

96

THE SPIRIT OF GOD AMONG PEOPLE

Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

23 July 1978

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-34

Only a divine teacher like Jesus Christ could draw so much attention to his very simple yet very effective parables. They have appealed not only to the audience that surrounded him twenty centuries ago but also to the multitudes that every Sunday over the centuries have learned something from their anecdotes and comparisons. Jesus taught the marvelous divine doctrine that is our faith just as the rabbis of his time did. I am happy and feel the immense honor of being the humble repeater of this doctrine of Jesus Christ, and I thank my dear audience for the attention they pay to this preaching.

I urge you, sisters and brothers, to lift up your hearts and your minds and be united to that faithful multitude, not only those who gathered by the lake where Christ was teaching from a boat, but also those who in diverse human situations are gathered in this holy church of God, the church of Jesus Christ. Let us try to live each Sunday the intensity of this mystery that brings us together around the altar. And as we leave our time of reflection, whether from this cathedral or from the communities where this same word is being heard through the radio, let us go forth renewed in the same faith, encouraged with the same hope, and vibrating with joy in the midst of our modern world. Our enthusiasm never wanes, because it is nourished by a word that is not from humans but from the Son of God. And we are nourished not only with the word but also with the Eucharist since both form part of our Sunday celebration. The celebration of the word of God becomes, under the sign of bread and wine, nourishment for the life of all of us who believe in the presence of the Christ who said he would be with us until the end of time (Matt 28:20).

I find the title from my homily this morning in today's three precious readings: «The Spirit of God among People». As usual, I will divide it into three thoughts: first, the Spirit of God; second, the vocation of human beings; and third, the church as the sign of the Spirit of God among people. By the light of these thoughts drawn from the word of God we will illumine the reality of our history this past week.

The Spirit of God

But first of all let us lift up our faith to God on high and listen to what the first reading from the book of Wisdom says about the Spirit of God.

The book of Wisdom is possibly the latest book of the Old Testament. It's the product of an Israelite who was reflecting on the whole Bible around the time of Christ or shortly before.

He did so in the precarious environment of Alexandria at a time when the city was becoming secularized. The word of God was losing its power and in danger of becoming merely human wisdom. Some people were perhaps being converted to idolatry and adoring false gods. The threat to the faith of Israel was great. The fervor of the time of the prophets no longer existed; there was no worship in the temple of Jerusalem. We find ourselves in the Greek ambience of human wisdom, or perhaps it should be called cosmopolitan. This is where we find this man who wrote the book of Wisdom, which is actually a book of sermons, at least the second part. It narrates the history of Israel, especially the Exodus, not as a history of past times but updating it to the time of Alexandria. This is what a good homily does: it brings the Bible up to date; it incarnates the eternal word of God in contemporary human history. In the book of Wisdom we find a model for what a homily should be.

The sacred writer reflects on how the power of God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt after the seven plagues and on how the people crossed the desert amid marvelous signs from God and finally reached the Promised Land. It then applies this to the situation in Egypt in another time, one close to the time of Christ. The author encourages the people of Israel not to abandon their faith in the true God. One of these homiletic reflections on the God who saved Israel is the passage that was read today. Here we find the God of the Bible, the God who summons Moses to lead the people to freedom, the God who inspires the patriarchs with hope of redemption—this is the same God who centuries later is adored by the Israelites in a pagan city. And so we can also say that he is the same God of today, 1978, here in El Salvador. He is the God who does not change, the eternal God. Let us examine the extraordinary traits the Sacred Scriptures present us with so that we can learn who our God really is, not from my poor Sunday homily but from the great homily of the book of Wisdom.

