

82

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Church of El Rosario¹

16 April 1978

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 2:20b-25

John 10:1-10

This Sunday, dear sisters and brothers, is the Fourth Sunday of the Easter season. You know that there are seven Sundays in the Easter season, and together they constitute a unity. They are the solemn proclamation that Christ lives and will die no more; they awaken in the hearts of the people a sense of confidence, faith, and magnanimity. The first three Sundays of Easter present us with accounts of the risen Christ's appearances; this fourth Sunday offers us an exquisite synthesis of the person of Christ as the Good Shepherd. That is why this Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday.

That is also why Pope Paul VI fifteen years ago asked that this Good Shepherd Sunday also be the Sunday of prayer for priestly and religious vocations. So we have many powerful motives to make our Eucharistic prayer this Sunday truly intense. Let us open ourselves to the hope and the faith of this church which prolongs the work of the Good Shepherd, thanks to the pastors and the souls consecrated to him who continually make him present in such varied forms around the world.

Therefore, my homily this morning will attempt to bring all this together by presenting three ideas. The first is that we must keep very much in mind the circumstances in which the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed so that the Gospel of the risen Christ sheds light on our history. Second, this message of the risen Christ is presented today under the image of a shepherd; this is the image that we should bring to our homes, our society, our environment: Christ is the Good Shepherd, living today as a shepherd who is in love with his flock. And the third idea is that we are that flock; the message of Christ is directed to the people as a vocation, as a calling, and that is the gist of the pope's message about vocations this year.

The circumstance in which the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed

My first idea is this: the Christians message should be proclaimed in concrete circumstances. This is not something that is new to our era. The aim of a homily is just that. The homily is the simple sermon of the pastor who celebrates the word of God and tells those gathered for

¹ On this Sunday Archbishop Romero could not celebrate Mass in the Cathedral of San Salvador since it was occupied on 11 April 1978 by members of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), as he explains in the homily. Read or listen to the homilies of St Oscar Romero at romerotrust.org.uk

reflection that this word is not abstract or ethereal; it is a word that becomes incarnate in the reality experienced by the assembly that is meditating on it.

Even though I mention this every Sunday, yet I say it again because it applies perfectly to today's three readings. In the first reading the Holy Spirit has just descended, and Peter leaves the closed doors of the Cenacle and preaches the first Christian sermon. Three thousand people are converted. That first sermon, which is a model for all preachers, does not ignore the circumstances. He announces the great message: Christ has risen to give hope and forgiveness to those who follow him. But in his sermon, along with the marvels of Christian redemption, Peter denounces the great sin that humans have committed: «You killed him!» He spoke so strongly, today's scripture tells us, that the people «were cut to the heart and asked, "What are we to do, brothers?"» (Acts 2:36-37). That is what the church wants: to disturb people's consciences and to provoke a crisis in their lives. A church that does not provoke crisis, a Gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle (to use a common expression), a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what kind of Gospel is that? Just nice, pious considerations that bother nobody—that's the way many people would like our preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny subject so as not to bother anyone or cause conflict and difficulty shed no light on the reality in which they live. They do not have the courage of Peter, who told the crowd whose hands were still stained with blood, «You killed him» (Acts 2:36). Even though his accusation would cost him his life, he still made it. That is the Gospel of courage; that is the Good News of the one who came to take away the sins of the world.

The second reading proclaims the marvels of the humble Christ who is led like a lamb to the slaughter. But in this first letter Peter declares that Christ's death was caused by sin and that humankind has gone astray (1 Pet 2:25). He rejoices that people have turned from their evil ways and begun to form a community in Christ. Here among ourselves, sisters and brothers, we are sinners, and I am the first of them. I have offended the Lord, but thank God one day we heard his call pointing out my sin, and instead of becoming arrogant and closed off in my pride, instead of slandering the church because she disturbed me, I accepted instead that message of God. On that day this wayward lamb that was I—and could be any one of you—humbly drew near to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. Thankfully, there was a word that reprimanded me; there was someone who told me frankly that that was not the way to act. This is the role of the church: not to ignore the circumstances of life but to point out to people their sins so that they repent.

