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THE DIVINE SAVIOUR AND THE POPE, SIGN OF GOD WITH US

Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

13 August 1978

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

Dear sisters and brothers, esteemed radio listeners, in the word of God just proclaimed I find a marvelous echo of the two great events we've experienced this week: our August celebrations of the Divine Saviour and the death and burial of Paul VI¹, who will soon have a successor.

That's why I want to send special congratulations to the archdiocese and all the faithful who participated in the feast of our Divine Patron. This year once again you gave eloquent witness that the people are in beautiful solidarity with their Divine Patron. A people whose eyes and hearts are fixed on Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world is a people who cannot perish. This, then, is a sign of hope that we must maintain: our love for the Divine Patron. Both the traditional *Bajada* (descent) on the afternoon of August 5 and the Mass celebrated outdoors (because our temple can't hold such a crowd) are in themselves eloquent signs of a profoundly Christian people. Let us maintain this honor and try to enter ever more deeply into an indissoluble, hope-filled adherence to the Son of God who, as we explained in last Sunday's homily, wants to be known as the Son of Man. This Sunday brings to an end a short but dense cycle of the church's life.

With regard to the death of Pope Paul VI, I want to express very profound gratitude for the many expressions of condolence and solidarity I've been honored to receive. As a family we want to express our condolences despite our own sorrows; as a family we want to share our grief with someone, and we find in the pastor of the diocese a person to whom we can address our pain and hope. During his life the Holy Father confirmed me many times in my ministry, and so I feel that also in his death he is confirming me and filling me with hope because there are many people who place their hope in the church and her pastors; there is a church that shares in the pain of grief as one family. Blessed be God! Even though the death of a pontiff is very painful, it is still charged with hope for the church, and that is how I expressed my own feelings: «Death that is hope»².

With praise and admiration I also want to thank our mass media—press, radio and television. They have all placed themselves at the service of this important news. How wonderful it is to see that these instruments that God has allowed us to invent to communicate with one another socially are being used not for falsehood, intrigue, and calumny but to serve

¹ Pope Paul VI died on the night of Sunday, 6 August 1978.

² See *Orientación* (13 August 1978).

what is good and true. Now those marvelous media have truly been sanctified, and they have shown the power they have to shape public opinion. And how beautiful public opinion is when it resonates with truth and goodness and when the subject of its emotions is a pontiff who leaves us such a profound plan for a civilization truly worthy of human beings! Let us hope that, just as the media have presented what is just and good in honor of the pontiff, they'll be sensible enough not to broadcast further calumny on those marvelous channels which have already offended the same pope in earlier programs. Let us hope that there'll be no more slanderous columns and no more voices that sound like the cackle of crows in the beautiful landscape of truth and goodness. Let us hope that the wonderful means of radio, press and television will be true schools for the formation of our young people.

That is why I insist, dear sisters and brothers, that as long as we have no guarantee of media that are freely and bravely at the service of truth and goodness, then all of us who read the newspapers, listen to the radio, and watch television must be critical. I was quite delighted by what a teacher expressed to me this week: «I used to believe everything the papers said, but when you started saying that we have to know how to read critically, I learned how to discern, thank God». That's what I would like, sisters and brothers: that you learn how to discern so that you can believe what is good in the media and praise them when they're at the service of goodness, but also that you can repudiate the media with revulsion and disgust when they use their beautiful plates to serve up food that is vile and venomous.

The word of God sheds a marvelous light on these two realities, and this week, which we might call a gray week, has also brought us other national events which I'll treat later. Still, these two things seem to me central; they serve to focus the light and illuminate the whole gray week and the gray landscape presented by our concrete history. They help us to understand that by our baptism we form God's people, the church, and that we're committed by our faith to that light which is Christ and to that column of truth rising in the world called the teaching of the pope. By virtue of that solidarity with Christ and with his representative on earth let us become an ever more dazzling people. Even though we share the sad history of a profane people who are involved in so many things that don't have the purity of God's kingdom, let us be what Christ so desired: salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt 5:13-14).