In the first place, says Wisdom, he is the one and only God (Wis 12:13). There is no other God. The whole Bible categorically declares the unity and uniqueness of God. With all the force of revelation, that declaration is heard here in Wisdom as one of the last echoes of the Old Testament. There is no more than one God, and all those who make gods of other things commit sin and offend God because they become idolaters. Certainly in this regard a homily of 1978 would differ some from the book of Wisdom. We're not in danger of the kind of idolatry that flourished in ancient Alexandria, but still the worship of El Salvador's God is being threatened by sham idolatries, such as the idolatry of money, the idolatry of power, the idolatry of lust, the idolatry of pleasure. So many idolatries threaten our civilization, just like the ones that tried to snatch the heart of the Israelites of Alexandria away from the only true God. «You shall not worship another God; you shall not serve another God because your God is the one true God!» (Deut 6:4). The book of Wisdom has revealed to us today God's «universal sovereignty» and his «total power»; God can do «whatever he wills» for he is «all-powerful» and «sovereign» (Wis 12:16,18). We have heard all this proclaimed in what is said today about the God of revelation.

Another trait of God that appears in the first reading is that of being providential: he is a God «who cares for all», a God who governs us (Wis 12:13-14). How wonderful it is, sisters and brothers, to feel governed by God, placed under God's sovereignty! That is what the Holy Bible means when it says that there is no power that does not come from God and that authority must be obeyed because it comes from God (Rom 13:1). But the Bible also says that the human sovereign, the one who commands, must not command anything apart from what God wants; moreover, it says that authority is to be respected only because it reflects God's sacred power. When human authority contravenes God's law and violates the rights, the freedom, and the

dignity of human beings, then it is time to cry out as Saint Peter did in the Bible, «We must obey God rather than men» (Acts 5:29). All power comes from God, and therefore rulers cannot use their authority capriciously but only according to the Lord's will. God's providence aims to govern the nations, and the rulers are only his ministers, servants of God like all the rest of his creatures.

Then the Bible says today that he is a «just God». «You do not judge unjustly» (Wis 12:13). «Your power is the source of justice» (Wis 12:16). Consider the richness of this concept of justice. Justice is the manifestation of power. A power is not true power unless it is just. God himself, who can do what he wills, does not abuse power; indeed, he cannot abuse it because he is just; he is justice par excellence. God's power is illuminated by his infinite justice. «You judge with moderation», says Wisdom (Wis 12:18). This is the eternal serenity of God; he does not get impatient. He is the God who holds the reins of all peoples and all human beings, and that is why his justice is restrained; it is justice that is serene and holy.

Still another title that comes from today's readings is «merciful God». «Your universal sovereignty makes you spare all» (Wis 12:16). «You govern us with great indulgence because you can do whatever you want» (Wis 12:18). This seems paradoxical. «Precisely because you can do what you want, you could trample on us, you could crush us, you could torture us, you could treat us cruelly. But no, precisely because you can do what you want, you love us because you have the wherewithal to be merciful and to hope that people will return to the right path».

How different human justice is! When human beings hold power, how they trample on others! So much torture! So many horrors! «You can do what you want, and that's why you're treating me this way». So many people have said that in those horrid cells that are the shame of our civilization, those chambers in the police stations and the National Guard bases, everywhere where there's been torture. They think they can do what they want—the powerful, those who have weapons, those who wear boots with hard toes—but only God can do what he wants, and our God governs us with goodness. What happens is that power, when given to weak persons, becomes cruelty: it's an inferiority complex that becomes brutality. God has no inferiority complex. God is sovereign. God can do all, and that's why he judges even his felons and his sinners with kindness and mercy. But that just and merciful God also imposes sanctions because mercy is not weakness. Today the book of Wisdom says, «You reveal your strength to those who doubt your absolute power, and you rebuke the insolence of those who refuse to acknowledge it» (Wis 12:17). This is true: when the insolent turn against God, what a sad state they're in! You can bet that God's power will make the omnipotent force of his punishment felt against the proud, the arrogant, and the disobedient. God also punishes, but only when his patience has been exhausted. God is just, but before that he is infinitely merciful.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is our God. Let us not forget him; let us respect him, realizing that he is the source of all the joy and the confidence of our faith. May the God that Jesus Christ reveals to us as Father, as providence, as goodness, always capture our hearts so that we will serve him not out of fear but out of love.