Above all, sisters and brothers, look at the gospel. What courageous words Christ speaks! He uses a comparison: «I am the gate. Only the legitimate owners of the flock enter by the gate. Anyone who enters some other way is a thief and a robber» (John 10:1,7). Hear the words of Christ, from whom we always expect words of love and kindness, but when it is necessary, he takes up a whip and drives out the thieves and robbers. He tells them, «The one who is not a shepherd enters only to steal and slaughter and assault» (John 10:10). The whip of Christ is lashing out against all the abuses of his time. He feels that the synagogue has betrayed its purpose of representing God's mercy, and the shepherds of Israel, already denounced by the prophets, have become evil shepherds in Christ's time. This passage of the Good Shepherd occurs shortly after the story about the man born blind (John 9:1-41). The Pharisees, instead of rejoicing because the man had his sight restored, excommunicated him because the work was done on the Sabbath (John 9:16,34). They were more interested in legalities than in mercy. The

Lord lashed out at these hypocritical Pharisees, these selfish pastors, these merciless synagogues, the ecclesiastical authorities of his time. The divine prophet Christ spoke harshly against sin wherever it was found, whether in Herod or Pilate or among the pontiffs and priests. He reprimanded them and proposed to them this figure of the Good Shepherd so that they would learn to be like him and so that the church would also be what she must be: a house of the Lord's mercy where sinners find not reproach or excommunication or harshness, but rather acceptance and the embrace of our Lord who calls them to forgiveness.

Do you see, then, how the three readings are a model for the church's preaching? She proclaims the wonders of the resurrection but does not forget the concrete circumstances of sin in which that message is proclaimed. In this way, sisters and brothers, I want to justify the *today* aspect of my homilies. I would not be a true preacher of the word of God if I did not take into account that this word of the Good Shepherd on this Sunday in April of 1978 is uttered within a tragic setting, one in which we need to highlight the figure of the Good Shepherd against these shadows of blood, suffering, depression, and desolation. We would not understand all the compassion of Christ at this time in El Salvador if we did not take into account *this hour* in El Salvador. And what is *this hour* in El Salvador? It seems incredible, sisters and brothers, but our history is densely packed Sunday after Sunday. When we finish one Sunday, I think, «What will I say next week? I already said everything». Yet the following Sunday comes and brings with it so much history and such a density of history. Truly we are living in a land and living at a time in which we are the protagonists of very decisive realities.

Events of the week

The first circumstance I want to highlight today is the one we are experiencing right now. We are in a church which is not the cathedral. First of all, I want to thank the Dominican Fathers for their hospitality. As soon as they learned of my problem with the cathedral occupied, they offered me their beautiful church. I thank them because this gesture, while it is a sign of the community's hospitality, also gives us a sense of the pilgrim nature of our church, as I said at the beginning. The church is not some building made of concrete or adobe or any other material. The material temple is nothing more than the sign of a tent that travels about and gets set up wherever the pilgrim people happen to go. Today we are a pilgrim people here in the church of El Rosario! How beautiful it is to know that on this pilgrimage we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of the Rosary, so beloved by our people! Let us love her greatly! On this morning when circumstances have placed us beneath her blessed mantle, we ask her to have pity on this people who continue their pilgrimage in the midst of so much anguish and uncertainty.

This brings me to another circumstance: we could not celebrate in the cathedral because it is occupied, just as four embassies are also occupied². The Popular Revolutionary Bloc, which has taken responsibility for the occupations, wants to put pressure on the citizenry so that they don't remain indifferent to what is happening in the rural areas of El Salvador. They also want to pressure the countries whose embassies are affected to help them to return to their fields now that the rains are coming and the crops need planting. They tell us, «We will die of hunger if there is no corn in our fields and our lands are not rich in beans». The *campesinos* are right. They want to return to work in their fields, and that is why they are

² The embassies of Panama, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Switzerland.

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asking for the support of those who have more voice: the cathedral, the embassies, the governments. They ask them to apply pressure to this situation so that they can return home in peace and find peace there. But they do not want to trust in promises. They want security and guarantees because they say there have been cases where the *campesinos* returned with assurances only to find themselves being led off to prison once again. We pray that the Lord will help us resolve this situation!

