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CHRIST, THE TRUE KING AND SHEPHERD OF ALL PEOPLES

Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

22 July 1979

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Ephesians 2:13-18

Mark 6:30-34

I believe I interpret correctly the feelings of all of you if we send our first greetings this morning to our sister republic of Nicaragua¹. We send greetings to Nicaraguans in a prayerful spirit of fraternal solidarity because now more than ever they need our spiritual support. The joy we feel at the dawn of their liberation also makes us concerned that their new freedom not turn to frustration. Rather, may the Lord, who has been kind to them, continue to inspire that liberation of the Nicaraguan people. Even with Christian inspiration we need to be aware of how costly this moment has been for them. More than twenty-five thousand deaths are no trifling matter, so the gift of God now being offered should not be squandered.

For that reason I think that the image of Nicaragua provides the best background for our meditation on Christ the Shepherd King as he is presented to us in today's gospel. For the truth is that, even though the civil war has ended, the consequences will be profound and will last a long time. It can be said of that beloved nation what today's gospel tells us about Christ's feelings as he beheld his own people: «He felt pity and compassion for them because they seemed to be scattered people, a shepherdless flock» (Mark 6:34). We can apply that image also to ourselves since our own nation fits that description, but we are still a flock which, in our search for unity among ourselves and a solution for our problems, finds God's answer to our hopes in today's gospel message. May God grant that Nicaragua and our country and all the countries of the world that find themselves with problems and crises may look to the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd King promised by the prophecy of our first reading and realized in the gospel we read today.

We are connecting our thoughts in this homily with those of last Sunday and the Sunday before. Notice how our Sunday reflections are helping Christians toward an ever more intimate knowledge of the central figure that we follow and love. Let us not forget that this central figure in whom we—not only as Christians but as patriots—have placed our hope and the certainty of salvation is the Son of God who became man. He is Jesus Christ, who under different titles takes on clearer contours in our souls and in our prayer. Let us hope that today, as in recent Sundays, we will consider him as the great Prophet who brings a revelation of God. We have also stated clearly that God has entrusted the mission of announcing his message not just to his hierarchy—the pope, the bishops, and the priests—but to his people. God wants the mission to be carried out by the whole baptized people. We preached that you are a prophetic

¹ On 19 July 1979 Anastasio Somoza was overthrown, and the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) came to power.

people, and as such you take part in the great prophetic mission of Jesus Christ, the great Prophet. Today Christ is presented to us as the Shepherd King. He is King and Shepherd of all the people of the world through all of history. He holds the key which is the solution for the problems of history and for the critical moments of the nations. Just by looking toward him, the world's people will find the solutions. If we turn our back on Christ, we will continue to have this absurdity of a scattered flock.

But Christ is not working alone. The marvelous thing is that Christ wants to identify himself with the baptized people of all ages in order to carry out his royal mission, his mission as King. It is our job as hierarchy and people to proclaim the eternal and universal kingship of Christ and to summon all nations and families, all men and women, to submit to it. His is not a despotic regime but a dominion of love. Its goal is our freedom, as Saint Paul says, «It sets us free to love in Christ Jesus» (Gal 5:1).

I therefore want to call this homily: «Christ, the True Shepherd and King of All Peoples». And the three thoughts suggested by the three readings are these: first, the misery of the peoples who are badly governed; second, good and bad shepherds of the people; and third, Christ, King and Shepherd.

The misery of the peoples who are badly governed

Today's readings invite us to see the miserable and calamitous state of people when they have bad rulers and bad shepherds. I want to remind you that in the first reading the prophet Jeremiah is addressing the rulers and the king of Judah. Poor Jeremiah was perhaps the prophet with the most tender soul. By temperament he avoided conflicts, but God called him to be a confrontational prophet. When still a young man, Jeremiah was filled with hope when King Josiah undertook to restore the nation and the religion in accord with the word of God. All was going well until they killed Josiah at Megiddo, and then there came a disastrous string of incompetent kings who were quite misguided in the alliances they made and the political actions they carried out.