You know that there are two kinds of fear, servile fear and filial fear. Servile fear is the fear of servants, the fear of those who do things just so they won't be punished. It's a poor, miserly fear that is at times hypocritical, a matter of mere appearance. But filial fear is that of sons and daughters; it is filial because it fears offending parents. It's a fear that is born of love. It's the love of a daughter who doesn't want to upset her mother. It's the fear of those who

don't want to breed resentment but wish to do good. This is the love we should have for God: «You are a God of love. You are a God of goodness and of mercy. That is why I serve you, not for fear of punishment but because I love you». It's what that beautiful poem says¹:

You don't have to give me anything because I love you;
For even if there were no heaven, I would love you,
And even if there were no hell, I would fear you;
I would love you the same as I love you now.

How beautiful are human hearts when they reach such independence and know that they love God not out of fear, that they serve and obey him not just because one thing is sinful and another is not. Fear of sin might remain as an emergency brake, and fear of hell could be kept as a needed reserve, but these should not be our primary motives. Our primary motives for bonding with God must be love and gratitude.

The vocation of humankind

Let us move on to my second thought, which has to do with the designs of the God who has created humankind and wishes to come and live in the midst of humanity. So my second thought is this: what is the vocation of humankind? I will try to sum it up with these ideas: the vocation of every person is to be an image of God, to participate in the life and glory of God, and to collaborate in the salvation of all people.

In the first place I tell you that the vocation of every person is to be an image of God. It is the vocation to goodness. Here I'm going to make use of the precious parable of the wheat and the weeds. But first let us recall how the first reading ended: «You have done this to give your sons an example. Thus have you shown your people that the righteous must be kind, and you gave your sons reason to hope that you will allow repentance in the case of sin» (Wis 12:19).

When the apostles ask Jesus Christ to explain the parable of the wheat and the weeds, he tells them clearly, «The good seed are the citizens of the kingdom; the bad seed are the followers of the evil one» (Matt 13:36-38). It's not that God wants both good people and bad people in the world. The sowers ask the owner of the crop, «Did you not sow wheat in your field? Why are the weeds coming up?» and the Lord answers them, «Yes, I sowed wheat, but the enemy has come to sow these weeds» (Matt 13:27-28). Dear sisters and brothers, I found the best commentary on this gospel passage in the *Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, a Vatican II document which says, «Faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design over man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human». The document speaks about the values modern people hold in high esteem. Among ourselves, for example, we appreciate values like respect, freedom, dignity, authority properly understood, fraternity, etc. These are values that all people carry in their hearts. And so, the Council says, «these values that proceed from our God-given intelligence possess an extraordinary goodness, but because of the corruption of the human heart they are wrenched from their proper destination and therefore need to be purified» (GS 11).

This is a good commentary on the wheat and the weeds. God has sown goodness. No child is born evil. We have all been called to holiness. The values God has planted in the human

¹ Verses from the *Soneto a Cristo crucificado*, by an anonymous sixteenth-century poet.

heart, values held in high regard by our contemporaries, are not rare gems; they are things that are continually being born. Why then is there so much evil? Because these values have been corrupted by the evil inclinations of the human heart and therefore need to be purified. The original, primordial vocation of human beings is goodness. We have all been born for goodness. No one is born with an inclination to take part in abductions. No one was born with an inclination to be a kidnapper. No one was born with an inclination to be a criminal. No one was born to be a torturer. No one was born to be a murderer. We were all born to be good, to love one another, and to understand one another. «Why then, Lord, have so many weeds sprung up in your field?» Christ tells us, «The enemy has done this» (Matt 13:28). People have let weeds—bad company, evil inclinations, vices—grow in their hearts.

Dear young people, you're at a time of life when you're deciding your vocation. Reflect on how all of us have been called to goodness. And reflect on how this older generation, to which I belong (I'm sorry to say), is leaving you young people a heritage of great selfishness and evil. You as new wheat must renew it all; you are the recently sown crops, fields still fresh from the hand of God. Children, young people, make yourselves a better world!