That's why my homily today is titled: «The Divine Saviour and the Pope, Sign of God with Us». Let us learn how to make the most of these signs and so become luminous with the light of the divine transfigured One and also with the goodness and truth of the visible head of the church. I'll develop my thought today with three ideas: first, desire for God and the human capacity for mutual encounter; second, signs of God's presence among us; and third, the pope as the great sign and the great sacrament of the church.

Desire for God and the human capacity for mutual encounter

The first reading beautifully describes this first thought: God's desire to be with human beings and to feel present in humanity and also his desire that humans be able to experience him, be aware of his coming and his presence, and feel the indwelling of God in the world.

In a scene that takes us back to August 6 we find Elijah, one of the persons who appeared with Christ on Tabor (Matt 17:3). The prophet is fleeing from persecution for having defended the rights of God. He has crossed the desert in a difficult journey of forty days and has arrived at Mount Horeb. Mount Horeb is the same as Mount Sinai, where Moses, the other

prominent figure of the transfiguration, had spoken with God centuries before and had received from God the commandments (Exod 20:1-21). Those who have seen the marvelous film of the Exodus will remember that sublime scene of Moses receiving from God the legislation that would guide his people. We can see, then, that God desired to make Mount Horeb or Sinai a sign of his coming into the world, a sign of his presence among us. Moses and Elijah are the two protagonists of the Old Testament who appear with the divine transfigured One on August 6, the day of our national feast.

What happened with Moses is happening this Sunday with Elijah. God told Moses to prepare himself because he was going to see God pass before him. So Moses covered his face because no one can see God without dying (Exod 3:6). The Bible says this to indicate the transcendence and the infinite majesty of God. Only when God has passed by can Moses see him from behind (Exod 33:30-22). That's just about all we can ever see, sisters and brothers; we cannot behold God, just as no one can look straight at the sun. Rather, we see the effects of the sun. Similarly, we can't look at God directly. We're too small; our pupils are too limited. But we can see him from behind; we can see the traces of his passing. That's what Elijah experiences in the theophany this morning. We hear God telling him, «Go outside, and wait upon the Lord who will be passing by». First he feels the force of a hurricane wind digging into mountains and cliffs; then he sensed the tremors of an earthquake; finally he sees the flames of a great fire. In none of these three manifestations, says the Bible, is the Lord to be found (1 Kgs 19:11-12). But then a quiet whisper is heard, a light breeze, something insignificant—and there is the Lord!

It seems that the Second Vatican Council is drawing on this passage when it tells us about the two kinds of revelation that God has made to humanity. God has revealed himself in a natural way. The Council calls the creation and the preservation of creation a permanent witness to God (DV 3). How small we feel when we behold creation, when we see the marvelously balanced conservation of nature! How small we feel when we experience the tremor of earthquakes, the flames of forest fires, the force of hurricanes, the beauty of creation, and the sublimity of so many phenomena that human beings can only behold in amazement but never restrain. Think of that storm that Peter experienced on the Lake of Gennesaret (Matt 14:30). How tiny human beings feel before the displays of the Creator's omnipotence in his creation! They are testimonies of God, permanent witnesses. Wherever we open our eyes or our ears to capture the murmuring of creation, there God is speaking to us. This is the natural revelation, and that's why Saint Paul says that that no one can be excused or pardoned for denying God (Rom 1:20-21). One must be very stupid or very arrogant to say that God does not exist. God can be seen in his creation, even if only from behind—«the Lord is passing by». Magnificent poetry has come from poets who see in creatures the traces of the Creator passing by. Just as we can see that a man has passed by when we see his footprints in the sand, so we feel that God has passed when we see the footprints of creation and of preservation passing continually through our world, so close to us.