The prophet Jeremiah had to proclaim some very unpleasant things. He had to announce the deportation to Babylon when no one believed that the nation could suffer the terrible humiliation of being made captives and carried into exile. That is why Jeremiah was not well received. It would have been easier for him to flatter the rulers and tell them, «Everything is well! Stay on course!» but the prophet spoke in the name of God and so had to denounce the sins of his age and declare, «That is not right! That is an error!» This prophet therefore had to watch as his own country sank further and further into an abyss. Finally, speaking words that could be spoken only by God's command, he told the rulers of Israel, «Woe to the shepherds who scatter the sheep of my flock and allow them to perish!» (Jer 23:1).

In today's prophesy we find the following elements which describe well the calamities of a badly governed people. First of all, the people were scattered. Authority, which should have been a moral force for unity, became instead a force for dispersion because of its errors. The people were left as a shepherdless flock and ended up expelled from their homeland. Jeremiah condemned the sin of the rulers who, instead of gathering the sheep into a single sheepfold, drove them out, repelled them, made them flee, and failed to care for them (Jer 23:2).

Jeremiah also denounced the fear and dread in which the people lived. They were a people living in terror, a frightened flock, a panic-stricken population (Jer 23:4b). And that is what I experienced yesterday, there in the villages of Chalatenango. What fear one senses in the people! There are men who don't dare return to their homes; they have to live in the mountains! They are truly a scattered and fearful flock!

The final judgment of the prophet was that the sheep were lost (Jer 23:4c). Doesn't that seem to you like an echo of what has happened with our own disappeared persons? The sheep who should have been in the sheepfold, lovingly cared for by the shepherd, are instead being persecuted, driven out, and disappeared.

A similar picture is presented to us in the gospel about the times of Christ. Christ was seeking a moment of repose, but the people needed him, sought him out, and finally found him. It was a great multitude, which the gospel describes with matchless words: «When Jesus disembarked, he saw a vast crowd, and he felt compassion for them for they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he calmly taught them» (Mark 6:34). He was not in a hurry; he forgot his exhaustion because the sheep needed him. That is what a good shepherd is like. Poor Jesus found a people who had lost their sense of unity and their mystical vision; they were looking only for the earthly solutions provided by the politics of their time. They had forgotten about God and had no one to guide them in their search. Jesus began to teach them that salvation comes only from God. He taught them that God loves us and does not abandon us but wants us to love one another and not be scattered. Such was the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul also describes for us a humanity divided between Jews and Gentiles. In the verse before the one read in today's second reading, from his letter to the Ephesians, we hear that the Jews had built a wall in their temple so the Gentiles could not enter. They had become a proud and selfish people because of the promises made to them and the revelation they had received. The Gentiles were considered as enemies and dogs, a separate race, and the Gentiles hated the Jews in return. So that was the situation: there was no peace; there was no unity. These are the people whom Saint Paul describes today as «excluded from the citizenship of God, strangers to the covenant and the promise, without hope and without God» (Eph 2:12). How sad! «In a world without hope and without God!» There is nothing more horrible than when people have lost their sense of God, their orientation toward God. That is why I am filled by hope when I see our church becoming incarnate in the world, even if some people criticize her. And this church is finding echo in all of you, dear sisters and brothers, you who fill the cathedral and the chapels and the places where you have gathered this morning to do Christian reflection. You are the people who are poorly governed.

Events of the week

Using this same backdrop, I would like us to focus our attention especially on the example that Nicaragua gives us today. Their conflict cost the lives of more than twenty-five thousand people. They were a people who were not heard, and in order for them to be heard there had to be a bloodbath. That's what happens when power is made absolute, when power is divinized. A tyrant thinks that he's indispensable and doesn't even care if all his people are killed. Nicaragua's experience should also make us realize that power cannot be maintained by repression or by official corruption. The time will come when people grow tired of being exploited and oppressed. This is a magnificent lesson for those who put their faith in power that cannot be maintained. (Applause)

But there is something that we should be aware of. You saw in the paper the reflection of the United States ambassador: «It would be an absolutely unpardonable error to close our eyes to the dramatic lesson of these tragic events in our neighboring country»². Plain common sense should make us reflect.