At the same time I want to congratulate the diplomatic delegations because they have dialogued with the *campesinos* in a spirit of great understanding. Both sides asked for the mediation of the church, and the church has been pleased to offer the chancery as a space for these negotiations. I know that this will be interpreted in the wrong way, but I want to make it clear that, before the chancery was offered, we had suggested that it might be better to find some diplomatic setting for this dialogue. The *campesinos* tried to find a diplomatic setting, but found none. So my office, which is always willing to offer the collaboration of the church and the Gospel, has offered this space in an impartial way. I also want to state that I personally have received the ambassador of Panama, and I am surprised that the newspapers have stated that the chancery paid no attention to her.³ Both I and my esteemed auxiliary, Bishop Revelo, have been present during the negotiations, and we have witnessed the openness of the diplomats and the honesty of the *campesinos* in the dialogue that has begun. We do not know where these negotiations are right now or why the occupations still continue.

This leads me, brothers and sisters, to speak about another important consequence. This occupation of the cathedral, which prevented us from celebrating Mass there, is a testimony, thank God, to the radical difference between the church and Popular Revolutionary Bloc. There has been a tendency (diabolical, we would say) to view all the activities of the Bloc as being dependent on the church. Let me say again something I have stated many times before: if the church is concerned about social justice and charity and is not in agreement with the prevailing order of injustice, that does not mean that she identifies herself with all those who also desire the same kind of change. The church has a perspective that is completely evangelical. It is the Gospel which inspires the church to receive the *campesinos* who have no place to spend the night and are hungry and need something to eat. It is the Gospel which inspires the church to help those in need and to speak out on behalf of their just demands. None of this, however, means that the church identifies herself with these other groups.

Let this be very clear, because the church cannot identify herself with any political party or with any political, social, or cooperative organization. The church does not have systems. The church does not have methods. The church has only Christian inspiration, an obligation of charity that urges her to accompany those suffering injustices and also to support the just demands of the people. Yes, the church is there, but without identifying herself with any system or method. I repeat, let this be very clear because I am not the director of any political organization. Neither I nor my priests should be leaders of these groups. If we coincide in our objectives, it is because Gospel perspectives shed light on the matter.

This is one thing I want to complain about, dear sisters and brothers. It is precisely to avoid being confused with any sector, any party, any method, or any grouping that the church remains independent so that she can criticize whatever evil she finds in any organization. The

³ *La Prensa Gráfica* (12 April 1987).

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church says this very frankly and said as much before; she denounces sin wherever it is found, whether in the Popular Revolutionary Bloc or in other groups of a more official nature.

One of the greatest sins, and one that causes me great pain, is that the present system of our country has caused this confrontation among *campesinos*. The very hunger that causes anguish in members of the Bloc is the same hunger that causes anguish in members of ORDEN. Remember also that many members of our army are themselves *campesinos*. When I see police guarding *campesinos*, when I see *campesinos* guarding other *campesinos*, when I see ORDEN fighting with the Bloc, I have to say, «How demonic this system must be that it has succeeded in taking advantage of people's hunger! People have to earn a living by persecuting and opposing and hating one another even though they all share the same situation of poverty!» Instead of helping them through a constructive dialogue so that ultimately all might be able to breathe more easily and live more freely, all we see is confrontation. One side takes advantage of deals which allow them to belong to something «official», while others less privileged wage a struggle to move from the margins and demand justice.

Therefore I repeat once again: neither repression nor violence is going to resolve this situation. We need a sound, authentic democracy which will open channels of dialogue so that the anguished cries of the people from the city and the rural areas can be heard. The people need laws and organizations so that they can truly live in an environment of justice and peace. As long as these channels do not exist, everything else is simply patchwork, and most often they are violent patches, for as Christ said, new patches only cause old cloth to tear, and our situation to become more tragic (Matt 9:16).

Life of the church

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, in the setting of this homily I take joy in these gestures of solidarity that have abounded in the light of the church. Thanks be to God, not only have I received numerous donations of materials, but the investigation commission and the assistance commission have received much support from our beloved communities and from all people of good will.