But when God comes as a gentle breeze, it is a more exquisite revelation of himself, one the Council calls supernatural revelation: «God willed to reveal himself and manifest the mystery of his will. Through Christ and with him and through the Spirit of God human beings can enter into a relationship with the Father and share in the nature of God. . . . God speaks with men and women as friends speak among themselves» (DV 2). Anyone who has a friend understands this beautiful comparison. With friends there are no secrets; there is confidence; there is relief from distress; secrets are told without fear of being condemned. That's how God

speaks his secrets and the designs he has for creation, for human beings, for his church. What does God, the Lord of history, want of humankind? How beautiful it is to feel like Adam in Paradise where, as the Bible says, God came down to converse with him! Christ, the Son of Man, felt just such delightful moments when he went up on the mountain to pray, as we're told in today's gospel (Matt 14:23).

We often find Christ in dialogue with his Father. He wanted to teach us that we must live in continuous communication with God and draw on his life. We must not live with sin or falsehood. We must immerse ourselves in the beauty and sublimity of God, thanking him for the favors received, begging pardon for our infidelities, and praying to him when our limitations reveal our impotence in the face of the great things asked of us. We must understand that we have a huge capacity and that God desires to fill this capacity. That's the beauty of prayer and Christian life: we come to understand that a divine interlocutor has created us and has elevated us to a point of being able to speak with him person to person. What would we give to have the power to create a friend to our liking and with the breath of our own life give that friend the capacity of mutual understanding and intimate conversation? We would feel that such a friend was truly another self! That is what God has done: human beings are God's other self. He has elevated us so that he can talk with us and share with us his joys, his generosity, his greatness. Imagine, a divine conversation partner! How is it possible for people to live without praying? How can people go through life without thinking of God? How can we leave that capacity for the Divine empty and never fill it?

If only my homily today could achieve this, sisters and brothers: to awaken in people an interest in discovering what perhaps has never been discovered! Like the boy in that film, «The Miracle of Marcelino», who went upstairs where he met Christ and spoke with him. What good fortune to be able to meet him! Perhaps we haven't gone up to that second floor. We stay at ground level, forever talking about human miseries, human intrigues, human lies. We don't go upstairs, or we don't go up on the mountain, as Christ did, to speak in private with our God. And that second floor is something we carry inside us. The Council says that God has placed within us a conscience that is like an intimate sanctuary into which God descends to speak in private with us; it is the place where we decide our own destiny (GS 16).

Let us be slaves to nobody. «Call no one on earth teacher», said Christ (Matt 23:10). That's certainly great defiance! But it is the holy defiance of those who have encountered the one and only person who is to be called Lord. When we have encountered that Lord and Teacher who illuminates truth in the intimacy of our own conscience, then we are truly free. We can then say things with the full confidence that God will back us up in what we say. Let us hope, sisters and brothers, that our people, who are so devoted to the Divine Saviour of the world, come to understand the greatness of this design by which God has created us. He has given us the ability to understand him, converse with him, and above all to realize that he desires to converse and share his life with us.

Signs of God's presence among us

How do we know God lives in the world? That's my second thought: the signs of God's presence. Besides the natural revelation in the signs we mentioned, which are like traces of God's passing by, we also have marvelous signs of the supernatural revelation. Here I draw on the second reading. In this ninth chapter of the letter to the Romans, Saint Paul begins to deal

with a problem that causes him such great pain that he says that he would even become accursed so that his own people might understand (Rom 9:3).

By entering into dialogue with God, Paul has come to understand that the people of Israel, his own people, are a sign that God wants to come and save us. But when he sees his fellow Israelites rejecting the moment of God's coming in Christ, he is grieved that his compatriots prefer to keep putting their confidence in the Law of Moses and in the works of the Law. They want to believe more in human institutions than in the love that justifies us, the love of a God who sends his only Son. Those who have had the good fortune to know Christ, who is like the summit of the Old Testament revelations, realize that the phases of the Old Testament were only a temporary framework. Now that Christ has come and accomplished the fullness of God's promises by his death and resurrection, there is no longer any need for circumcision or the Jerusalem temple or the priesthood of Aaron or all the laws of Moses. This great conflict affected Paul so deeply that he went as far as to say, «Even though God condemn me, I accept the condemnation so that my compatriots come to understand this grace of the chosen people, a grace they haven't understood» (Rom 9:3). As the second reading has told us today, Israel with all its privileges is the sign of God with us.