There is also a lesson for our church. In the Nicaraguan conflict, not only the archbishop but the whole bishops' conference knew how to unite together in a joint condemnation of the injustices and in efforts to support and encourage the people. Without identifying with the Sandinistas, the church played a very important role because she stayed close to people and was faithful to them. That is why the Sandinistas now trust the church; they don't consider her to be allied either with Somoza or with the revolutionary forces. They view the church as an understanding mother, and they are relying on her Christian guidance in this time of reconstruction.

That dawn of liberation in our sister nation, Nicaragua, has aroused great rejoicing and hopeful enthusiasm in our own Salvadoran people, but it is sad to think that this joy of ours in the Nicaraguan liberation is still not shared by our government and the ruling classes. Our church feels joy and satisfaction for having reaffirmed the thinking of the church of Nicaragua, and we continue to feel close to them in their joy and to share their responsibility through prayer and evangelical clarity.

We are filled with hope, like people breathing fresh new air, when we read the ideals of the new governing junta³. Among other things they state the following:

«There will be enacted the legislation necessary for the organization of an effective democratic government working for justice and social progress».

«The judicial power will be guaranteed exclusive jurisdiction, and it will function with the necessary independence of its members in order to reestablish proper application of justice and to guarantee the full exercise of the rights of citizens».

We feel great satisfaction with the assurance of guarantees for the protection of human rights, which apply especially in those areas where Nicaraguans were suffering the misery of being a badly governed people.

For example, as regards freedom of information and communication: «All laws limiting the free publication and distribution of opinion and information will be repealed». As regards freedom of worship: «Complete exercise of freedom of worship is guaranteed». As regards free organization of unions and popular organizations: «Legislation will be enacted and actions adopted that guarantee and promote the free organization of unions and popular organizations both in the cities and in the rural areas». Blessed be God that in our Central America there is at least one place where the right of people to organize is respected, even if they are just humble *campesinos!* (Applause)

² *El Diario de Hoy* (18 July 1979).

³ The quotations are taken from the «Program of the Governing Junta of National Reconstruction of Nicaragua», ECA 371 (1979) 835-842.

Also, regarding respect for human rights: «All repressive laws will be repealed, especially those that assault the dignity and integrity of persons and sanction murders, disappearances, torture, illegal arrests, and searches of homes. All repressive institutions will be abolished, such as the Office of National Security and the Military Intelligence Service, which have been used for the political repression of the people and their organizations». (Applause) We could apply these same terms to certain organizations that are well known to all of us here.

Regarding eradication of the vices of the dictatorship: «The corruption that has characterized this dictatorship will be eradicated: fraudulent expropriation of properties, contraband, illicit exemptions and dispensations from taxes, fraudulent contracts, unfair advantage in real estate deals, misuse of government funds» etc., etc.

With regard to the administration of justice: «Military personnel and civilians who are involved in crimes against the people will be brought before the courts of justice». (Applause)

Speaking about the new army of Nicaragua, the document states, «In the new national army there will be no place for corrupt military officials or anyone guilty of crimes against the people». (Applause)

Many other things could be mentioned, but I'm especially happy with this statement: «A program of repatriating Nicaraguans living abroad will be implemented so that they will be able to place their knowledge and experience at the service of the country and participate actively in the tasks of reconstruction and development».

Let us hope, sisters and brothers, that there won't be any need for a bloodbath among us Salvadorans in order to have policies like these, which are not favors but are simply the rights of every human person. There is still time for us to regain these rights by reasonable means if the government has enough good will to be what the Bible says it should be: an understanding shepherd of the people.