In this regard, I want to read to you this thought sent to me in a letter from someone in the Baptist church who offered assistance: «I must lament the fact that many leaders of the different Protestant denominations are not aware of all that is happening here in our country, but I can assure you—though you may already be aware of it—that there are many people who both personally and collectively give wholehearted support to you and to the church you represent because what you are doing is neither more nor less than what Christ demands of all of us».

I was also very pleased to receive some donations from the diocese of Santa Ana. The pastor who sent this donation wrote, «I consider this small sum of money a donation of gold. It is only twenty-five *colones*, but it represents the donations of people who work in the marketplace. Another woman who wished to remain anonymous donated two *colones*. They asked me to send you their greetings. I believe this is a symbol of the hearts of gold of the people of Santa Ana, revealed now in this way». Many other parish communities, such as San Marcos, and many parochial schools and colleges have also made donations. I am truly grateful for your hearts of gold that respond to the needs of our people.

The present situation led our Catholic schools to dedicate three days this week to a reflection on the reality of our country. I know that many people have misrepresented this activity, saying that we are trying to turn the children and young people into communists. Nothing of the sort, sisters and brothers! This is the voice of the Gospel that wants to enlighten the Christian education of these young people so that they are not ignorant of the problems but know how to examine and judge what is happening. This is not making people socialist. One of our school principals was asked if she was in accord with the archbishop and his position. She responded affirmatively, and I thank her. At the same time someone else was asked, «Are you fomenting socialism in your school?» She responded, «This word is very ambiguous, and I cannot really say». And that is the case. We cannot accuse the schools of teaching socialism, because this is a very ambiguous word, but we can say that the schools are making students more aware of social justice, the Gospel, and fraternal charity. Why should they not know about that?

In this regard I want to send greetings to the Escuela María Catalina Dimaggio. They sent me a recording with the results of their three days of reflection. I will tell you here publicly—I'm not ashamed to say it: I cried when I heard the girls and young women of our *barrios* express love and gratitude for their pastor and for their church that is trying to make people aware of their human dignity through her development work. Because this is what the church does: she encourages people to develop themselves, to distinguish themselves. The church can never approve of poverty that allows people to remain on the margins of society, nor can she ever approve of poverty that results from the laziness and inactivity of people.

Let this also be clear: when we speak of a church of the poor, we are not speaking about a church of sluggards or thieves or prostitutes who earn their living by sinful means. That is not the church of the poor! When we say «church of the poor» we are telling people that they ought to understand that their poverty, their humble houses, and their rural origins should not make them feel different from other people. All of us have been created in the image of God, and we must respect and promote this dignity. That is not communism; that is not subversion; that is the Gospel of him who came to offer his life for all people without exception, without distinction of persons.

I am therefore also happy with the work of the lawyers who have continued to negotiate an amnesty for prisoners and are trying to achieve true rule of law. As they themselves have said, «In our country the law and the legal system have been prostituted, and so the ones who must promote justice are the lawyers and the defenders of a justice that has been stained by so many injustices». Blessed be God! A lawyer who does not belong to this group told me, «This is a sign of hope for the people!» That is what I really feel myself.

I want to thank God and ask all of you to do the same because Gustavo Cartagena, after a mysterious abduction, is now safe. Blessed be God!

Finally, I want to inform you that because of the present circumstance in the cathedral all liturgical activities for today have been cancelled. Thus, there will be no confirmations there this week. Speaking about confirmation, I want to remind you that on May 14, the feast of Pentecost, the Catholic schools and the youth groups are preparing a magnificent confirmation ceremony. In the Catholic colleges the students who are in the second and third years of high

school and have not yet been confirmed will receive the sacrament. Those young people who are not in colleges but are at least sixteen years old will also be accepted for this confirmation.

But I want to ask for your collaboration in this regard. Let us help the church communicate the true meaning of confirmation by not bringing your small children to be confirmed. That is not the proper age for confirmation. Confirmation is a sacrament for young people, a sacrament in which those baptized as infants are now able to affirm consciously that baptismal commitment and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit that strengthens the faith they received in baptism. Therefore, I repeat, from May 14 on, from Pentecost on, we will not be confirming small children. We are requiring a certain age and also catechetical preparation.