When Paul put aside the Mosaic Law and became a Christian, he could say with joy, «Since I'm a Christian, I am going to be sincere. My conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, assures me that I'm not lying» (Rom 9:1). Poor Paul! When he became a Christian, they treated him as a traitor, the same way they treated other Jews who became Christian. They were considered «anathema», which means «under a curse». That's what Paul was, under a curse, because he had become Christian. But he told them, «Believe me, my conscience is illuminated by the truth of the Spirit, by that Christ who loves you and wants to be known by you. I feel great pain and immense, unceasing sorrow. I would even become accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my sisters and brothers, the people of my own race and blood» (Rom 9:2-3).

Here Saint Paul begins to enumerate the reasons why Israel is a sign of God among human beings. First, says Paul, «They were adopted as God's children. To no other people did God say, "You are my child", as he did to the descendants of Israel» (Rom 9:4).

Second, «they are blessed with God's presence» (Rom 9:4). No other people that passed through history witnessed the glory of God as Israel did when they journeyed through the desert. They experienced God coming down in the brightness of a cloud that lit up the night and by day protected them from the sun (Exod 13:21). And when the temple of Jerusalem was consecrated, it was filled with a great luminous cloud (Exod 40:34). The Jewish people were evidence of the presence and the brightness of God.

My third point is the covenant (Rom 9:4). This very morning we're on Mount Sinai with Elijah, with Moses, with the divine transfigured One, and we know that it was on a mountain that God said to the people, «I will be your God, and you will be my people. This is my law» (Lev 26:12). When Christ inaugurates the Eucharist we're celebrating this morning, he transfers all the richness of the covenant to our altar: «This is my blood that is shed as a covenant with you, the covenant of the new and eternal testament» (Mark 14:24). There'll no longer be any other covenant, for the covenant of Sinai prefigured the covenant of the altar, and that's the one we're celebrating here today. Today, dear sisters and brothers, we in the cathedral and the

communities tuned in with us are the people of Israel celebrating our covenant alliance with God.

Fourth, there is the Law, another privilege of Israel (Rom 9:4). The Bible says that no people ever received such a wise law because it came from the very wisdom of God. Through the Law Israel knew precisely what God wanted and what God didn't want. Saint Paul praises the Law, but he says the Law is not enough because Christ has come to complete the Law and to give us strength to fulfill the Law (Gal 3:11-26). Still, the Law is always a gift, for the Old Testament gave us the Ten Commandments of the Law of God, and these are still valid today. Those who believe in Christ, who is the fullness of the Law, are also obliged by the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. The Law is a privilege for it gives us true knowledge of what God desires and what God does not desire.

Worship is still another privilege of Israel (Rom 9:4). Worship was involved in all the legislation and organization by which God inspired Moses to choose a family for the priesthood and establish the rites that would be performed in the temple of Jerusalem. In those marvelous liturgies of the temple God made himself present in order to receive from his people, represented by their priests, a humble homage of gratitude and repentance. In those celebrations God blessed that people, and they always experienced themselves as God's people and felt God's presence in the temple as the soul of their nation.

Then there were the promises, another privilege of the Old Testament, says Saint Paul (Rom 9:4). The promises are a sign that God is present with the people. So sure and effective were the promises given to this chosen people that we can make an extraordinary claim: no person has ever had a biography written *before* being born, except for one man, who is Christ. The prophets announced centuries in advance the stature, the figure, the spirit, the deeds that Christ was coming to perform. They were God's promises. That's why Saint Paul in speaking of Christ calls him the «Amen», the fulfillment of God's promises (2 Cor 1:20). And that's why Saint Paul was aggrieved that his people were rejecting the fulfillment and preferring to stay just with the promises. He felt sad that his people were more attached to the human institution of worship than to the love of the God who inspires the worship.