I would also like to greet the Nicaraguan sisters and brothers who are living among us. Naturally, I distinguish two classes of refugees in our country. There are those who are happy at this moment when freedom is finally dawning for their people, and I encourage them to return to help build a more just and human nation that will make God's kingdom more present among us. But there is another class of people, those who have been defeated and who come fleeing after the fall of their leader. El Salvador offers them hospitality as well, but in welcoming them we also warn them not to contribute to the increase of repression among our own people. (Applause) We will make them feel welcome as long as they, like us, try to leave behind injustice, violence, and disorder and become converted to the new world that we are inspired to seek in Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and King.

At the same time, we want to inform you that Caritas is fulfilling the church's mission on behalf of the church in Nicaragua. They are already sending the goods that have been collected, which are the following: eighty sacks of corn, thirty-eight sacks of beans, twelve sacks of sugar, thirty-two sacks of rice, and also a certain amount of money, about which we'll give more details later. Our hands remain open to collect any other aid that you may want to donate to the beloved people of Nicaragua. I encourage all of us to be generous for as long as our sister republic needs our assistance.

There in Nicaragua we also see a reflection of our own situation. We can say of our own people what the gospel says today: they are a scattered flock seeking after unity and trying to escape from this dead-end street. The threats continue, even against the centers of the Salvadoran Youth Council, and we add our voice to the council's anguished plea for a stop to these threats against youth centers which do so much good⁴. The centers include a long list of schools, orphanages, and counseling centers in our country, both of the government and of the church. They are doing much good work for children and young people. So we hope that there are no more of these irrational threats against institutions and works that should really be receiving not threats but the support of our people.

The teachers have suffered many humiliations during the past month, and this week they continue with a new phase in their strike. They have drawn up a list of demands⁵, and our radio station, YSAX, offered what seemed to me an excellent commentary on them⁶. The best thing would be for them not to misuse the strike but to have recourse to dialogue, which is always important for our country. ANDES should do everything possible to promote dialogue. We believe that the strike or the work stoppage programmed for this week may make dialogue more difficult rather than facilitate it. It would be better for ANDES to seek alliances with different educational institutions, especially the Federation of Catholic Schools, which I know is willing to join them in putting pressure on the government in support of their just demands. ANDES has to learn to create alliances among those working in the educational field and not to presume that they are the only ones concerned about the nation's teachers. Other educational forces were able to achieve substantial gains for the teachers during the last congress on educational reform. Isn't it possible for these other forces to act in solidarity with ANDES and so continue the struggle by means of reasonable dialogue?

I would like to say the same about all the labor conflicts that are unresolved. I was made very happy by the news in *El Mundo* about the five labor conflicts that were resolved by the Ministry of Labor. That is the ministry of the Ministry of Labor! According to the same report, there are still 253 conflicts requiring revisions or reforms of collective labor agreements, and the whole administrative department of the ministry is working on these matters⁷. I also want to tell our beloved workers, with whom the church has always stood in solidarity, that they should know how to separate labor problems in their own factories from expressions of solidarity with other workers; these expressions are also valid but often surpass the sphere of worker-management negotiations. Also, be very careful about politicizing strikes and letting them go beyond the limits of legitimate labor protest. In a word, we should try to be guided by reason rather than by caprice or arrogance.

This scattered people of ours continues to deplore the numerous arbitrary arrests, many of which are aimed at disappearing people. María Josefina García and Francisco Martínez Canizález were arrested in the Las Ventanas district of El Paisnal, and María Josefina later appeared murdered. Nothing is known of the whereabouts of the brothers Luis Abel Corvera Romero and Antonio Corvera Romero. Their father, Esteban, and a four-year-old girl,

⁴ «Urgent Communiqué of the Salvadoran Youth Council to the People in General», 14 July 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 July, 1979).

⁵ *El Diario de Hoy* (13 July 1979).

⁶ The commentaries of YSAX for 1979 have been published in *El Salvador: Between Terror and Hope*, UCA Editores, San Salvador, 1982. See the commentary, «The Week Was Like This (7 to 14 July)», 345.

⁷ *El Mundo* (17 July 1979).

Maricela, were also beaten but then released. The student Miguel Ángel Terezón Ramos was arrested when he was entering his printing shop, Offset Atlántida. The FAPU has occupied the church of El Calvario demanding his release, and his family is also asking that the equipment in his printing shop be respected.