At the same time, let us all respond to our second vocation, conversion. Consider what the first reading told us, that God is waiting for people's conversion (Wis 12:19). And Christ, God among humans, declares in the parable of the wheat and the weeds that the weeds should not be pulled up; they must be left for the time of harvest (Matt 13:29). Even the oldest person can be converted. The good thief, executed alongside Christ on Calvary, was converted and in his final hour received forgiveness and heaven (Luke 23:42-43). It's never too late to be converted. Here and now I would like to call sinners with God's vocation so that they become converted from their bad life. How many times in the difficult circumstances of our preaching in this cathedral, dear sisters and brothers, has this not been the call with which the church's denunciations have ended? We have never denounced out of resentment; we have never sown hatred.

Yesterday, there in the community of Tutunicapa where I went to celebrate Mass, a schoolboy asked me, «I was given an assignment, and you can help me do it». «What was it about?» I asked. He showed me his notebook and asked, «Is it true that you sow hatred?» «Who told you that?» He said, «That's the task they gave us, to ask whether the bishop is sowing hatred». How sad, sisters and brothers, even to pose it as a question! What a lot of weeds! But I wish everyone had the chance to tell the boy what I told him: «Have you heard me?» He said, «No». «Well, the people who have heard me can tell you that I've never sown hatred». «So why do people say this?» «Because they don't want to understand the message of love». The love of Christ demands renunciation. The love of Christ demands things that sometimes are hard, and that's why people prefer to say that someone is subversive and sowing hatred when he's doing nothing more than preaching conversion. At the end of every denunciation we ask for the conversion of those who have committed the wrong. We tell them God does not want to lose them, that God is waiting for them.

How many know the terrible secrets of those mysterious dens where so many of our brothers and sisters have been lost? How many people there have their hands stained with blood and with violence? How many weeds are growing there! Yet God waits for them. «Don't uproot them», says Christ, «just wait» (Matt 13:29). Let us wait also. I would like to tell all those friends, my sisters and brothers who have uneasy consciences because they have

offended God and neighbor, that you cannot be happy that way. The God of love is calling you; he wants to forgive you; he wants you saved.

This parable of the wheat and the weeds, dear sisters and brothers, should help us to understand the mystery of iniquity that is at work also within the church. The church is not God's crop of pure wheat. The bishops, the priests, the religious, the lay people, the married couples, the young people, the Catholic schools—shouldn't they all be holy? Yes, of course. But are they? Sadly, we must say no. And so is the church false? That's not true either. Some church congregation may want to boast that all its members are holy, but that cannot be the truth because Christ has said that his church is like a field where both wheat and weeds grow together. As long as we live in this pilgrim church, we have to live together, wheat and weeds—not so that we all get lost among the weeds but so that the weeds become wheat and, when the hour arrives, we can all be citizens of God's kingdom and we can all shine like bright suns in the kingdom of the Father (Matt 13:43). As long as we are not good Christians, we will be no more than weeds even if we go to church and celebrate Mass. As long as we're not what we should be, we're not the ideal God desires, but God is putting up with us and waiting.

This is the authentic voice of the Gospel. It doesn't try to say that some are better than others, but it calls one and all to conversion because conversion means searching for God. The Apocalypse tells us that it's not just sinners that must stop sinning and become holy; its words are demanding: «Let those who are holy become more holy; let those who are just become more just» (Rev 22:11). Who knows what degree of holiness God is asking of me and of each one of you? If we have not achieved it, then we need to be purified before entering the only kingdom where the citizenship of God's children becomes real.

This is the time, sisters and brothers, for us make use of our lives not just to do what we feel like doing. «You have the power to do all things», says the Bible speaking of God, «but precisely because you have power to do everything, you are not free to do evil» (Wis 12:18). Despite being free God cannot do evil, for goodness and true freedom mean always doing good freely, as God does it, and not because one is forced to do good. God has given human beings, whom he made in his image, the ability to do evil but not so that they will do it. If you have hands for striking, you can strike, but you shouldn't strike; your hands should be for giving generously. If you have feet, it must be so that you can walk along paths, and God has given you the ability to walk along the path of evil, but you shouldn't use your feet to walk along that path of evil or to trample on a poor tortured man; rather, you should use your feet to walk freely on the path of goodness. God uses freedom for infinite goodness, and so his children, as images of God, should use it not to commit sin, not to live in sin that offends God and misuses freedom, but to do good.