The risen Christ presents himself in the figure of a shepherd

Sisters and brothers, we are living here in El Salvador a situation that reflects sinful circumstances similar to the ones in which today's three readings were written—circumstances that need to be illuminated by the light of faith. These circumstances here in El Salvador in 1978 will respond to the same light that appeared twenty centuries ago: the light of the Good Shepherd.

This central figure of the Good Shepherd is the second point of my meditation this morning. Today's readings present the Good Shepherd against a background of sinful circumstances. There is no need to repeat all these things. All you need to do is reread these passages and carefully analyze how many denunciations of sin Peter makes in his first sermon and in his first letter. Notice also the denunciations that Saint John makes in his gospel. Despite sounding very mystical and lofty in his thought, John nevertheless makes very concrete denunciations of very concrete historical persons. This explains why the apostles encountered so much conflict and why they died as martyrs. No one wants to have their sins pointed out to them, except perhaps the humble folk who desire what the church desires: conversion. In this sense of conversion, then, the figure of Christ as Good Shepherd, or as the gate through which the flock legitimately enters, is a wonderful lesson and inspiration: «I am the Good Shepherd. I am the sheep gate» (John 10:9,11).

Saint Peter says in his first sermon that God made Jesus «Lord and Messiah» through the resurrection (Acts 2:36). What profound expressions! That means that Christ lived fully incarnated in our humanity as a man of his time. He did not distinguish himself from those who used to attend the synagogue just as you come here to Mass today. If Christ lived today, he would be here among us, and we would not be able to distinguish him. Where is Christ? He is a man like every other man.

But when his hour arrives and he says, «The hour has come for my glorification» (John 12:23), then the Lord will distinguish him, first by humbling him in a way no other human being has ever been humbled. And there we have the second reading, Saint Peter's wonderful letter which seems more like a passage from Isaiah: «Silent, like a lamb led to slaughter, he taught with his attitude of humility how we should suffer» (1 Pet 2:24). As the Messiah who embodies all the prophecies of the Old Testament, «he took onto himself the sins of all of us» (1 Pet 2:21). Peter tells us that Christ is our Savior precisely because of his suffering. He is the Messiah whom many awaited with triumphalist expectations and so were disillusioned, like the disciples of Emmaus, who were going to their homes because it was the third day since

they had killed him. «We were hoping for political liberation, but look, they finished him off» (Luke 24:21). So Christ took them to task: «Oh, how foolish you are and slow of heart! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and so enter into glory?» (Luke 24:25). This is Christ's condition. Therefore, sisters and brothers, I tell you: the church cannot be confused with other liberation movements, neither with the Popular Revolutionary Bloc nor with the Communist Party nor with any other earthly organization. Those who speak about the church in this way are speaking vile, slanderous words. The church is this Christ who says, «It is necessary to suffer. There is no liberation without the cross. There are no true liberators without hope in another life. Yes, we must work for a more just world, but we cannot expect paradise here on earth». The Messiah speaks to us about a liberation that is bought with blood and suffering. This teaching of Christ provides great hope to today's liberators for he is the Good Shepherd who gives his life (John 10:11).

Let us look at another aspect: he is Messiah and Lord, *Kyrios*, emperor and king, not with vain and grandiose triumphalism but with a divine royalty that makes him all-powerful, that makes him present in his church, that makes him the architect of history, that makes him the cornerstone of all human movements, and that makes him the compass that guides all of history toward its true destiny. He is the Lord of history, the Lord of ages, the Lord of eternity. He is the key which encompasses past, present and future. «Christ forever», says Saint Paul. Christ is the Lord. Christ lives. Christ has risen, and death no longer has dominion over him. But this Christ presents himself as the Good Shepherd. What a marvelous thing, to consider that this powerful king, this man who bears the marks of all his suffering now made into glorious stars, is now our great liberator and our great shepherd!