Salvador Flores Benítez disappeared twenty-three days ago. David Eleoneo Ponce was arrested near Pasaquina Park. His anguished parents have sent me an anguished plea for help in which they say, «We address ourselves to you on behalf of our son and ask that you make a public appeal for his release. May God grant that they have not killed him already as has happened with many of those arrested in this country». I have seen myself this mother's distress, and any mother here would understand. It is awful to go searching in the different detention centers and not find your son and not be given any explanation of where he might be.

Doctor Rogelio Monterrosa Sicilia, a lawyer of Santiago de María, has also received death threats from the UGB. May the Lord grant that these threats not be carried out and that the voice of conscience prevail, the voice that clearly cries out the fifth commandment: «You shall not kill» (Exod 20:13).

I would also like to convey the concerns of the inhabitants of part of the Colonia 10 de Septiembre, who have been threatened with dislocation to make way for new construction. It should be kept in mind that these are poor people. It is true that progress in the country is desirable, but it should not be built on injustices and assaults, especially against the poor.

I also want to make reference to the fire at *La Crónica del Pueblo*. When we were leaving the cathedral last Sunday, someone gave me five *colones* and a note that said, «We want to lend a hand at this tragic hour to the prestigious journalist so that this courageous newspaper may again be published. We want to do the same for the social communications media of the archdiocese because they are on the side of those who suffer». (Applause) If this statement finds any echo, I would like to reaffirm it by citing some supportive gestures that have helped this paper. For example, the vendors spontaneously offered to help clean up the disarray left by the fire, and I know that a number of workers are asking for contributions to help restore operations. I have spoken with the director of the paper, Doctor González, and he's grateful for these gestures. If people are willing to help, he wants to proceed with the cleanup. He has already opened an account at Banco Cuscatlán with the first contributions that arrived. Those who want to help can send their donations to account number 05771, Banco Cuscatlán.

We also welcome the appearance of a new publishing effort by the Independent Journalist Agency. The thirteenth issue of its journal is now out, giving us fresh prospects for freedom of expression. I welcome and support this endeavor. May it always flourish as a voice for truth.

Good and bad shepherds of the people

All this helps us to realize that advancement of any people depends on the governments and shepherds they have. That's what I want to explain in my second reflection on the theme of this homily, «Christ, the True King and Shepherd of All Peoples». What stands out in today's readings is that this Shepherd King needs the collaboration of human beings. We Christians are invited to take part in Christ's mission to place all things under the dominion of the morality

and the law of God. But even those who are not Christian have a great responsibility in governing nations as shepherds. Please notice that the prophet Jeremiah stresses both secular and religious shepherds this morning. When the prophet says, «Woe to the shepherds who do not care for their flock!» (Jer 23:1), he is referring to rulers and also to pastors of the church. Those of us who share this tremendous responsibility must analyze together the characteristics of the bad shepherd and the characteristics of the good shepherd.

My second point concerns the good and the bad shepherds of the people. Jeremiah reprimands the false shepherds with these words: «Woe to the shepherds who scatter the people! You shepherds of my people have scattered my sheep; you drove them away and did not take care of them. I will hold you to account for your evil deeds» (Jer 23:1-2). Let us keep this in mind: whatever the goodness or badness of governments and shepherds, there is a God who inspires good shepherds, good governments, and good actions on the part of those who collaborate with him. There is also a just God who takes strict account of the evil actions committed by those who have the sublime role of governing. When Christ found the multitudes in disarray and without a shepherd (Mark 6:34), he declared, «I will hold the shepherds to account for their evil deeds» (Jer 23:2). It must be terrible for those who worship power to fall into the hands of God and to have to render accounts to the One who is above all powers!

The first reading tells us that God takes care of his people, and this greatly consoles us: «I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their meadows so that they will increase and multiply. I will appoint for them shepherds who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing» (Jer 23:3-4). This is a beautiful passage, and that is why I believe that our role is to help maintain people's hope, prayer, and faith in the Lord. Not all is lost. Better days will come, and the Lord will raise up and inspire better leadership for our people so that they are not a flock without a shepherd but are governed by true love.