Dear sisters and brothers, we are called to be citizens of the kingdom. Our vocation is to share in God's life and God's glory, and here I make use of today's second reading. As you're aware, for several Sundays Paul has been offering us his letter to the Romans, which contains for us a great revelation, one we shouldn't forget! The revelation is that, starting in this life, Christians are justified and forgiven once they have become truly Christian by living out their baptism (Rom 5:9). Furthermore, this Christian life that has made us children of God, new creatures, will be revealed in the future and will also give us the glorified bodies we hope for (Rom 6:4). This body that already bears within it the first shoots of the spirit of new life will also rise up (Rom 8:23). That's what Christ told us today: «Your bodies and your spirits will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father» (Matt 13:43). And this will happen now, sisters

and brothers, in our present humble dwellings. Yesterday I saw some terribly poor homes in Tutunichapa and other marginal zones where there were very holy people living alongside people full of vices. What can I say? Alongside the saint is a sinner. What a great difference there will be at the hour of judgment, but not now! Now it may appear that the greatest sinner shines brightest while the holiest person appears despicable, but when the true values that are important to God's eyes shine forth, then, as Saint Paul has told us today, the Spirit will testify that you are children of God (Rom 8:16).

And according to today's epistle, that Spirit of God that has been given us is offering us another very valuable service: the Spirit teaches us to pray. Dear sisters and brothers, if we really want to reveal the new creation that God has worked within us by giving us his Spirit and making us share in his divine delight, then let us be led by his Spirit to pray. Saint Paul tells us today, «The Spirit within you teaches you to ask and to pray according to the desire of God, and God who searches our hearts knows what the Spirit of God is asking within your hearts» (Rom 8:26-27). How can it be that God, in order to establish an intimate dialogue with human beings, has raised them up to the same divine level and speaks their own language? And in order to raise them up to his divine level, he has given them his Spirit. To pray is to talk with God.

The Second Vatican Council gives an excellent comparison, saying that God has given humans the intimate sanctuary of their conscience so that they can enter that private space and there speak confidentially with God to decide their own destiny (GS 16). We all have a little church within ourselves, our own conscience. There God is. There his Spirit dwells. Blessed are those who do not forsake that sanctuary by failing to pray. Blessed are those who enter often to speak in solitude with their God. Try it, brothers and sisters. Even if you feel sinful and stained, enter all the more and say, «Lord, correct me. I have sinned. I have offended you». Or when you feel the joy of performing a good act, say, «Lord, I thank you because my conscience is joyful and you're applauding me». Or when you're in anguish and find no one to offer a word of guidance, enter your intimate sanctuary, and God will show you the way. Or when you're sad, like those many mothers who cannot find their disappeared children, enter alone with God and say, «Lord, you know where they are. You know how they're being treated». Speak with him. How beautiful prayer is, sisters and brothers, when God's Spirit is praying within us and we're sharing God's life!

In the book of Wisdom there's the wonderful prayer of the ruler who asks for a share in God's wisdom, and all of us can pray in the same way: «God of our fathers, Lord of mercy, you made all things by your Word and in your Wisdom have established man to rule the creatures produced by you and to govern the world in holiness and justice. Give me Wisdom, the attendant at your throne, and reject me not from among your children» (Wis 9:14). The ruler also prays, «Send me Wisdom so that she may work with me and help me know what is your pleasure. She will guide me discreetly in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory; thus my deeds will be acceptable and I shall judge your people justly» (Wis 9:10-12).

When I read this prayer, sisters and brothers, it reminds me a lot of the prayer used in Alcoholics Anonymous. It seems to me a superb summary of the prayer for wisdom: «God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference»².

