me how they listen to these words which give them consolation, hope, and nourishment, I felt like crying and saying like Christ, «I give praise to you, Father, for you hide these things from the wise and the learned of the world and reveal them to these poor folk. I give you thanks because you have given me a hearty voice and made a radio broadcast available to me. May this continue for the consolation of so many people» (Luke 10:21). This is communion, sisters and brothers. We experienced this communion in the humble gift of the *campesinos*. There in Dulce Nombre de María the people gave me the fruit of their first crops and a mat woven for me. Who would not be grateful for these kind gestures of our humble folk who show they are living in communion with their pastor? Thank you for expressing this communion on so many occasions! Without this communion there is no church. Passover is what makes this church. The true church lives the paschal communion.

Finally, sisters and brothers, the Christian Passover is an *eschatological* Passover. Eschatology refers to the final salvation at the end of time. Saint Peter has told us today that Christ was the Lamb foreseen from before creation and that he will come to be fully revealed at the end of time (1 Pet 1:19-20). Between this Lamb announced before the beginning of time and his arrival as the judge of history at the end of time, there is this period of history that we are weaving. That is why we who live in history must have as our starting point the Lamb who lived before history and who is now the goal of history. Let us not lose sight of this perspective. When we struggle for a better world without this eschatological horizon, we are losing sight of this vision.

As long as we have faith and hope in this Christ who will return and in the realities that exist beyond our own failures and our death and our difficulties, as long as we keep present that horizon, then we are the Passover church, the church of hope. The gospel speaks to us also

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<sup>8</sup> Reference to his meeting with Pope Paul VI in the general audience of 30 March 1977. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (3 April 1977).

about this eschatological sense: «Foolish and slow to believe! Did he not have to suffer all this so as to enter into glory?» (Luke 24:25-26). Suffering is necessary, and we should not be surprised or scandalized by afflictions and unexpected failures. How many times have we heard relatives of a deceased person weeping and almost blaspheming: «If God loves, why has he taken my beloved away?» God loves you, and that is why he took her away. He sends her ahead of you and wants you to meet her there. Those who struggle for liberation and see their efforts fail are tempted to say, «This is not solved with Christian hope. We have to resort to violence». That is a lie. God is patient because he is eternal. We must be patient with him, awaiting the definitive heaven, the sure triumph, the true Passover.

That's why I had to laugh, sisters and brothers, when a newspaper was interpreting my preaching as though it were aimed at subverting democracy. They say that I'm proposing socialism<sup>9</sup>. What foolishness! The church does not propose any system! The church does not defend any social systems or any political parties. The church gives hopeful inspiration and eschatological meaning to history. She sends forth her children, all of you who live in the world and have to make the world. You have to build a more perfect democracy and a more just social system according to your own criteria. You have an obligation to do this work!

As church we must always keep people mindful of this Christian hope which offers criticism to every social system. The church criticizes them because, from the perspective of the system of eternal happiness, she tells every historical system, «This is not good; that is unjust; there is a better way to do this or that...». The church sheds light on the realities of the earth from the perspective of hope. That is the church's mission.

Sisters and brothers, let us now celebrate our Eucharist today, the true sacrament of our Passover. I want to conclude by reading these words that Saint Peter addressed to the first crowd of Christians: «God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death because it was impossible for him to be held by it. David says of him, "I saw the Lord ever before me, with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence"» (Acts 2:24-28). This is a good Christian prayer. How magnificent is this Christian hope! Even when we are tormented by the worst forms of torture, we say to the Lord, «You are at my right hand, and you will not allow me to perish». Courage, sisters and brothers, and with this Easter hope and faith let us now make our profession of faith!

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<sup>9</sup> «Violence Fomented from the Pulpit», in *La Opinión*, April 1978.

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