Since we are making reference to God's authority, I want to refer also to the Second Vatican Council. In speaking about the origins of political communities and nations, it states:

Persons, families, and the various groups which make up the civil community are aware that they cannot achieve a truly human life by their own unaided efforts. They see the need for a wider community, within which each person makes his or her specific contribution every day toward an ever broader realization of the common good. For this purpose they set up a political community according to various forms. The political community exists, consequently, for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy. Indeed, the common good embraces the sum of those conditions of the social life that make it possible for individuals, families, and associations to attain their own perfection more adequately and more readily. The political community comes into existence in order to search for the common good. It is this principle that justifies the political community and gives it meaning; from this principle it derives its primary and proper legitimacy. ... Since there are many different people in the political community, they will naturally be inclined toward different solutions. Therefore in order that the political community might not disappear because of this plurality of vision, it becomes indispensable that

some authority should direct the action of all people toward the common good, and it should do this not in some mechanical or despotic way but working primarily as a moral force that is grounded in freedom and a sense of responsibility to each individual. It is evident that the political community and public authority is based on human nature, but at the same time it is part of the order that is foreseen by God even when the determination of the political regime and the selection of rulers is left to the free determination of the citizens. It follows then that the exercise of political authority in the community, as well as in its representative institutions, ought to be exercised within the limits of moral order in order to achieve the common good as judged by the established legitimate juridical order or by the order that will be established. This, then, is when citizens are obliged in conscience to obey. From all of this we can see the responsibility and the dignity and the importance of civil leaders. But when public authority exceeds its competency and oppresses its citizens, these people should not shun the objective demands of the common good. Therefore it is licit for them to defend their rights and the rights of their fellow citizens from abuse of such authority, always mindful of the limits of natural law and the Gospel (GS 74).

Excuse the long citation, but it helps us understand what is meant by the saying, «All power comes from God» (Rom 13:1). That is the truth. No one can govern unless given power by God. That is what Christ told Pontius Pilate when Pilate was boasting that he had power to kill Christ or let him live. Speaking slowly, Christ said, «You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above» (John 19:11). In other words, rulers are representatives of the Shepherd King only as long as they convey the mind and the love of God underlying all just laws. But when they make their power into an absolute idol, when they turn against the laws of God and against human rights, or when they commit atrocities against the people, then we cannot say that their authority comes from God. If authority is not used legitimately according to God's desires, then the people must obey to some extent out of concern for the common good that keeps the nation together, but they always have the right to demand justice. This example applies to us very directly, as we were saying, and let us hope that we will return in time to the source of all authority, our Lord.

That's why Christ's gesture in today's gospel needs to be an indispensable part of our reflection. He chose these apostles to be shepherds and to represent the divine Shepherd to humankind, but he told them, «Come and let us go rest a while» (Mark 6:31). This resting with Christ finds its profound meaning in prayer. Prayer means drawing close to God and seeing how our own authority conforms with that of God. That is a duty for all those who govern, whether in the secular sphere or the ecclesiastical. If pastors or civil rulers draw apart from God so that their power is not united with God, then instead of being a uniting force, as the Council told us it should be, it becomes a scattering force. When that happens, it does evil instead of good.

It is necessary, therefore, for us here to call upon all the people of God, those who through baptism participate in this prerogative of Christ the King, to submit everything to the command of God: the structures of the earth, the consciences of individuals and families, everything that is part of the world and society. Politics itself must submit to God so that it doesn't deviate from its true objective but rather guides the great role Christians have received from God. Politicians must listen to Christ, for he calls them to reflect often on their responsibility and the direction their lives are taking. Politics exists to make our lives a true commitment and collaboration with the reign of Christ in the world; it should not remove us

from the dominion of Christ and submit us to the dominion of sin and the idols of wealth and violence. The one true God will demand of us an accounting of the use we have made of his divine power. May God be satisfied and rejoice that some of his children, by uniting themselves closely to him, have governed well and helped guide the creation toward him.