I urge you, sisters and brothers, not to leave our Mass without having first removed from your heart all the bitterness that so often leaves us pessimistic because we have lost hope. I urge you this morning to awaken in your hearts the magnanimity and joy of those who hope for everything. I urge everyone to do this, even those who govern and those who rule the destiny of our country with their capital and their money. Likewise, I speak to the hearts of the *campesinos*, the poor, the workers, those who live on the margins of society. Let us insist with one another: there is no redemption if it does not come from Christ. Let us all be humble. Instead of hating one another, let us love one another and hope that Christ the Good Shepherd will guide this people. Only he can guide us; there is no other guide for our people. If others arise apart from Christ, then Christ himself condemns them: «No one can enter and address the people except through the gate, and I am the gate. If someone has entered by another gate, they are thieves and robbers. They have entered not as shepherds but thieves who want to take advantage of the situation. They come to steal and kill and mistreat» (John 10:1,9-10). These words can be spoken literally about many people who are in no way good shepherds; they are not the least interested in the common good but are concerned only about their own advantage and their own situation; they want to maintain by brute force this situation that is not rational.

Here, then, we have the figure of the Good Shepherd which should inspire parents, bishops, rulers, the rich, and the poor. The Good Shepherd, Christ, Messiah and Lord, should be the inspiration for all Christians. This is a beautiful meditation, and we could continue with this reflection, but we have said enough here to give you an idea of the central message of this Sunday: Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

The message of Christ is directed to the people as a vocation, as a call

My third point is the following: we are the children of this present situation, and we live as protagonists of these circumstances of our country. But thank God, we are Christians, and we believe in the Good Shepherd. What does that mean? It means we have a personal responsibility. This Good Shepherd, as presented to us in today's three readings, is a shepherd who calls us to collaborate. Look at the first reading. Saint Peter tells us: «Through Christ, God has given us the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit» (Acts 2:38). This promise that God made in Christ is valid for you and for all his children and for all whom the Lord calls.

On this day dedicated to vocations, it is wonderful to recall that the first vocation is the one you have as you come here to Mass because you are Christians, having been baptized due to the love of a Christian mother. When I was still unaware, a blessed woman among our people, my mother, brought me to the church to be baptized, and from that day I am a Christian. The Lord called me. He called me through the heart of my mother. It is the same with all of us who are baptized. We have been called, called to receive the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ our Savior, is for all of us.

The second reading also presents the concept of vocation, saying, «When you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God, for to do this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you» (1 Pet 2:20-21). My Christian sisters and brothers, those who think that Christianity is the key to avoid suffering are mistaken. Some people stop praying because they asked God to cure them of some illness or to give them better luck, and they say, «God does not listen to me. I continue in my misery, poor and disgraced. I don't pray any more». Such people have not understood the dignity of their vocation. God has called us to suffer. Christ is the only one who did not sin, and yet he suffered greatly. And since we are gathered together in a church dedicated to the Virgin, let us think of Mary who, like the innocent Christ, was sinless and yet also suffered beneath the cross as seven swords pierced her heart. Yes, the Lord calls us to suffer, but to suffer even as we do good. Look at the contrast here in the politics of God! The reward for doing good does not mean that I will be well off. Saint Peter makes this very clear in his letter today: «Do good and suffer». What a marvelous thing this is to God! «For to do this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you» (1 Pet 2:20-21).

Therefore I tell you, sisters and brothers, any liberation that is achieved without suffering and pain is a pure lie. There is no paradise here on earth. Complete liberation will be beyond our death, but it needs to begin to be realized here on earth. It is necessary, then, for us to stay free. I feel bad, sisters and brothers, that at this time when the people can no longer tolerate the present situation, there are so many people who are indifferent and who would prefer, like the ancient Israelites, to continue to eat the onions of Egypt (Num 11:5). They protested against Moses because in the desert they were suffering on the way to liberation: «Why did you take us away from Egypt? Even though we were slaves, we were better off. We had meat to eat; our pots were full!» (Exod 16:3). This is the situation of many people: they just want to be well off. But how long will this last? Definitive liberation implies suffering and a passage through a dark tunnel, like the passion of Christ. Saint Peter encourages us by saying that the passion is brief. The time of suffering is brief, but we have to accept it with the same joy with which Christ embraced his cross and walked toward Calvary. He fell, but instead of remaining on the ground, he got up three times and kept going until they nailed him to the cross because he knew that only then would redemption be complete. Everything was

accomplished, to the very end (John 19:30). I urge you, sisters and brothers, as Christians, not to be afraid of suffering; rather let us realize that is the common vocation of every Christian.