And the list of privileges continues with the patriarchs (Rom 9:5). Even the New Testament takes delight in proclaiming «the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob, the God of Isaac» (Acts 3:13). The patriarchs were personages that our theological tradition calls the «eternal heights»; they were the tall peaks of humanity who touched God and were called friends of God. They received the first promises and can be considered fathers of our faith, a title we Christians still give to Abraham (Rom 4:16).

And finally there is Christ, «the Messiah who is over all, God who is blessed forever» (Rom 9:5). Saint Paul has been assembling this mountain of privileges, and at the peak he places the patriarchs from whom Christ bursts forth. It's as though the human race, humanity itself, has touched the Divine, and as a result, a flower of this privileged humanity, the Virgin Mary, receives in her bosom the Word of God and makes him a man who appears in the world as a son of our patriarchs, a child of the promises of God. This Christ is the one who must be accepted, says Paul. This Christ is the one who incarnates the presence of God in the history of Israel. God was present in all of Israel's history because it was a history that moved forward as if pregnant with the great Son of Man; it was heavy with the divinity of God's promises until it gave birth on that holy night in Bethlehem. The Virgin is not only a woman; she is a whole race.

She is a whole privileged people who received God's promises which there in Mary found their incarnation.

But besides Israel ... Kindly leave³! Besides the promises made to Israel, sisters and brothers, there is Christ, the flowering of those promises. In these days when the church is such front-page news, I take great joy in telling you that the church is today, thanks to Christ, the fulfillment of the promises. «Israel of God» is what Paul calls this Christian people who are gathered today in the cathedral (Gal 6:16)—the Israel of God. Israel is important not for being a child of Abraham but for being a child of God's promises. Israel is important for having been entrusted with the mission of bringing Christ into the world (Rom 9:8). It is the new Israel, the church, that is today entrusted with making our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ present in the world.

The pope, the great sign of the church

And now we come to the third thought of my homily. The Gospel of Saint Matthew was written in the Christian communities, in the New Israel, and it was the fruit of profound reflections such as those we're engaged in now. Read Saint Matthew and you'll continually find the words, «This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophets» (Matt 2:23). Matthew writes as someone transferring the old Israel to the Christian people. Right here in today's passage we find a description of the church, and it's something we do well to keep in mind, especially those communities that reflect a lot on the Gospel. If you ask me, I'll send you an outline in which the whole Gospel of Saint Matthew appears as a poetic hymn to God's kingdom, to the «kingdom of heaven», as Matthew calls it, the kingdom that comes into this world and becomes present among us in a Child Messiah whose spirit is captured in the proclamation of the Beatitudes. In the parables of these recent Sundays Christ has been describing for us the humble aspect of the kingdom of heaven: it is like a mustard seed, but it has an expansive force that nobody can resist despite opposition from the bad fish and the noxious weeds (Matt 13:31).

All these reflections bring us to this point. Chapters 13 to 18 of Saint Matthew tell us about the human community where God's kingdom begins to be a reality. And in that concrete human community there is one main person distinguished as the head. There are three chapters containing three passages about Saint Peter. One of them is today's reading, where Saint Peter appears to be the principal figure in the boat. Christ draws close to the boat without the disciples' noticing, and they think he's a ghost (Matt 14:26-31). According to Saint Matthew, that little boat in which the apostles are sailing is the church; it's the community of those who believe in Christ and have been given authority by Christ. The one who stands out as prince of the apostles is Peter, and his successor is the present pope.

We've often dwelt on how our church is persecuted, but we do well this morning to reflect that this continues to be the truth, no matter who denies it. They're persecuting the Christian community that's trying to be faithful to that Christ and become identified with him. The persecution is the furious storm that makes Christ appear as a ghost; it makes people afraid of Christ, and so many draw apart. But it is at precisely that moment that Christ asks of us the proof of valiant faith. This is where Peter appears as the one most tested in faith; he needs a special faith and enters into a very unique relationship with Christ, one the other

³ A person burst into the cathedral shouting words that are not comprehensible in the tape recording of the homily.

apostles don't have. Christ extends his hand to show the unity between himself and Peter and the church that walks with Peter.