² Prayer attributed to the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).

I think that in our days this prayer should not be only for the salutary meeting halls of Alcoholic Anonymous; it should be the prayer of all those who want the world to change. «Give me wisdom to have the courage to change what should be changed and the serenity to endure what can't be changed». How much good this prayer has done for alcoholics! They realize that their lives can change, and I, who have heard so many testimonies, can tell you how much joy there is when God's wisdom takes hold of a man, no matter how given to vice, and makes him the craftsman of his own remaking. He is no longer an alcoholic; now he is the joy of his family. And so why can't each one of us sinners do the same? Why can't the selfish person do it, the one who thinks that sharing with others is impossible? All of us who think that nothing can change, that things must keep going on the same way—why can't we pray this way?

Changes must come about, but not without wisdom. «Give me the wisdom to know the difference». Human beings have been called to share in the life, in the thought, in the intelligence of God—how can they be powerless to make a better world? We Salvadorans who refuse to believe we're walking down a dead-end alley—why don't we pray so as to make it possible to change things as much as we can? Why don't we ask the Lord for the courage to change what can be changed and for the serenity to carry on as long as things don't change? (Matt 13:43).

I also tell you, sisters and brothers, that the vocation of human beings is a vocation to eternal life: they will shine like suns in the kingdom of the Father. Let us not forget this eschatological dimension, this dimension beyond death. We should not seek our salvation only on this earth. A better world must be illuminated by what is beyond, by what will never come to pass in this life. Here things are always imperfect, but Christian hearts must struggle to make them less imperfect so that they become the path toward the infinite and absolute perfection of the God who awaits us.

I also say that the vocation of human beings is a vocation to collaborate in the salvation of others. This is also the sense of the parable that was read today: «The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast that a woman put into the dough so that the whole batch was leavened» (Matt 13:33). This is what being a Christian means, according to Christ: being leaven. Bakers know how the little bit of yeast that is placed within the dough leavens the entire mass. This is what Christians should be: the smidgeons of yeast that go on to transform their families, their neighborhoods, their communities, their towns, the entire country, the entire world! But now we are yeast without strength, and that is why we have not been able to leaven the mass. This reflection should help us, then, to understand the responsibilities we have by our Christian vocation to be apostles and to be the leaven of our society.

The church, sign of God's Spirit in the midst of humanity

Finally, sisters and brothers, my third thought: the church is the sign of God's Spirit in the midst of humanity. Here I make use of the third parable that Christ has proposed to us: «The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person sowed, and it becomes a large bush, and the birds come and dwell in it» (Matt 13:31-32). This is an image of the church as a sign in the world. Just as the tree is a sign of protection for the little bird who flies in search of shade, so too the church is a sign of the place where people can find all the means offered by God.

I said before that we don't expect that all those to whom God's life is offered will be as holy as they should be—or as we all should be. But what we should know is what the great

Italian writer Manzoni³ used to say, «When I kneel before a confessor, I don't need to know whether that man is in greater need of God's pardon than I am. What is important to me at that moment is the sign of forgiveness: "I absolve you". Even if he is a sinner, he absolves me in the One who forgives and seeks the conversion of people». It is a sign. This cathedral right now, for example, with you inside it is a sign of people who desire the word and the Eucharist of the Lord. It is a sign that makes manifest the church.

Dear sisters and brothers, let us be like the little mustard seed and make this sign grow. Let us be true instruments and signs of the way to salvation. Let all of us who belong to the church and are citizens of the kingdom be truly wheat in the midst of the world, wheat that invites the weeds to be converted so that day by day the harvest for the kingdom of heaven becomes ever more complete.

Life of the church

Now we can understand, sisters and brothers—forgive me for leaving this until the end—how this church that is sign, how this church that is leaven, how this church that is wheat in the midst of weeds, how this same church demonstrates this week many signs of her presence and also presents many rebuffs to the weeds that surround her.