The gospel also speaks about the meaning of vocation: «I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep» (John 10:2,9). Here we have a general calling. All who want to be saved have to enter through Christ. Without Christ there is no salvation. Those of us who have the honor of being pastors would not be pastors if we had not been called to enter through the gate. The true bishop, the true pastor, and the authentic pope are the ones who have entered through the gate that is Christ. The day that I am no longer in communion—God save me from that—I would be a schismatic, a thief, an assassin, a robber. I would be like the pastors who usurp churches, such as the little church of Dulce Nombre de María which some members of ORDEN have taken possession of. You see, our churches are not occupied just by members of the Bloc. The people of ORDEN have also seized many churches so that others would not occupy them, as if the church were some plaything at the disposal of every protest. Those who do not enter through the gate who is Christ are thieves. The only pastors are those who enter through Christ and preach in his name and announce his word. This is the criterion: entering through the gate of Christ and not through the windows or some other opening.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, this is the meaning of vocation. I will conclude by reading a beautiful reflection of Paul VI for this day: «When Jesus talks about the “shepherd” and the “flock” he is presenting himself as the Good Shepherd, and he is presenting the community of believers, that is, his church, as the flock open to receiving the whole of humanity. Now, to understand the meaning and value of every vocation, these are just the two realities that we must fix our minds on: Christ and the church. Here we find the light to accept and the support to persevere in the vocation fully understood, freely chosen, and strongly loved. Look at Christ. We say this particularly to you young people with fatherly affection and great confidence. Look at Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man and Son of God, the High Priest of the new people of God, the eternal Shepherd of his church who offered his life for his flock, “taking the form of a servant... obedient unto death, even death on a cross”»⁴.

The pope then explains the profound theological meaning of these words: «Only from Christ, who is the only priest and pastor of all people, comes the pastoral concern of all men who are called to be priests and pastors». Therefore, the vocation of seminarians, of bishops, and of priests cannot be understood without taking into consideration Christ who is the only priest. Nor can it be understood without comprehending the church as the flock of Christ, where Christ is the shepherd and our only job is to make his presence visible in the midst of his people.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, you who are listening to me, I thank you much for your attention because it is to Christ that you are giving your attention. That is why the pope concludes his message with the words, «And so to you young people, be concerned about knowing these two realities: Christ and the church. For without them you will not be able to understand the meaning of your life. But we must also say to you shepherds of souls, religious, missionaries, teachers, theologians, and you experts in spirituality, education, and vocation

⁴ PAUL VI, «Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations» (1 February 1978).
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psychology: make these realities known, teach these truths, make them easy to understand, stimulating, and attractive, as Jesus the teacher and shepherd did»⁵.

On this Sunday, sisters and brothers, let us offer our prayers to the Good Shepherd so that his courageous and guiding presence will continue in the world through the voice of his pastors. Let us also pray that the vocation to be Christian will continue to be embraced by those persons who were baptized and perhaps have lost their grasp of Christianity. May we understand that being Christian means being called to suffer and to carry the cross. But this is how the world will be saved, so we should not be afraid when the hour of suffering approaches but should strongly embrace that cross. May our young men and women understand this great plan by which God calls them so that he can use their faces to make himself present in the world, use their hands as the hands of Christ to give the gifts of love, and use their feet to walk along all the roads of history bringing redemption and salvation. Christ has need of us, and on this Sunday of the Good Shepherd, this Sunday of vocations, we thank God that we have a church blessed with an abundance of young men and women who are anxious to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. United then to Christ the Good Shepherd, we are going to join ourselves to the pope's prayer. We are going to do this as part of the prayer of the faithful. But first, let us proclaim our faith.

⁵ Ibid.

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