The Council's constitution on the church describes something that strikes me as very important at the present time, sisters and brothers. The question is this: if Israel was the sign of God's presence in the Old Testament and if the Christian church is the sign of God's presence among our contemporaries, then why is the church not holy? And apart from all this, why is the church even necessary? I want to propose to you three principles. Keep them very much in mind in these days when the church is engaged in conflict.

The first principle: God is in Christ, and Christ is in the church, but Christ overflows the church. That is, the church doesn't pretend to have the whole Christ; it doesn't claim that only the people in the church are Christians. There are many Christian-spirited people who have no knowledge of the church but who perhaps live better lives than those who belong to the church. Christ overflows the church, just as when you put a glass in a flowing fountain of water: the glass is filled with water, but it doesn't contain the whole fountain; there's still plenty of water left outside the glass. Accordingly, says the Council, there are many elements of Christ's truth and grace that exist outside the church (LG 15,16). This is one of the great revelations—or what we might better call «rediscoveries»—of an important truth. Let those who feel vain pride in the institutional church realize that not everyone in the church is Christian and that not all Christians are in the church. Not all of them are found there; there are many Christians who are not in our church. Blessed be God that there many good people, many *very* good people, outside the confines of the institutional church: Protestants, Jews, Muslims, etc. I have experienced this in a profound way this past week. The death of the pope has shaken not only the institutional community called church; it has also transcended and overflowed the church because many people experience in the pope a presence that means something special to them.

The second principle is this: the church is a sign of God's presence and therefore is necessary. Even though the church cannot contain the whole Christ, she is a sign that Christ is in the world. Let's go back to our comparison. The glass of water that's taken from the fountain doesn't contain the whole fountain, but it's a sign that the water in the glass is from the fountain and that there exists a fountain from which a glass of water can be taken. Listen to what the Council says: «Fully incorporated into the society of the church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her; they are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the supreme pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind people to the church in a visible way are the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion. Those persons are not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the church, do not persevere in charity. They remain indeed in the bosom of the church but only, as it were, in a *bodily* manner and not *in their hearts*» (LG 14). People can belong to the church in a bodily way; they may attend Mass in the cathedral *in body* but not *in heart*. People can be *in* the church physically and yet not be *of* the church because they are not *heartily* there. It's not enough to say, «I'm from a baptized family». If you don't live in conformity with Christianity, you don't belong wholeheartedly to this Mystical Body of Christ.

The Council also tells us, «All the children of the church should remember that their exalted condition results not from their own merits, but from the singular grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only will they not be saved, but they will be more severely judged» (LG 14). That means that we Catholics have the good

fortune of knowing the means of salvation that Christ has brought. In this glass called the institutional church we have the pope, the hierarchy, and the sacraments as God's instruments for giving us salvation. But it's not enough just to have them at our disposal. Even those of us who are instruments can be condemned because, even though instruments of God's grace, we may fail to make use of this grace of God for ourselves.

That's why, when we speak now of the pope or of the church as an institution, we should be very aware that neither the priests nor the bishops nor the pope nor the sacraments nor the church organizations contain the whole Christ. Nevertheless, they are necessary because they are palpable signs that make God's presence among us something real.

And so the third principle is this: not all the members of the church possess and radiate God. That's exactly what Saint Paul is lamenting, that his own privileged people refused to accept Christ. Still, he says, «by God's grace there will always be a remnant» (Rom 11:5). The Virgin, Saint Joseph, the apostles, and the first Christians converted from Judaism formed the remnant who were faithful to the promise and accepted Christ. In contrast, most of the Jewish people continued to believe in their own institution. Let us be very careful, Catholics, beginning with us who are God's ministers! We shouldn't think that we're the cream of Christianity because we're bishops or priests or because of the institution we call the church. We're a sign, but we may resemble a bell, which is also a sign: it summons people, but it stays outside! In the same way, Christ urges all of us who form this visible institution of Christianity to be truly signs of God's presence in the world.