Christ, King and Shepherd

Finally, sisters and brothers, there is Christ who is King and Shepherd. Today's first reading cites the Lord's great promise that a just king will arise in Israel: «Behold, the days are coming when I will raise up a righteous shoot of David; he shall reign as king and govern wisely; he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell in security. And they will call him "The Lord is our justice"» (Jer 23:5-6).

The second reading from Saint Paul portrays Christ precisely as the Shepherd King who unites two peoples who are divided. The wall in the temple of Jerusalem that separated Jews from Gentiles was broken down, Saint Paul tells us. Christ broke through it with his own body by dying crucified and leaving hatred nailed to the cross. All divisions among human beings were thus overcome. Christ is our peace. Let us never forget this beautiful phrase in today's reading: «Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us with God and put hatred to death. He came bringing news of peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near. Now through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father» (Eph 2:14,16-18).

This is the function of the people of God. I have always insisted that we distinguish between the people of God and people in general. When I preach about all God's promises regarding our participation in Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, I am addressing all of us who belong to communities of baptized Christians because we are called by virtue of our baptism to be responsible for saving this world. As a prophetic people of God that participates in the royalty of the Shepherd King, all of us who are baptized must pass review on our attitudes so that they are not in opposition to the kingdom of God and his law but are, to the contrary, a faithful collaboration with and a reflection of God's kingdom on this earth.

Life of the church

But this Christ, I repeat, already has representatives here in the world, namely, those of us who form the community of his church. That is why, as we examine the past week, I also review the ordinary ecclesiastical activities that are our principal task. Our pastoral agents—priests, religious, faithful—do not do politics. We *do* shed our evangelical light on politics, but our principal work is lighting the lamp of the Gospel in our communities.

For that reason I'm pleased to cite today some of the pope's teaching that offers light to the world. I refer specifically to some words he addressed to food experts and ministers of agriculture from 150 nations, who were meeting together to discuss ways to help poor *campesinos*. The pope told them that the *campesinos* should be helped through redistribution of income, and he also said that the *campesinos* should have a voice in political decisions.⁸ I want to cite here part of his message so that you can understand his concerns. It's true that the pope has told priests to stick to their priestly functions, but please take note that there are no paid

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Participants in the World Congress for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development», 14 July 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (29 July 1979).

advertisements in the newspapers quoting this other aspect of the pope's message. (Applause) There are plenty of paid ads that tendentiously criticize priests for taking sides in their pastoral ministry⁹, but would that there were as much interest in making known what the pope has said in Oaxaca, in Monterrey, and in Santo Domingo or in publishing the part of his encyclical where he decries all those abuses that the church, and therefore her priests, must also denounce. (Applause)

Our archdiocesan community also sends fraternal greetings this week to the dioceses of Santiago de María and Santa Ana on the occasion of their patronal feasts, Saint James the Apostle on July 25 and Saint Anne on July 26.

I've already said plenty about the feast of the Virgin of Carmel, but it's something I want to emphasize. We have two great resources for our ministry. First is the presence of Mary among our people; it is a great blessing of God to have a people so devoted to Mary! Second is the treasure of our popular religious devotion. Sisters and brothers, let us not lose this inheritance of our parents and grandparents. Even though this devotion may sometimes seem imperfect and even a little ridiculous, it is the religiosity of our people. By cultivating it we will find the religion that God desires for this present time.