We rejoice to see that the pope has now chosen the theme for the day of peace next January first. It is «To Reach Peace, Teach Peace»⁴. This involves an education that doesn't end when school is finished but continues into our old age because we can always learn how to be instruments of peace. So let no one feel they're too old for this school of peace. Let us all educate ourselves for peace.

A document has been published in Rome that gives guidelines for the relations between bishops and religious in the church⁵. We will soon have the opportunity to make better known these two great elements of the church, the episcopacy and religious life, which must work together for the good of God's people.

There is also very gratifying news about the preparations for the meeting in Puebla. Bishops and experts are already meeting in Bogotá to prepare the basic study document for Puebla. Let's pray hard so that all this work will lead toward true hopefulness for our Latin America. The president of CELAM, Cardinal Lorscheider of Brazil, has said that in this Puebla meeting there will be some very profound revisions of the doctrines of Christology, ecclesiology, and liberation theology. But he also said that the church will have to study ever more profoundly her commitment to the poor and her attitude toward the positions of governments and other organizations that have impeded the process of evangelization in Latin America. Pointing out the danger of massive migration to the large cities, the cardinal said that small ecclesial communities become more necessary. Listen to this carefully so that we can continue working in this area of ecclesial base communities where evangelization becomes more human and more personal.

³ Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873).

⁴ *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 July 1978).

⁵ *Ibid.* (16 July 1978).

On this Sunday we want to congratulate the sister churches of Santiago de María and Santa Ana since they'll be celebrating their patronal feasts on July 25, the feast of the apostle Saint James, and on July 26, the feast of Saint Ann.

Here in the archdiocese, our newspaper, *Orientación*, published a document⁶ in which our priests express their solidarity with the Jesuits whose house was searched on July 8. They share their outrage, offer their moral support, and consider opportune and sincere the communiqué in which the Jesuits affirm their position in the church and among the Salvadoran people. Our priests rejoice that the calumnies of those who wish to damage the church have once again been shown to be false.

From July 28 to 31 the Colegio María Auxiliadora of the Salesian Sisters will be celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of its foundation, and very soon the Colegio Don Bosco of the Salesian order will also celebrate its jubilee. We rejoice with them and ask the Lord to grant many blessings to these followers of Don Bosco.

The Centro Ana Guerra de Jesús for women market vendors held a meeting where they discussed the life of the child in the Salvadoran family. This is a silent labor that is achieving much good among the persons working in the market.

From the twenty-fourth to the twenty-eighth of this month, that is, this week, the Universidad Centroamericana will hold a seminar on the sociology of religion.

Today the communities of Zacamil, San Antonio Abad, Santiago Texacuangos, and Mejicanos have organized a gathering for engaged couples. At least twenty-five couples are going to reflect on the significance of engagement according to God's plan.

Yesterday, as I already mentioned, I had the opportunity of visiting the outlying neighborhood of Tutunicapa, where I celebrated Holy Mass and was able to observe the pastoral ministry that the catechists and the very apostolic Christian communities are doing there. I urge all Christians to work in the same way.

This afternoon Corpus Christi will be celebrated in the parish of San Antonio, just as it was celebrated last week in the parish of Miramonte.

I want to invite you, sisters and brothers, to come this afternoon at 6:30 o'clock to Paleca where, as you know, there was a sacrilegious robbery of the tabernacle. We're going to celebrate a ceremony to make amends to the Blessed Sacrament. I also ask everyone to help so we can assist the pastor to recover his lost tabernacle.

I also want to express my joy at the return of Father Guillermo Alfonso Rodríguez, one of the priests who left during the most difficult moments because he feared for his life. We want to thank Immigration for allowing him to enter without difficulty. Hopefully this is a sign that other priests who have been unjustly removed from the archdiocese will be able to return without fear.

⁶ «The Priests' Senate of the Archdiocese of San Salvador» in *Orientación* (23 July 1978).

I want to rejoice also with Father Fernando Echeverría and with the pastor of Concepción in Chalatenango, both of whom celebrated their silver jubilees as priests in these days. I ask you all to pray for them.