And that's why, sisters and brothers, to conclude, I call the pope the great sign of the church. Theology tells us: *Ubi Petrus ibi eccelesia*—where Peter is, there is the church. That's one of the beautiful things about this week: we have gotten a sense of where the center of Catholicism is, which is something other Christian confessions cannot demonstrate. That's why I tell you that it's necessary for the institution to exist. In his humility the pope thought he was ineffective, and yet when he addressed the Protestants in Geneva he told them, «My name is Peter. I am Peter. Christ has desired to make of my humble person the sign of his presence, the center of his church»⁴.

The Second Vatican Council, taking its lead from Vatican I, teaches us what the primacy of the pope means: «In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, he placed blessed Peter over the other apostles and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman pontiff and of his infallible magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful» (LG 18). This is a dogma of faith, defined by the First Vatican Council in 1870: the pope has a primacy that is infallible, and he is the supreme authority of the universal people of God.

And so, sisters and brothers, even though Pope Paul VI has died, the word of God is telling us today that God longs to be with human beings and that we humans have the ability to be with God, even to the point of forming a human organization called church, the place where God dwells with us. And the true sign of that presence of God in his church is the pope. If we had time, it would be marvelous to describe here the wonderful features of that office. The office of the Roman pontiff is richly endowed since he's the only person charged with

⁴ PAUL VI, allocution to the ecumenical council of the churches in Geneva, 10 June 1969.

maintaining the foundation and unity of the church; the papal office takes on characteristics and forms very proper to the personality of the man chosen for that institution. Many of you, like me, can name the popes: Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI. All very different types of human beings! When John XXIII, clothed in papal robes, mounted the balcony of Saint Peter's to announce himself as pastor of the universe, he said, «Many people are waiting to see what the new pope will be like. Will he be a statesman? Will he be a diplomat? Will he be an organizer? All those ideas are wrong though they might serve as ornaments. What you should look for in the pope is a shepherd. I will try to be the shepherd, the representative of the Good Shepherd»⁵.

As I told my dear priests in our meeting, Paul VI had that charism of being able to speak eloquently about Christ and the church. He vigorously defended the church but was also bold enough to carry her to far distant frontiers, such as the *aggiornamento*, the updating of theology, addressing the problems of humankind, the primacy of the spiritual, the open dialogue with the world, etc. The form of the office changes with each man who ascends to the papacy, but the institution remains the same: «You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church» (Matt 16:18).

And so we conclude, sisters and brothers, by saying to the Lord: many thanks for having created the Roman pontiff and for preserving him through twenty centuries. And when it looks like everything is finished, when Paul VI has died and there's no clear sign of who will be his successor, it is precisely at that moment—when the church seems most leaderless and confused, when she feels orphaned—that she is most full of hope. The pontiff will be chosen who is fitting for our time. The newspapers can ponder, «What will he be like? Who will it be?», but maybe he'll be the one least mentioned. The humble Cardinal Sarto⁶ never imagined that he'd be the great successor of Leo XIII, and the humble son of *campesinos* never thought he'd be John XXIII. That's the way the history of the church surprises us because it's the history of salvation, it's the thought of God becoming embodied in humanity. Let us pray hard to the Lord, sisters and brothers, so that this new pontificate will be truly worthy of the faith we have in this church.

Life of the church

Given this perspective of the church, we can now understand why our church is so lively in the archdiocese and what the nectar is that should nourish her: it is God's presence and our hope and confidence in God.

Accordingly, we have many church events to mention in these days. There are, for example, the feast days of the founders of the great religious congregations that work among us. July 31 is the feast of Saint Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits; August first is the feast of Saint Alphonsus Maria Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists; August 8 is the feast of Saint Dominic Guzmán, founder of the Dominicans; and August 15 is the patronal feast of the Sisters of the Assumption.

A visit to the novitiate of the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Joseph gave us a sense of the religious life around us. Also, the Lay Paulist Institute celebrated solemn profession this week

⁵ JOHN XXIII, homily at the ceremony of his coronation as pope, 4 November 1958.