Yesterday I was in San Miguel de Mercedes, faithfully fulfilling my duty of encouraging the Christian communities that are flourishing there. The military checkpoints at both entrances to the village turned many people back and prevented them from attending. The soldiers also made me get out of the car and searched me. Even the bishop is suspect! Later they told me it was for my own safety. If it were for my own safety, I thought, why didn't they let me remain in the car? I also told them, «Why don't you allow these people you've detained to enter with me? I'll walk with them on foot». They were women. They didn't let them enter. Afterward I had a chance to go look for the women in San Antonio Los Ranchos, where they were waiting for me because they really wanted to speak with their pastor. I believe that in this case, just as with the barriers they set up for the vigil we had in the cathedral, they are trying to restrict the freedom of our church. I would like to ask respectfully that these actions not be repeated because they offend against our church, even when the pretext given is the safety of her pastor. I want to repeat what I have said before: the shepherd does not want security as long as there is no security for his flock. (Applause)

Our travels yesterday ended in the delightful village of La Aldeita, where the community of priests, sisters, and minor seminarians were celebrating as a family. I was able to greet a new deacon, Jaime Paredes, who is already serving in his post there. We hope that he adapts well to that exemplary community and that we'll soon have the good fortune of ordaining him a priest.

Regarding the prayer vigil I already mentioned, and forgetting the unfortunate military vigilance surrounding it, I want to congratulate the vicariates that promoted this long vigil of forty hours. Many communities, many priests, and many faithful from all over the country took part in it. I had the opportunity to greet there another priest, Father Luis, who

⁹ The reference is to a paid advertisement, unsigned by any person or group, which quotes the following words from the message of John Paul II in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe on 27 January 1979: «You are priests and religious; you are not social organizers, political leaders, or functionaries of any temporal power». *El Diario de Hoy* (20 July 1979).

was with us before and has come again to offer his services. I welcome him and wish him much success in our rural areas, which are in great need of his enthusiastic collaboration.

Orientación will be publishing a document in which the priests reaffirm their intention to take their priestly vocation very seriously¹⁰. In light of their reflection on the killing of a priest who was fulfilling his duties, the priests want to revitalize our personal lives and our parish organizations with prayer, community spirit, and study, and in this way to lay the foundations for the kingdom of God. In the next issue of *Orientación* we will also publish a declaration in which the sisters express their solidarity with the priests¹¹.

We send greetings also to the new governing board of the Federation of Catholic Schools.

I also want to denounce again the fact that our brother, Father Ástor Ruiz, was not allowed to enter at the airport but was dispatched to Guatemala. He was returning from Colombia, where he had gone to study the Puebla document with priests and sisters of other nations. The same thing happened yesterday with another priest who has worked for many years among us, Father Juan Deplancke. He arrived at the airport, and he also was sent to Guatemala. There is, therefore, no freedom for our priests to carry out the missions that sometimes require them to cross borders.

In a special way I want to join in the sorrow of the family of Doña Abigail de Giralt of San Miguel. She died yesterday.

In this way we review our activities as a church community and we examine our national life, of which the church is a part. Since the church's interests and the nation's interests are intimately interconnected, we should not be two entities in conflict but should complement one another. But both one and the other should take inspiration from the one King and Shepherd, Christ our Lord. A people will be treated with the dignity they deserve and their rights will be respected only when their leaders and the whole people, as a potent force, look on high and place their hopes in him who is our King, our Justice, our Peace: Christ our Lord. There is no other solution, dear sisters and brothers. Trying to build a nation, a future, a better world without the help of Christ is to build on sand (Matt 7:24-27). The winds of violence will destroy everything. We need to build on the rock of faith, with the inspiration of the King whom God has anointed to govern human beings in both their earthly vocation and their heavenly vocation. So governments, bishops, parents, officials, collaborators, and pastoral agents—all must work for the sake of the country and the church under the inspiration of Christ, who had compassion on the multitude. Even if our own human collaboration fails, there will always be divine resources and better leaders than ourselves to help in governing the people.

May the Lord grant, therefore, that this reflection help us to take our proper place in society, wherever our vocation has situated us. Let us look toward our Lord for inspiration so that we learn to give our lives their true meaning by creating nation and creating church. Let it be so. (Applause)

¹⁰ «The Preferential Option for the Poor of the Archdiocese» in *Orientación* (29 July 1979).

¹¹ «Declaration of Solidarity of the Sisters Engaged in Pastoral Ministry with the Priests of the Archdiocese» in *Orientación* (5 August 1979).