In the apostolate of religious life I also want to rejoice with and congratulate the sisters who run the Escuela Catarina Di Maggio for the oratory prize won by their student Ana María Chafoya Solano. We also commend the Carmelite Missionaries of La Laguna and the Policlínica for their great labor. I ask you to pardon me for not mentioning you last Sunday.

I also want to invite you, sisters and brothers, to the priestly ordination that I'll have the pleasure of celebrating for the Jesuit Carlos Arias Monge in the chapel of the Externado San José on Saturday of this week, July 29, at five in the afternoon.

As we've been announcing before, I announce again the feast of the Divine Savior. We are mainly calling people to assist at the traditional «Descent», the vigil on the fifth, and the Mass at eight o'clock in the morning, which we'll possibly have to celebrate outdoors.

Helping out with the cathedral is a duty. I want to read here the testimony of one person who left this message on the envelope: «The June tithe for the service of our God. Let it be my tithe». This person left as an offering to our Lord a sum of money corresponding to a tenth of his or her salary.

Events of the week

This is the church, sisters and brothers, and these are the signs of the church in the world. At the same time this church has to live alongside many weeds, and so it is here that the church also rejects those things not in accord with God. For example, the raids have continued. Everyone learned from the newspaper⁷ about the capture of a twelve-year-old girl and another young girl aged sixteen along with her mother. Before that I also heard about the search of the humble home of Mrs. Dolores Castillo. This woman is elderly, arthritic, and diabetic, and she suffers from hypertension; the sixty security agents didn't hesitate to torment her, at least by the shock of it all. As we heard in today's readings, there is a great need for more awareness and more humanity.

The labor union of Cigarrería Morazán was dissolved, and others are in danger of being dissolved. The reason is the lack of support for the right of workers to organize unions. It's believed that seventy-five percent of workers are not unionized and so cannot avail themselves of their right to defend themselves by means of a union.

Most of all, I want to unite myself to the suffering of the family of Dr. Álvaro Edgar Cuéllar—excuse me, Víctor Cuéllar Ortiz—for the kidnapping of their son, Álvaro Edgar. Many prayers have been offered, and from this pulpit, as is my custom, I make a call for peace of mind to be restored to this home. I want to remind the kidnappers that the family is poor and cannot offer the large sums that are usually demanded in these cases.

There have also been violations and injustices in constitutional procedures as, for example, in the case of Dr. Eduardo Espinosa Fiallos who, thank God, has been returned to his

⁷ See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (19 July 1978).

family after a month of subterfuge. Other prisoners have been presented with evident signs of torture, such as the man who was treated by a nurse because his thumbs were almost crushed.

I want to thank *La Crónica del Pueblo*⁸ for giving echo to these denunciations, and I also ask you to support this newspaper in its difficult situation. Given its ideals, it naturally cannot count on much support.

I also want to tell you something hopeful, sisters and brothers. On July 18 the Human Rights Convention of the Organization of American States, to which El Salvador is a party, went into effect. In Peru the military government has granted amnesty and a general reprieve for all those who were sentenced and brought before the courts for political reasons. Moreover, it suppressed a decree that justified expulsions and detentions without judicial mandate. Italy also decreed an amnesty that will benefit some nine thousand prisoners. These are examples for our own country. We have been visited by Dr. Fox, a representative of the International Commission of Jurists, and we had a long dialogue with him.

There's a lot more news, sisters and brothers, about our national life, but we want above all to celebrate now our Eucharist. We bring to the altar all these events, to which you can unite what is happening in your own family and in your own personal life so that it is all transformed into an oblation to the Lord. All our history can now become matter for the sacrifice in which Christ our Lord makes his love and his redemption present among us. Lord, may all this pain, may all this suffering, may all this shame, may all these reflections of your children be transformed into hope on your altar so that El Salvador might see better days. Let it be so.

⁸ This newspaper was the only Salvadoran means of communication that published in its Monday edition a summary of Archbishop Romero's denunciations.