⁶ Giuseppe Sarto became Pope Pius X.

in the seminary chapel. Let us be aware, sisters and brothers, that religious life now flows over into secular life and that you laypersons can also vow to live a life consecrated to the Lord.

Speaking about the world of the laity and the poor, yesterday I was deeply moved when I visited the community of La Fosa and celebrated Mass with one of the new Christian communities that are forming everywhere in our capital. This afternoon we'll also be in San Ramón.

Events of the week

At the same time we want to see this bright light of the church growing ever brighter. I beseech all you Catholics to work hard so that we truly become a people of God that makes God present in the world and sheds light in our gloomy gray surroundings.

This week you all heard the mysterious news about the case of Mr. Matsumoto⁷. We read in the press very technical declarations that made us think a little of that philosophical adage, *qui nimium probat nihil probat*—one who proves too much, proves nothing. In any case, we ask that the authorities apprehend the persons responsible not only in the case of Mr. Matsumoto but in so many other cases that remain clouded in mystery. We also ask that the good name and the lives of innocent parties not be harmed in order to cover up mysteries or to carry out pseudo-investigations.

We express our condolences to the Matsumoto family, especially his widow, and we have invited them to offer a Mass tomorrow at five o'clock in the chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital. We also lament the abduction this week of Mr. Tomás Armando Monedero⁸ and the murder of his longtime chauffeur, José Bruno Díaz Velázquez. As always, we can only repudiate this recourse to violent means, and we ask you to pray for the deceased and for the return of peace to our land.

Our Legal Aid Society has denounced legal anomalies in the capture of and proceedings against the professors of ANDES and in the arrest of *campesinos* in the villages of Suchitoto, San Vicente, Cinquera, Apopa, Zacatecoluca, and Chalatenango. Also, through information received by the Legal Aid Society we've learned that in the last two weeks twenty-two persons have been arrested for violations of the famous Law of Public Order. But tomorrow, thank God, a commission, backed with more than fifteen hundred signatures, will appear before the Legislative Assembly to request the repeal of this perverse law. They will also ask to be present during the discussion of their petition.

In today's *Orientación* you'll find a letter from the Christians in Cinquera⁹. I ask you to read it carefully; there are denunciations of great cruelties; many crimes are attributed to the National Guard and to ORDEN. Most recent was the murder of the unfortunate Irineo Valle,

⁷ «Death of Matsumoto Clarified» in *El Diario de Hoy* (11 August 1978). The news item, relying on the extrajudicial statement of Augusto Antonio Carranza Parada, captured by the National Guard, stated that Mr. Fujio Matsumoto was killed by members of FARN on the same day he was kidnapped. Also, the final paragraph of this news item reports that Carranza denied before the judge of the First Criminal Court that he had been tortured and said that he had never made such declarations.

⁸ Armando Tomás Monedero, a coffee grower and president of the FAS Sporting Club, was kidnapped on 10 August 1978 in Santa Ana. See *El Mundo* (11 August 1978).

⁹ «The Christian Community of Cinquera Addresses Her Sister Communities of El Salvador» in *Orientación* (13 August 1978).

who leaves behind a widow and orphans; in their name I ask you all to continue to help out. In our archdiocese Caritas is the hand of charity that asks something of those who can give in order to give to those who are in need.

We must thank the Assembly for their gesture of sympathy in declaring a state of mourning for the death of the pope. Let's hope that this means that care will be taken not to disseminate further calumnies against the Holy See and the Roman pontiff.

As you can see, dear sisters and brothers, we are a people on pilgrimage, and we are charged with this great mission: making God present in the world. Let us feel honored by this great realization, and let us give thanks to the Lord. And now, in order to fuel our lamps so that they'll burn brighter, let us draw close to the altar which is our Sinai, the mountain of transfiguration from which Christ sheds light on all his people so that they can move forward amid the gray shadows of our history, always illuminating with God's brightness the dark situation of our nation.